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CHRISTIAN LEADER

January / February 2021

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Racism and the Church



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Shining a light

We must expose racism

Ephesians 5 refers several times to the power of light to expose what is hidden. “Everything exposed by the light becomes visible,” Paul says in verse 13. Writing about these verses in an advent devotional, LifeWay editor Joy Allmond says that living as people of light means being both active and proactive in battling sin and addressing the impact sin has on people.

This involves fighting for the vulnerable and bringing justice to “people who have suffered at the hands of evil,” says Allmond. It also means that as people of light we expose that which “threatens our own souls.”

This issue of *Christian Leader* is intended to shine a light on racism, an important subject that involves fighting for justice for others and being honest about the places the sin of racism has taken root in our own hearts. Dina González-Piña sets the stage with her introduction outlining five levels of racism. The remaining authors—Jamie Mack writing the Frontlines column, Terry Hunt and Mark Isaac writing print and online feature essays and Darren Duerksen, Saji Oommen and Mark Rea writing online—share personally and boldly.

While U.S. Mennonite Brethren congregations include people of color, this issue is written with white readers in mind. None of us want to be racist, and yet we must let God’s light of justice and mercy shine into the corners of our minds and hearts to reveal attitudes and practices toward people of color that we may not immediately recognize and could want to keep hidden once exposed.

Our hope is that the essays in this issue will shine a light on racism and prompt white U.S. Mennonite Brethren to honestly look at ourselves, our churches and our institutions and to move toward a better understanding of systemic racism. This may be the first time some readers have heard stories and perspectives like those shared by our writers. Their stories may be difficult for many of us to identify with, but stories can help us better understand someone else’s life and where they are coming from. Hearing someone else’s story can also remind us of our own stories. When we share and listen to each other’s stories, we can find common ground. ■



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Multiply board accepts recommendations

The newly appointed Multiply board met Nov. 9-10 via Zoom and accepted all 18 recommendations submitted previously by the Multiply Review Task Force. This includes the recommendation to transition Randy Friesen out of the role of president of Multiply, according to a Nov. 17 joint statement from USMB national director Don Morris and Canadian Conference of MB Churches national director Elton DaSilva. USMB and CCMBC expressed gratitude for the years Friesen served as president of the North American MB mission agency. The full Nov. 17 statement, including the 18 recommendations, can be found online at www.christianleadermag.com

The board met again Dec. 1 and among the topics of discussion was creating a “more robust” U.S. office.

The U.S. appointed board representatives are Yvette Jones, Fresno, Calif.; Aaron Halvorsen, Olathe, Kan.; Vivian Wheeler, Birch Bay, Wash.; and Fred Leonard, Fresno, Calif. The Canadian members are Chris Stevens, Ontario; Bill Seinen, British Columbia; Wendi Thiessen, Manitoba; and Maryanne Berge, Saskatchewan. David MacLean, British Columbia, is also a representative but appointed by the previous Multiply Board. Ed Boschman, International Community of Mennonite Brethren treasurer, will be the ICOMB representative to the Multiply Board, and Morris and DaSilva represent the national directors of the owner conferences.

In mid-December 2020, U.S. board members Leonard and Jones submitted their resignations. As of press time, no additional information was available. —USMB

Board approves Church Planting Council

The USMB Leadership Board, meeting via Zoom Oct. 23-24, 2020, approved the formation of the Church

Planting Council (CPC), a volunteer board that will help facilitate a unified USMB church planting vision and assist in “keeping the church multiplication piece of USMB’s three core commitments progressing and succeeding,” according to the proposal.

Tasks the CPC will undertake include initial church planter contacts and interviews, planter assessments, training, coaching, internships, apprenticeships, cohorts, special events for planter couples, project funding, establishing task force teams and overseeing church plant launches.

The Leadership Board affirmed a proposal from USMB Youth to develop a National Leadership Pipeline to identify and train potential leaders to serve local USMB churches. The board also approved a 2021 budget of \$834,204.

Between its March and October 2020 board meetings, the Leadership Board met via Zoom five additional times, primarily to discuss and take action regarding Multiply, the North American MB mission agency, including appointing new board members and accepting recommendations from the Multiply Review Task Force. —*Leadership Board minutes.*



USMB Giving Tuesday donations over \$25,000

Donations to USMB for Giving Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020, totaled \$25,178.14. Funds raised will be used to help resource USMB church planters, provide LEAD initiatives for USMB pastors and churches and fund ethnic

integrated ministries.

“On behalf of all of us at USMB, I say thank you for your generous support on Giving Tuesday,” says USMB national director Don Morris. “We know the unusual economic circumstances have caused us all to tighten our belts, so we especially appreciate your donation this year. We couldn’t have done it without you. By giving to USMB, you are part of a community of believers working together to advance the kingdom of Jesus.”

Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. In the seven years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed \$211,773. —USMB.

New LEAD Cohorts coming soon

A new lineup of LEAD Cohorts is coming in late February, covering topics such as corporate prayer, rural church ministry and more. LEAD Cohorts are free online meeting places for anyone interested in learning more about a specific topic. The only cost is for materials as recommended by the cohort leader. Cohorts typically meet online via Zoom for about an hour every two weeks over a three-month span. Updated cohort information and links to sign up will be made available in early 2021 at www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts/. —USMB

CDC convenes virtually

Delegates from the Central District Conference convened virtually for worship, business and fellowship Nov. 6-7, utilizing Zoom and YouTube to gather online for their annual convention due to the coronavirus pandemic. The virtual event was hosted on the new CDC website, www.cdconference.org, and included three business sessions; two pre-recorded worship sessions; a late-night prayer session; and four breakout sessions.

Delegates expressed a desire to gather

together in person and shared struggles related to pastoring in a pandemic and disappointments over cancellations.



CDC chair John Langer moderates a business session of the online district convention. Photo: Janae Rempel.

District minister Rick Eshbaugh shared his excitement for what God has done in spite of uncertainty during the pandemic, mentioning the aid provided by MB Foundation in the form of the COVID-19 Church Relief Fund and by USMB, who gave a \$20,000 gift for two CDC church plants and provided additional resources for doing church virtually.

In other business, delegates unanimously approved a budget of \$475,300, heard updates from church planters Jon Fiester and Christian Kohs and held elections.

The theme was “The Days Formed for Me,” from Psalm 139:16, with speakers Samuel Hailemariam, Grace International Church, Indianapolis, Ind., and Galen Wiest, Multiply. Four individuals shared brief testimonies. —CL

Youth conferences altered, cancelled

District youth conferences in 2020 were impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. The Southern District Youth Conference (SDYC) transitioned online to a virtual event, while the Central District Youth Conference was canceled.

Southern District youth minister Russ Claassen distributed a digital package to churches via email containing links to

flyers, videos and resources to help youth leaders create an alternate SDYC gathering with their youth groups. The theme for SDYC was “Home,” and speaker Jesse Allen provided two recorded messages.

Some churches planned alternate in-person events, some of which were altered, cancelled or postponed. Most youth groups who gathered did so the weekend of Nov. 21-22. Others postponed until spring as a result of increased coronavirus cases locally.

Meanwhile, the Central District Youth Conference was canceled, according to Anthony Lind, associate youth pastor at Bethesda MB Church in Huron, S.D., and member of the Central District youth committee. Initial plans were to hold the event at Inspiration Hills Camp in Inwood, Iowa, with precautions such as social distancing and mask-wearing when social distancing wasn't possible. —CL

Tabor College president to retire

The Tabor College Board of Directors has announced the retirement of President Jules Glanzer at the end of the 2021-22 academic year. The announcement was made Oct. 22, 2020, in a joint letter from Glanzer and board chair Susan Franz Koslowsky.

Glanzer began his tenure at Tabor in February 2008 after serving as the dean of the George Fox University seminary. Under his leadership, Tabor has expanded its program offerings and campus facility development to serve students and offer exceptional hospitality.

Glanzer has been responsible for raising nearly \$50 million to benefit the operations and capital growth of the college. Additionally, he established the presidential leadership program, both

teaching and mentoring students the past 13 years. —TC

FPU freezes tuition, adds scholarship

Fresno Pacific University is freezing tuition for undergraduate students for the 2021-2022 school year and is offering a new scholarship to qualified students.

The tuition freeze is in effect for all students in traditional undergraduate programs as well as adults in the bachelor's degree completion programs and applies at all five campuses. Tuition in graduate programs, including Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, will rise 2.99 percent.

The new Possibilities Scholarship guarantees qualified students a place at FPU by filling in any gaps between other financial aid and the cost of tuition. Incoming freshmen will be eligible for the award if they meet certain academic and financial criteria.

The scholarship is renewable at the same dollar amount each year recipients maintain good academic standing and eligibility for Cal Grants and Pell Grants. For more information, visit fpu.edu/possibilities. —FPU

India MB conference faces turmoil

Long-simmering leadership conflicts in the Mennonite Brethren Church of India (MBCI) reached a crisis point in recent years, prompting the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) to declare in August that it no longer recognizes the India conference president's leadership.

In September, ICOMB's 22 conferences called on member churches to pray for healing and peaceful transition in India, where P.B. Arnold has been president of the conference of 212,000 people in about 1,000 churches since leadership transitioned from mission



Jules Glanzer

5 minutes with...

Luke Haidle

On a Friday filled with sermon prep, a hospital ethics committee meeting and childcare duty while his wife taught school, Luke Haidle found time to answer a few questions for the *Christian Leader*. Luke is pastor of Living Hope Church, the Mennonite Brethren church in Henderson, Neb., and the newly elected chair of the U.S. Mennonite Brethren Leadership Board.



How did you become Mennonite Brethren?

I went to a Christian high school in South Dakota with some Mennonite influence and then to Tabor College where I graduated in 2000. Looking for a place to do a year of ministry, I discovered Multiply's short-term TREK program in Abbotsford, BC. I ended up staying there for 10 years, five years as director.

How did you come to be involved in conference leadership?

When I was first approached, I thought it was kind of ridiculous. I don't know anything about denominational operation. Eventually I decided I'd let my name stand, but with a super-unspiritual motivation—I was going to learn and steal every idea I could and bring it back home to my church in Henderson.

The major restructuring of Multiply, the mission agency of the US and Canadian conferences came to a head just as you began as chair. How did that situation impact you in your new role?

Having served within Multiply for close to 10 years, having lived on both sides of the border and now getting to serve as pastor has provided a perspective and insight which I trust has been helpful to the process. The recent evaluation and

review process have been no small thing, and I believe it requires a listening ear, a discerning spirit and willingness for intentional and courageous steps. Good people have been involved in the process, and the desire for national church planting and international missions remains a commitment for all involved.

You recently finished Tabor College's Master of Business Administration. Why an MBA?

I wanted some further education and thought about the skills I needed. I had gotten my Master of Arts from the MB Seminary in British Columbia and my exegetical preaching was already forcing me into deep study of Scripture. The questions I had in my pastoral role – how to hire a secretary, marketing questions like how to get the word out about our church's Christmas in the Barn – these were better answered by an MBA.

How do you think the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the church?

This may be a practice run for the future—a new skill set for decentralized worship. COVID-19 has forced a lot of us to think smaller, home-based. We're learning to build on important areas that have just been an accessory to Sunday. And we had to learn how to be a video production company in six days!

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

workers about 40 years ago.

ICOMB has been sending correspondence to Arnold for at least a year, expressing concerns about reports of unbiblical abuse of power and authority, misappropriation of resources, the use of judicial courts to resolve disagreements, wounded confidence among international agencies and institutions and a lack



Paul Gandham, standing, is a leader who opposes the leadership of current India conference president P.B. Arnold.

of transparent leadership elections.

"This is a corrupted leadership situation which should grieve the heart of every Mennonite Brethren," says Don Morris, USMB national director, in an email to *Christian Leader*. "I applaud the leadership of ICOMB for taking a strong stand against this corrupted leader. I also pray for ICOMB and those leaders who will need to continue to engage—that God would grant them wisdom and perseverance in seeing this through." —CL

MWC observes Fellowship Sunday

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) invites Anabaptist-related churches around the world to observe Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday Jan. 24, 2021, a day to observe a common theme in a worship service as an act of solidarity. The theme for 2021 is "Following Jesus across barriers" and resource materials have been prepared by Asian church leaders. Resources may be found at <https://mwc-cmm.org/anabaptist-world-fellowship-sunday>. —MWC

The power of a good story

Antiracism education starts at home

“Mine! Mine! Mine!” I immediately think of the annoying, ever-present seagulls in the Disney movie *Finding Nemo*. But if you’re a parent, chances are these words also invoke images of a child fighting for the right to play with a particular toy or clinging to a precious stuffed animal he doesn’t want to share.

Sharing is not innately understood. It seems counterintuitive to children’s developing brains. Why would I want to give away something valuable that I can keep for myself? Yet we know, as adults, that learning to share toys will lead and grow into other greater skills, like generosity, kindness and unselfish behavior. We begin with the simple encouragement, “You can share.” And we rejoice at the small improvements, “Good job taking turns!”

There are many things our children learn to do with little help—eating solid food, walking or riding a bike. There are others that require much coaching for many years, sharing being one of them. Because we love our kids, we won’t risk leaving them to their own devices when it comes to these. As a white parent, I have been reminded over the past year that there is another skill I cannot and should not avoid—training my children to be antiracist.

My husband and I have chosen to raise our kids in a culturally diverse city, sending them to neighborhood schools. We’ve done this because we value diversity. However, being surrounded by various cultural groups does not inherently teach me or my kids to show honor, respect and value to their classmates or our neighbors. This part takes intentional teaching. And this antiracism education starts at home. Parents, we are on the front lines!

Racism is a large issue to grapple with. But there are small steps we can all take to begin our antiracism journey. One step I’ve taken over the years is reading stories with my kids. (Even my teens will read a beautifully illustrated picture book with me on the couch.) I look for books that

feature main characters of different cultural backgrounds living in America. I search for ones that highlight the accomplishments of people of color, like John Lewis or Rosa Parks.

Reading books told from the perspective of a child allows children to relate to the story in a significant way. After reading *I am Not a Number*, my 9-year-old son and I had a tear-filled, heart-felt discussion. The author, Jenny Kay Dupuis, writes from the first-person perspective about her grandmother’s experience being removed from her home and placed in the Canadian Indian residential school system. Her story is heartbreaking and necessary for us to hear. Reading helps us gain an accurate and authentic understanding of identities, perspective and experiences different from our own. It is an opportunity for all of us to grow in understanding, empathy and love.

Jesus’ most common form of teaching was parables, a simple story to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson. If the wisest teacher to ever walk the earth used stories to illustrate large, hard-to-learn principles, shouldn’t we take note? Can we let the stories of others speak boldly into our hearts and minds of the value and worth inherent in each unique individual that God created? Can it help us, and our children, embrace the image of God in each other, especially those that look and live differently than we do?

The greatest part about reading with my kids is that I am growing too. By searching for books, talking with librarians and asking questions with my kids, I am modeling humility, allowing the Holy Spirit to shape my mind and heart. I am simultaneously reminding myself that the story of God’s kingdom is one of a people gathered from every culture and nation, speaking every language. As I listen and learn through the stories of others—be they in books or in person over a cup of coffee—I am stepping toward the kingdom of God. I am teaching my kids to journey alongside Jesus, who loved others enough to listen to their stories too. ■



Jamie Mack is humbled to keep learning alongside her husband, Randy, with her four kids ages 9 to 19 and among her faith family at North Fresno Church. Jamie serves on staff at NFC as the associate pastor of discipleship and worship. Her lifelong love of reading is gladly shared through Bible studies, book clubs and with other seminary students in her current studies at Fresno Pacific University. She realizes her antiracism journey will last her whole life and hopes to encourage others to journey with her in this important kingdom work.

Blessings galore

Outrageously blessed in spite of cancer diagnosis

“‘Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’” (Malachi 3:10).

The Lord gave me this verse when I was diagnosed with Stage Almost-3, particularly aggressive breast cancer. I scoffed. Facing a full mastectomy and a grueling course of chemo, I was more than a little skeptical that there could be any blessings coming my way. But I said, OK God, I’ll take you up on that challenge. Go ahead, shower me with blessings.

The next day, up popped the faces of five men on Facebook (a group called Veritas, I later learned) singing a stunning arrangement of *It Is Well with My Soul*. I was stopped in my tracks by the reminder that not everything may be well with my body, but it certainly can be well with my soul. My choice.

Flowers were delivered immediately from Alvena, who knew I was struggling with the diagnosis. Important to know: I love flowers.

COVID-19 had put the kibosh on anything but urgent surgery, and my hospital of choice had closed off wings in order to keep their census down. My surgeon convinced them my case was urgent, and a whole hospital wing was opened for me. It was so peaceful and quiet.

The day of surgery, a rainy April morning, was dismal to match my mood, and my husband could not even enter the hospital with me to check me in. But there in the parking lot, standing in raincoats and galoshes, at 6:00 in the morning, were Mark and Cindy with a big cardboard sign wishing me well. Really? Who does that? Were those raindrops or tears on my cheeks?

Upon returning home from the hospital, I was delighted by the balloons and hand-lettered signs lining the driveway, ala the Burma Shave signs on Route 66, the handiwork of my grandchildren and neighbor kids.

Enough bouquets of flowers arrived following surgery to cover every surface. I loved it!

Marilyn sent a card every few days until her stash of get well cards was depleted. The unexpected part was that enclosed in each card was a photo of something fun we had done together over the years—a parade of happy memories.

Krystal came to the door with her three small children in tow and two quarts of Cherry Garcia ice cream, my favorite. There will surely be Cherry Garcia ice cream in heaven, won’t there?

Celeste, a high school friend I hadn’t seen in 40 years, somehow learned of my illness and knowing I would lose my hair, ordered two head scarves for me and sent them from several states away. They were the perfect gift, except that the revival of our friendship was even better.

Judy, a long-lost childhood friend also in another state, started texting me a flower every single morning without fail until the final chemo treatment. Did I mention I love flowers? Even virtual flowers.

Vicki began encouraging me each day via text by sending the first line of an old childhood chorus. For example: “The birdies in the treetop sing their song.” To which I replied: “The angels chant their chorus all day long.” This charming ritual continues to this day.

After each chemo treatment when the cave days came—those miserable days when I crawled into a cave and pulled the darkness over me—meals arrived in abundance, feeding my husband and my soul, if not always my squeamish stomach.

My neighbor, Kay, is a year or two ahead of me in this cancer journey. We shared, laughed and cried together. We had always been cordial, but now we are best friends.

An old Tabor friend, Carol, thought of me one day for no apparent reason except the nudging of God. She picked up the



Dotty Penner Warkentine
is a native of Fresno, Calif. She enjoys gardening, reading, traveling, tennis, music, quilting and, of course, her family of four children, 10 grandchildren, and the precious littles—five young great grandchildren. Much of her reading is done via audio books so that she can multitask with her other activities. Dotty is a retired freelance harpist and considers herself a lifelong learner. She and her husband, Al, are members of North Fresno MB Church.

See TESTIMONY, page 25



AN INVITATION TO UNDERSTAND RACISM

Making sure our USMB house is an equitable place for all

“**A**way with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” Amos 5:23.

This past fall, the USMB webinar platform became a place of learning and discussion around the history of race and racism. For those who joined and participated in small group discussions either to process the documentary *Race: The Power of Illusion* or the book *The Myth of Equality* by Ken Wytmsa, this time was rich. Rich with information, rich with documentation, rich with biblical lens, rich with real experiences and a call for truth telling.

This experience helped frame our understanding of questions critically imperative for the church—including the Mennonite Brethren Church—to address today. Questions like what lenses are we using to address challenges? What structures have we built? Whose idea are we leading from? As our denomination welcomes new members, particularly members from a non-dominate ethnic group like that of DR Congo, the question we must ask ourselves and continually address is, what are we inviting others to join?

What God requires

Micah 6:8, which says, “He hath showed you, O man, what is good. And what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God” (ASV), is one of my life verses. This verse invites us to be deep in understanding what God requires of us, his bride, his church, his people. What does it mean to do justice? Who needs justice to be done on their behalf? What has been an injustice? Who has been on the receiving end of injustice? These are critical questions that the North American church has a duty and a responsibility to address.

These past years I personally have embarked on a journey of asking these questions, and seeking to understand our own U.S. history has been key. We are living in a land that Native Americans called Turtle Island. This land was occupied when the first European settlers arrived, and the original people of this land suffered great violence at the hand of the new settlers.

In the book *Unsettling Truths* by Mark Charles, who was a guest speaker for the fourth USMB webinar on racism, Charles tells the hidden truth of the massacre of native people done by the church. The disappearing of native folk and the taking of the land was not done by people who were naive to Christian faith.

It was done by people who held a sword in one hand and the Bible in the other. Quite recently a movement around truth-telling has gained momentum, addressing false narratives like Columbus “discovering” America.

You might be tempted to ask questions: What are we to do now about an encounter between people so long ago? Will God hold us accountable? Does this have anything to do with us today? I invite you to read more about the Doctrine of Discovery, the spiritual, political and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians, and dive into the wisdom Charles, our Navajo Christian brother, shares with us in his book.

Levels of racism

Jeremiah 22:3 says, “This is what the Lord says: Administer justice and righteousness. Rescue the victim of robbery from the hand of his oppressor. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless, or the widow. Do not shed innocent blood in this place.” As we work for justice and read Scriptures like Jeremiah 22:3 or Matthew 25, one of my favorites, we need a framework of understanding levels of racism.

None of us want to be labeled a racist. The media has already done an explosive job of dividing our thinking around this subject, as though it can be sliced in political party lines or, dare I say, ethnicity. The truth is that we need to have the courage and wisdom to understand racism at several different levels. Here are five levels for us all to process:

Level 1 Intrapersonal Level: Intrapersonal racism is a way of seeing the internalized supremacy/racism that is the personal conscious or subconscious acceptance of the dominant society’s racist views, stereotypes and biases of racial and ethnic groups. It gives rise to patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that result in discriminating, minimizing, criticizing, finding fault, invalidating and hating others/oneself while simultaneously valuing the dominant culture.

Level 2 Interpersonal Level: Individual racism refers to an individual’s racist assumptions, beliefs or behaviors and can be conscious or unconscious. Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. Once we bring our private beliefs into our interaction with others, racism is now in the interpersonal realm. It’s found in our practice of overt discrimination and implicit biases.

Level 3 Institutional Level: Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. It is a pattern of social institutions—such as governmental organizations, schools, banks and courts of law—whose effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as people of color.

Level 4 Community Level: This is the system used to allocate resources and uphold inequalities based on race and amplifying disparities. An example is school segregation.

Level 5 Systemic Level: Structural or systemic racism in the U.S. is the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal—that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. Structural racism encompasses the entire system of white domination, diffused and infused in all aspects of so-

ciety including its history, culture, politics, economics and entire social fabric.

Our house needs remodeling

Imagine moving into a house that was built hundreds of years ago. Wouldn’t we consider remodeling in order to have indoor plumbing and air conditioning and updating this house to hold the commodities now available? If we wanted to live in a more efficient home, we would examine what it needs, hire the right craftsman to do the work, tolerate the dust, be inconvenienced for a season and keep reminding ourselves that the end product will be worth all of the work.

The church must do some remodeling when it comes to racism. Within our own denominational structures—composition of leadership, styles of leadership, definition of leadership, perspective of kingdom work, allocation of resources, priorities—everything needs to be reexamined in light of our goal. What might we be missing if our structure continues to uphold our original floor plan?

In Revelation 7:9, John writes, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” We need to be inconvenienced. We need to break walls of hostility and injustice so that we make sure this house—that we do not own—may be an equitable living place for all of our MB family. This, my sisters and brothers, is a journey of trust, truth, lament, confession, repentance, unity and of love—all for the glory of God.

I am honored to be part of a group of writers that have trusted *Christian Leader* readers with their own journey on race and racism. Our experiences are rich, both with pain and with hope. As you reflect on your own journey, here are 10 suggestions for what is next.

1. Participate in Mennonite Central Committee’s year-long learning experience on race and racism and the role of the church in North America using Jemar Tisby’s book, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the Church’s Complicity in Racism*. Webinars will be available to hear from diverse ethnic faith speakers throughout the year.

2. Advance your own journey by reading books like *The Myth of Equality* and others recommended on page 16.

3. Meet with folks for deep and brave conversations.

4. Reach beyond your homogenous community and enter spaces with mutual engagement.

5. Read authors from marginalized communities and be open to seeing the journey through a different lens.

6. Invite speakers/preachers that have a different ethnic experience to share.

7. Move beyond resourcing old structures and see what God is doing in marginalized spaces.

8. Go on a prayer and fasting journey, asking God to reveal areas that need to be decolonized.

9. Widen your circle to include people not from your ethnic group.

10. Practice radical hospitality.

Dina González-Piña is the executive director for West Coast Mennonite Central Committee. She and her husband, Xavier Piña, pastor Iglesia La Gran Comision, a USMB congregation in Hanford, Calif.

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

The church should be leading the fight for racial justice

BY TERRY W. HUNT

I was born 60 years ago in the United States of America, “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” In our Declaration of Independence, it says, “all men are created equal.” But in my childhood,

I saw the opposite.

Both of my parents are African American, but my mother is so fair skinned that she could easily pass for a white woman all day long. In the 50s and 60s my mom



would frequent a local drug store that served lunch. In those days, Black people were not allowed to be served at the lunch counter or to sit at a table. But she looked so white that they never asked her if she was Black.

One time, Mom and her sister (my aunt) went to a restaurant, proceeded to the “Colored Section” and seated themselves. The waitress came over and told them that they were in the wrong section and asked them to move to the “White Only Section.”

Not long ago, my aunt told me that she once received a speeding ticket that she deserved. She retained a lawyer who asked her if everything was correct on the ticket. “Everything but my race,” she said. The lawyer told her not to say anything; she would have a better chance of getting off if the ticket indicated she was white.

“

Desegregation

As a child, I went to school by bus, and I remember passing two all-white schools that were close to our home, but we kept driving 17 miles until we reached an all-Black school. When our schools were desegregated in 1968, I was bused to the nearest school. But all of the Black students sat at the back of the bus.

The first year our schools were integrated, over 50 percent of the Black students were held back and asked to repeat the year. In part, this was due to the outdated schoolbooks that we had been given to use. One of my schoolbooks had my mother’s name in it. She is 24 years older than I am, so that

tells you how far behind the Black schools were. We learned later that some of the white teachers didn’t really want the integration policies to be successful, so by not promoting many of the Black students it gave them the right to say, “I told you so.”

By the mid 70s when I was in high school, most of my closest friends were white, and I didn’t feel much racial tension. From time to time, I would hear my parents talk about workplace inequality and how it was tough for people of color to advance. Growing up, my parents would tell us that we needed to work twice as hard as white people in order to have a chance at a decent life.

Two strikes

I also remember being told that we already had two strikes against us: We were poor, and we were Black. As a teenager, that was a big pill to swallow. I knew that in baseball you only had three strikes and you were out. Even with those two strikes, God allowed my three siblings and me to grow up as Christians and to become successful and productive citizens.

My life has been uncomplicated compared to most people of color across this nation. In many areas, the opportunities that were available to me were not available for others.

I have spent the last 36 years as a pastor, half of those years as a bi-vocational pastor and plant manager, and 15 of those years as the district minister of the USMB Eastern District Conference. Other than my devotion to Jesus Christ and my family, my passion now is to engage with Christians about what I feel is the number one cause of disunity in our churches and nation: racial injustice.

The voice of Jesus

The American church should be the voice of Jesus in every situation and embrace God’s plan for the church as revealed in Revelation 7:9, “a great multitude...from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” The Christ-like church should be leading the charge and not following a particular political party or movement.

There are so many things dividing the churches in America today, from denominations to worship styles. In terms of race, the church is still the most segregated institution in America on Sunday mornings. I often ask myself: Why is that?

I invite you to begin asking yourself the same question as you think about the makeup of your local church. I also invite you to start praying with me and asking God to look deep into our hearts and to oust anything that is keeping our churches from reflecting his plans for his church. May I encourage you to make friends with people who do not look like you and learn to listen to their stories as you share your own. My prayer is that as Christians, we will find common ground in the Word of God and in our efforts to be peacemakers.

Terry W. Hunt is the USMB Eastern District Conference minister and pastor at The Life Center, a multicultural congregation in Lenoir, N.C. Hunt has lived and worked in North Carolina his entire life and is very active in his community and with USMB. He and his wife, Kathy, have four daughters and four grandchildren.

”



Two words that began my journey to understanding systemic racism

BY MARK ISAAC

“**S**he’s difficult.” These two words were all it took for me as a university administrator to deny a colleague a seat at the table. With these two words I finalized a team without her, brought them together to develop a plan and then implemented and finally celebrated its successful conclusion. She missed out.

Now, years later as a pastor once more, I still remember the chain of events and conditions I created with these two words for my Black, female colleague, for myself and the team and for the university and community. It would take weeks and months for me to learn about the part I played in perpetuating systemic racism and to begin repenting of it.

As significant as it is to me, my repenting is only a drop in the deep-running river of recognizing and dismantling the sin of systemic racism. I am only now in the last eight years awakening to the realities of it in American society and my part in it. The fact that I am beginning to see systemic racism, to feel remorse for it and to redress it in my life and in the church does not deserve a shift of the spotlight from the lived experience of those like my colleague who have suffered on account of it for generations. If my story is to contribute, then let it turn your attention and open your eyes and ears to those who have suffered and suffer from it still.

I had no idea

It had not occurred to me that my colleague was anything else but difficult. I certainly wouldn’t have said she was difficult because of her race, nor would I have attached my perception to her gender. I’m smarter than that; I’m neither a racist nor a misogynist. Looking back, I can see how such positive self-assessments actually blinded me to the truth about myself, society and people of color like my colleague.

Smart as I thought myself to be, I had failed to learn anything meaningful about her or from her prior to that decision. I had made my assessment having never once even worked with her. Colorblind as I prided myself to be, I had failed to see the impacts of our racialized society on her life or how her Black heritage had given her a wealth of wisdom, experience and fortitude the team might have needed. And as egalitarian as I was, I had failed to recognize the mettle she had developed on account of her gender.

I had no idea the perseverance she had demonstrated as a Black woman to earn her doctorate. None of these things mattered to me then. As a professional white Christian man, I was simply accustomed to setting standards and defining norms for my family and the churches and communities I served. I judged her to be “difficult” and acted to exclude her because I was in a position to

do so for the best interest of the team and organization. That she spoke up in disagreement with my decision, not unlike protests following brutal police actions, only reinforced the rightness of my decision and my assessment that she was difficult.

Over the next few weeks following my decision, a series of events put my colleague and me in closer proximity to each other. Her office was near mine and when I stopped by on one occasion, she mentioned that she had volunteered for the team I had put together. She wondered why she hadn't been selected. I hesitated to say the words, but finally told her I perceived her as difficult. That confirmed what she had been told. Could I give an example? she asked. As I did, I realized I had only been judging her from a distance. I didn't know her and hadn't cared enough to try.

Listening and learning

And so, a relationship began. I listened, and I learned. I saw how the small decision I had made about her had been made from a place of privilege and power, the kind that was able to set standards for how people worked and by which she had been judged "difficult."

Did I care to know of the crucible her difficult life had provided as a foundry of her character? Was I prepared to see the difficulty I was perpetuating in her life? In the shared difficulty of that current situation, could she count on me to be empathetic, understanding and open to listening and learning?

Was I the difficult one? Such questions gnawed at me.

I had hurt my colleague deeply and recognized how vulnerable she had been in sharing that with me. And because of her persistence in challenging me, we entered a process with others to gain understanding and to seek restoration. Little did I know the grace, wisdom and strength of my colleague! What I discovered through her and the process was instructive and transformative. I was living and leading while never examining the influence and the privilege systemic racism had provided me. She and other colleagues, alongside the Word and work of the Lord in my life, had revealed what should have been self-evident: I was participating in the perpetuation of systemic racism.

Learning to be difficult

At the conclusion of the process, my colleague invited me to a table of repentance. Before two dozen of our colleagues I laid out the role I had played behind the scenes in her life and in ways that

had affected them in the organization, too. My decisions were influenced by my assumptions, virtually none of which I had examined. She was a single Black woman with an earned doctorate, a devoted follower of Jesus, an educator and an activist committed to breaking down the barriers of systemic racism. She was difficult, indeed. She'd had to be all her life. And though I had not known it, I needed her to be.

I am learning to be difficult, too. My ongoing repentance, growing recognition and calls for redressing the privilege and power from systemic racism in society and in the church has created difficulty for some around me. Much of that difficulty is exacerbated by the polarized politicization of systemic racism as an issue and the way it is portrayed in the media. And yet some are engaging and learning along with me.

Whole generations are growing up around me already awakened and increasingly active in exposing and dismantling these systems. They are looking for spiritual leaders to take the Bible's calls for justice and righteousness seriously. One of the ways I've responded was to purchase and use the newly published and first-ever New Testament commentary from an African American perspective, *True to Our Native Land*, to help me see and share the text from that lens of experience. As a pastor and leader, my words matter.

Two words set me on a course I could not have predicted. I came to value my colleague in ways I had not

imagined. New insights continue to spark increased empathy. And though the experience was one of difficulty, it has opened a path to greater understanding and a shared hope for God's justice and righteousness—his kingdom—on earth as it is in heaven.

In the words of the song known as the Black national anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*:

“Thou who has brought us thus far on the way
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light
Keep us forever in [that] path, we pray”

Mark Isaac is lead pastor of New Life Community, formerly Dinuba MB Church, in central California. He is a graduate of Tabor College and MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, and has pastored churches in California, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Mark and his wife, Laurie, have four grown children and two grandchildren.

“She was a single Black woman with an earned doctorate, a devoted follower of Jesus, an educator and an activist committed to breaking down the barriers of systemic racism. She was difficult, indeed. She'd had to be all her life. And though I had not known it, I needed her to be.”

Learn more about race, racism

Reading is one way to expand our understanding of race and racism. Contributing writers Darren Duerksen, Terry W. Hunt, Mark Isaac and Jamie Mack offer their recommendations for books and resources that can advance your journey and give you a different perspective on this important issue. A full list is posted online at www.christianleadermag.com/race-and-racism-resources/

Books — Nonfiction

Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming Our Ethnic Journey by Sarah Shin, 2017. This is the first book I read on the subject of racism. —Mark Isaac

Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We are Stronger Together by Tony Evans, 2015. I have been a student of Dr. Evans for over 40 years. If there is anyone who can speak words of hope and healing to the body of Christ, it is he—calling the church to action in embracing oneness from the perspective that Christ is not taking sides but taking over. —Terry Hunt

Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity by David W. Swanson, 2020. Our church elders read this book and are still considering ways to engage the conversation with our church family. —Mark Isaac

The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism by Jemar Tisby, 2019. This book helped me see that racism would never have taken root in America if the church would not support it. It also has made me more aware of my call as a "minister of reconciliation." —Terry Hunt

The Myth of Equality: Uncovering the Roots of Injustice and Privilege by Ken Wytmsa, 2017. I had been looking for a white evangelical voice who could speak/write on race and privilege, which could serve as a bridge between those at the forefront of race relations in America. This book challenges evangelicals to awaken our nation's racist history and ask more in-depth questions about race, identity and responsibility. —Terry Hunt

The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration by Isabel Wilkerson, 2010. How could I not have known about this?! Wilkerson's book on the migration of 6 million Black Americans from the South to other parts of our nation is a long book, but like a good movie with delightful characters and incredulous situations, you just don't want it to end. —Mark Isaac

True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary by Brian K. Blount (editor), 2007. Biblical commentaries are virtually all written from a

white Western perspective. I have owned and read nothing else, until now. I won't preach a text unless I've read about it and understood it from the perspective of my Black brothers and sisters. —Mark Isaac

Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, 2019. This book tells the truths that we didn't learn in school about how the ideology of Christian discovery dehumanized the indigenous people of Turtle Island. You will learn so many things about our U.S. history that you didn't know. —Terry Hunt

White Awake: An Honest Look at What it means to be White by Daniel Hill, 2017. Hill provides a very readable, biblical and often personal look at what it means to grow in our understanding of white culture and identity. He presents seven stages that he and most white people move through, illustrating them with stories from over 20 years of lived and pastoral experience in Chicago, including five years with Willow Creek Community Church. —Darren Duerksen

Books — Fiction

Go Set a Watchman: A Novel by Harper Lee, 2016. Whether or not you read the author's first acclaimed novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, this recently discovered and published second novel stands on its own. I found myself struggling intensely along with the main character, Scout, a daughter who had come to see the evil of racism very differently from her father's and her community's perspective. —Mark Isaac

Salvage the Bones by Jesmyn Ward, 2011. Ward gives us the story of an impoverished Black family in rural Mississippi and their experience of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath as seen through the eyes of the middle daughter Esch. Through it all Ward doesn't tell us about racism. Rather she rather shows us how racism segregates Black communities and makes them highly

vulnerable to economic changes and natural disaster, but also how their relationships with each other provide strength and resilience. —Darren Duerksen

Books — Children

Preaching to the Chickens: The Story of Young John Lewis by Jabari Isim. I am embarrassed to say that I did not know who John Lewis was until he died a few months ago. This fun book with gorgeous illustrations tells a snippet of his young life, the beginnings of his calling to be a peacemaker, preacher and civil rights leader. —Jamie Mack

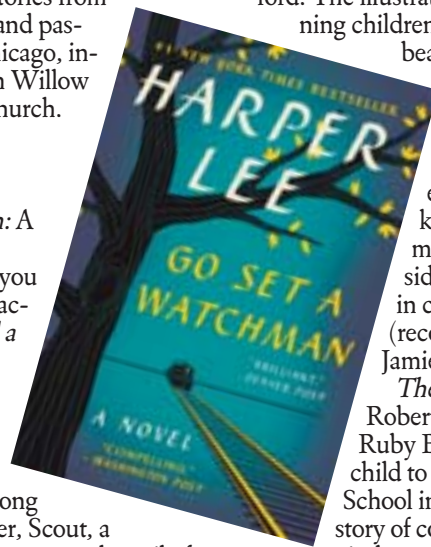
The Day You Begin by Jacqueline Woodson. This is a fantastic book to help kids talk about feeling anxious, or left out, or different. —Jamie Mack

Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Safety by Carol Boston Weatherford. The illustrations in this award-winning children's book are just as beautiful as the story itself!

This book highlights Harriet Tubman's deep faith in God and her belief that he was calling and equipping her to do his kingdom work. It caused me to picture Harriet alongside the heroes of faith listed in chapter 11 of Hebrews. (recommended ages 6-14) —Jamie Mack

The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles. As a 6-year-old, Ruby Bridges was the first black child to attend Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. This true story of courage and kindness reminds us that even the youngest can be trailblazers for change! (recommended ages 4-12) —Jamie Mack

Brown Girl Dreaming, by Jacqueline Woodson. SO GOOD!! This award-winning memoir is written in free-verse poetry, making it wonderfully accessible to young readers. My teenage daughters and I thoroughly enjoyed this book, which was an easy entrance into historical realities of the civil rights movement in the 60s. Buy it, read it, discuss it and pass it on to a friend! (ages 10 and up) —Jamie Mack



Mountain View in growth spurt

Fresno church is planting in U.S., internationally

Mountain View Church (MVC) in Fresno, Calif., is in the midst of a growth spurt, though it's not the kind of growth one might think. Rather than large-scale growth in one location, MVC is spreading the salvation of Jesus through its intense church planting efforts.

With two campuses being planted in nearby Clovis, a couple across the country and several internationally, church planting is at the forefront of Mountain View's mission.

MVC is a three-campus church with plans to plant two additional campuses locally by the end of 2021—one in Old Town Clovis and a campus in a place yet to be determined.

Planting in Clovis

According to Fred Leonard, MVC lead pastor, church leaders were praying for a church plant in Old Town Clovis. A popular event, shopping and dining district with a historic twist, Old Town Clovis is located in the city right next door to Fresno.

Through a miraculous series of events, God brought Scott and Jackie Gossenberger, a church planting couple with a heart for Old Town Clovis, to MVC to pastor this campus. MVC Old Town is set to launch late January 2021, and with the gathering of interest groups, volunteer recruitment and marketing, it's in the thick of the final planning phases.

Meanwhile, MVC staff pastor Tony Petersen and his wife, Roxanna, have been praying about planting a church for some time now, but arriving at the place of actually pulling the proverbial trigger was much more of a process.



Fred Leonard, lead pastor of Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif., pictured on MVC's Live the Mission Sunday with church planters Tony and Roxanna Petersen, announces plans for a new church plant in a location yet to be determined. *Photo by MVC*

After meeting with Leonard and the rest of MVC's leadership team, undergoing a church planting assessment and meeting with USMB leaders, the Petersens decided that this was a calling from God and obedience was the only response.

"The best way to share the gospel is through church planting, which is why we were thrilled to send out the Petersens to lead a new MVC church plant campus" Leonard says. "The more churches there are, regardless of the area, the more people are likely to hear about Jesus."

Petersen agrees. "Unless Christian churches and pastors plant more churches and more campuses, fewer and fewer people will hear the gospel, respond to the gospel and be saved by God's grace," he says. "That's just what we know."

As far as a location, MVC is praying for God to make a location available in either northeast Clovis or the Fresno High area by Easter 2021. The Petersens have a heart for the area—their hometown—where so many are hurting and in need of a Savior.

"To Roxanna and me, the opportunity is here, in this area, right now," Petersen says. "We know there's obviously a ton of churches in the area already, but despite the appearance, lots of Fresno and Clovis still need Jesus, too."

Planting in Spain

Malaga, Spain, was not on MVC's radar until the day Misael and Dyrly Amarilla unrolled a map of the country across Leonard's desk. The Amarillas moved from Paraguay to Fresno in 2015 when Misael enrolled in Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and began his apprenticeship at MVC. Their plan was always to move back to Paraguay and plant a church, but as graduation approached, God laid something, or someplace, else on the Amarillas' hearts: Malaga, Spain, a place with little to no churches and an evangelical population of less than 1 percent.

"We were excited to go back to our families in Paraguay, but then God spoke Spain to our hearts, and it was a call that we could not get away from," Amarilla says. "The lack of Christians

there really gripped us.”

After spending five years in Fresno, learning English, earning a master’s degree and welcoming two babies to their family, the Amarillas are living with family in Paraguay for the next several months. There they await the paperwork needed to move and begin their efforts on the ground in Spain. They are praying toward a Spring 2021 arrival date.

Additional projects

In addition to MVC’s church plants, other churches MVC is invested in are planting churches of their own.

After wrapping up multiple apprenticeships at MVC from 2010 to 2012 and working with Leonard to write a strategic plan, Josh and Brienne Shaw planted Lighthouse Church in Denver, Colo., in 2015. Since that time, the church has seen significant growth, outgrown several locations and is now planting its first campus.

“For all of the grandparents out there, you can probably sense the joy and excitement we are experiencing right now around this church plant,” Leonard says.

Meanwhile, international church planters Kevin and Kate Herla trained and strategized at MVC in 2017 and then went home to East Germany—an area home to a largely atheist population—to plant Connect Kirche. They have been busy training leaders, sharing the gospel and leading East Germans to Jesus. Today, the church is planting its own church plant in Ilmenau, Germany, a town just south of its home base in Erfurt.

According to Leonard, many other churches that MVC supports and advises are also in the process of planting churches.

“We could name more church plants that Mountain View is involved in, but it’s not about Mountain View,” Leonard says. “It’s all about God and the miracle he’s doing. When I think

about the way he is expanding his church through MVC, it blows my mind. It just goes to show that God is looking for a willing vessel to expand his kingdom. There’s nothing special about Mountain View. We’re nothing more than a conduit for mission.”

The view from 30,000 feet

Leonard says the church’s goal is to plant as many churches as possible, wherever possible.

“We are always praying God will provide us with church planters, buildings, new locations and new countries in miraculous ways,” he says. “And that’s how most of our church planting efforts begin.”

Leonard invests a lot of time into church plants while they are just an idea. He meets with MVC’s church planting apprentices to help them develop a financial plan with a goal to move toward self-sufficiency within two years.

“We don’t want to limit church planting and church growth based on the size of our wallets,” he says.

MVC does not follow a specific church planting model. Rather, it plants campuses and free-standing churches depending upon the church planter and the partnership. MVC is willing to consider investing in any church planting model it believes will move toward sustainability. Apprentices that come to MVC from the global community are sent back to their family of churches upon completion of their apprenticeships.

Planting churches internationally can be a challenge because of cultural differences, Leonard admits, which is why he enjoys working with church planters to write their strategic plans. There are overarching principles about reaching the lost, fundraising and budgeting, but some things are best left to the locals.

“Our goal is to never say no to an opportunity we believe will reach lost people, be sustainable and daughter its own churches,” Leonard says. “We are here

to help. We never forget God used a donkey, thus, he can use us.” —*Allie Rodriguez*



Jordan Ringhofer

Ringhofer serving as new PDC minister

Building relationships is Ringhofer’s goal

For the first time in 15 years, Jordan Ringhofer has the opportunity to sit with his family during a church service.

He’s also moved from the front to the back of Hope Kingsburg—the U.S. Mennonite Brethren church in Kingsburg, Calif., where Ringhofer formerly served as lead pastor—an ability afforded him as a result of his new role as Pacific District Conference (PDC) minister.

When Ringhofer left his position as lead pastor at Hope Kingsburg to become the new PDC district minister, it set into motion a swapping of roles, as

interim district minister Dennis Fast passed the baton to Ringhofer and stepped in as interim lead pastor at Hope Kingsburg.

Ringhofer says he is excited to develop connections and be in conversation as he steps into his new role as a pastor for the district pastors.

“It’s being here for them and uniquely here for them in ways that other pastors can’t be because they have their congregations that they also have to be responsible for,” Ringhofer says.

Embracing Mennonite Brethren

Raised in a multid denominational background, Ringhofer (pronounced “Ringhoffer”) first learned about the Mennonite Brethren as a high school student wanting to be baptized at Neighborhood Church in Visalia, Calif. Ringhofer attended Fresno Pacific University, where he says he continued to learn what it means to be Mennonite Brethren. He was drawn especially to the Confession of Faith and the foundational Anabaptist beliefs.

“Jesus is the center of our faith, community is the center of our lives, reconciliation is the center of our work,” Ringhofer says. “That struck a chord with me in the person of Jesus. I’ve chosen to be a part of this. I wasn’t born into it.”

Ringhofer’s wife, Tristan, however, was born and raised Mennonite Brethren at North Fresno (Calif.) Church.

The two met in the FPU choir. The couple has been married more than 15 years and has two sons, ages 6 and 4. Tristan teaches at Immanuel Schools in Reedley, Calif., where she also serves as the learning director at the elementary school.

Ringhofer says he originally planned to major in psychology with a minor in music and then considered accounting before choosing the path of ministry.

He has served in pastoral roles since his graduation from FPU in 2006 with



PDC minister Jordan Ringhofer, center, stands with Arturo Cana and his wife Blanca (left), and Gabriela Linares and her husband Salvador. Pastors Arturo and Gabriela lead El Rey Ya Viene Iglesia Cristiana (The King Is Coming Christian Church), in Arleta, Calif. Ringhofer recently visited the church with Xavier Peña and Cristobal Aleman, members of the PDC Hispanic Council.

his bachelor’s degree in contemporary Christian ministry and a minor in business administration. He served as youth and worship pastor at Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore., for six years, before transitioning to Hope Kingsburg—then Kingsburg MB—for a two-year stint as associate pastor for youth and worship, before most recently serving as lead pastor there since 2014. He earned his master’s degree in Christian ministry from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary in 2019.

A new role

Ringhofer has served on the PDC executive board since 2011, and when former district minister Gary Wall announced his resignation in 2019, Ringhofer joined the search team for a new district minister, while Dennis Fast, on staff as associate pastor of care at Hope Kingsburg, stepped in as interim district minister.

For six months, Ringhofer says he resisted the idea of applying for the position, but as he and Tristan began praying more intently and intensely about it, the opportunity arose to re-

consider.

Fast spoke with Ringhofer after a strategy meeting in April.

“I saw significant leadership gifts in Jordan that I felt would be effective in district leadership,” Fast says. “I felt we needed someone younger who could connect well with young and growing pastors. We needed someone decisive to handle difficult issues that arise in a denomination. And we needed someone with a strong commitment to Anabaptist theology to help navigate us in days when many voices call for attention theologically. I saw all of that in Jordan and recommended that he apply.”

So Ringhofer resigned from the search team, applied and was selected as the new district minister. He was installed as district minister the first weekend of October in a pair of services conducted on Zoom, including a Saturday service in Spanish and a Sunday afternoon service in English.

As someone who has chosen to be Mennonite Brethren, Ringhofer says he views his hiring—by a people group who he says has struggled to transition

from being an ethnic group unified by cultural artifacts to a more diverse, yet committed, group—as evidence of a willingness to listen to one another and invest in a diverse approach.

“We’re a confessional people, which means that we recognize that there are certain things that we all mutually submit to, which is this confession of faith—this shared understanding of this is who God is, but then also within that that there is just exceptional diversity that is afforded,” he says, adding later:

“We can leave and go to any other denomination, any other church, at any time, yet we choose to be countercultural by saying we’re committed to one another, we’re going to be faithful to this family,” Ringhofer says. “That’s something that the world doesn’t really offer.”

A pastor for the pastors

A typical day, or at least a typical-in-a-pandemic day, for Ringhofer begins with a scan of his email inbox to respond to messages and finding the correct Zoom links for the calls he has on his schedule for the day.

Most surprising so far, he says, is simply the amount of reading—documents and emails—that is required, especially in the days leading up to meetings. (The interview for this story took place the week of the USMB board meetings).

“Right now when everything is a screen or a paper in front of you and very little human contact, it is surprisingly fatiguing to just sit down and read all that, and I like reading,” Ringhofer says. “I love reading books, I love reading anything.”

Key to the role is building relationships and being available. One of Ringhofer’s first goals is to organize consistent regional gatherings with lead pastors over Zoom.

The PDC is divided into five regions, and Ringhofer would like to begin meeting with regional pastors quarterly, or once a month if possible,

to build relationship and awareness of resources available to them, whether expertise, young leaders, community-involvement or church-planting.

He plans to begin with English-speaking pastors and branch out from there. The PDC Hispanic Council has divided its churches into regions with regional pastors who Ringhofer says are doing an “excellent job of networking with one another.”

He’s learning Spanish and hopes to spend time building trust and extending an invitation for relationship.

“Making sure the churches know, particularly our ethnic churches, like our Spanish-speaking churches, our Russian Slavic churches, making sure they know that when we do come around, it’s not just because we’re trying to insert ourselves in their business

or take over things, but that it’s just building relationship,” he says.

The pandemic has forced people to become familiar with Zoom and also placed a higher value on face-to-face gatherings.

“I think we’re going to start seeing greater attendance to the in-person gatherings when we do offer them, because I doubt we’ll offer them as frequently as we did, but yet now when we do offer them, it’ll be a time to get together with your friends and get together with this part of our family that we haven’t seen face to face other than on a screen,” Ringhofer says. “We are created to be an incarnational presence in people’s lives, not just a virtual presence.”

Looking ahead, Ringhofer is excited to be in conversations about steward-



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ship of resources, especially as it pertains to church planting and church health.

“I look at where the conversations are at and where people’s hearts and motivations are, and as burnt out as we are on everything in the world around us, we see a significant swell of people that are saying, ‘We want to see people come to know Jesus. How do we use our resources and our time to make that happen?’” Ringhofer says. “That’s getting me excited.” —*Janae Rempel*

Album reflects congregation’s experiences

Lighthouse Church releases album produced in-house

If music paints a picture and evokes emotion, Lighthouse Church’s new album, *Reason to Praise*, provides snapshots into the life of the Denver, Colo.,

congregation.

Sam Tichenor, Lighthouse pastor of worship and care, describes the album as a “love letter to the church,” the songs he wrote reflecting the lived experiences of the congregation.

“I’m sitting with people, learning from them and going, ‘Hey, tell me your story,’” Tichenor says. “I get the story and I get these pictures and I get these words. It’s very vulnerable because you offer this to the church and to the Lord as a love letter, and you hope that it doesn’t miss the mark.”

Space to write

Writing music for Lighthouse Church has been one of Tichenor’s goals ever since he was hired in fall 2018.

Tichenor has been writing music since he was 14, but with no previous pastoral experience aside from volunteer work and mentorships, his plans for writing music were put on hold as he leaned into his new role, meeting with people, making set lists and preparing for Sunday services.

He began work on a new album in late 2019, then the coronavirus pandemic afforded time that sped up the project. With pastoral care moved online and no in-person gatherings, Tichenor finally had space to write.

“It probably would’ve taken a little longer if COVID-19 hadn’t happened because you’re juggling two different things,” Tichenor says. “You’re juggling being a pastor and juggling writing music, and being a pastor is always going to win out. Being able to take time in the office and work with our lead pastor Josh (Shaw) was a great opportunity for us to push it through.”

With hours a day dedicated to the project, a new album began to take shape. Shaw says the album reflects Lighthouse’s identity and the Jesus the congregation serves.

“Pastor Sam is an incredible musician, and most important, shepherd to our church,” Shaw says. “The songs his team wrote for this album reflect the deep reverence our church has for the lordship of Jesus. They are full of lament and joy, suffering and praise.”

Reason to praise

The album, *Reason to Praise*, contains nine songs, including a mix of what Tichenor calls “typical worship songs,” Christian contemporary music and contemplative songs of lament.

The album covers a wide range of emotion, from the upbeat and happy *Overcome*, to the more somber *Reason to Praise* and *Psalms 51*.

“I think the biggest thing that we can learn is that we can find two emotions in one place,” Tichenor says of the album’s message of hope. “We can be able to struggle and wrestle with something but also find joy in the mourning. Find joy in the sadness. ... The Lord is still good and his mercy endures forever, so I can still praise him no matter what season I’m going through.”

Each song on the album reflects the lived experiences of the church and members of the congregation, including difficult seasons of losing staff members, enduring COVID-19 or mental health



Sam Tichenor, playing keyboard, says “I think the most rewarding part of our live recording event was just seeing the church actually grasp those songs and watching the Lord minister to different people during different songs. And looking down from the stage and saying, ‘Man I know that person’s story, and I know how this song could minister to them,’ and watching them respond to that and be a part of that.”

issues.

“There’s the struggle and wrestle with God of the lament, but we also have the hope of Jesus,” Tichenor says.

The title track references a season of Lighthouse teachings on lament as church leaders learned of congregants’ struggles with mental health.

“We learned that a lot of our church congregants were dealing with depression, suicide—just a lot of mental health issues—bipolar disorder,” Tichenor says. “As we were aware of that, we were able to sit with our congregants and our people that we love and say, ‘Hey, can we walk through this with you?’ so it basically came out of a couple different stories of congregants we loved.”

Thank You was written the first Sunday Lighthouse returned to in-person gatherings after meeting online for a season as a result of COVID-19.

“We ended up in what we call ‘spontaneous moment of worship,’ where we were just singing to the Lord and giving the Lord praise out of our hearts,” Tichenor says. “Because we were all together, this phrase came out, ‘My heart cries thank you, thank you for all that you have done.’”

Meanwhile, Tichenor wrote the verses of *Psalms 51* five years ago and finished the song after a Lighthouse series on the Psalms. The song is slow, Tichenor says, then reaches a sudden big moment in the bridge, reflecting David’s emotional state and reliance on the Lord.

“Even if it doesn’t hit everyone, that’s okay because it’s for the church, and our church has latched onto these songs,” he says of the album. “So we’re really thankful for that.”

An offering to the church

Lighthouse Church has been involved in the process from the beginning, allowing the congregation to take ownership of the project.

After writing a song, Tichenor and the team worked out changes on stage.

“When we play it live versus listen-

ing in a studio after we’ve recorded it, we can feel a moment more,” he says. “We’ll write, we’ll play and then we’ll finalize it and record it.”

All of the writing and recording was done in-house with about 10 volunteers and staff members. Tichenor played piano and served as one of the primary vocalists on the album with a handful of others, including his wife, Jamie, who serves as family ministries pastor at Lighthouse.

The Lighthouse congregation can be heard on the album as the choir behind the lead vocals. Lighthouse held a live event to record audio and video. Tichenor used a hybrid model for the audio, meshing what he produced beforehand with the live recording.

“It’s a lot of cut and paste and all that fun stuff,” he says. “Everything, production-wise, lies in my hands.”

Meanwhile, a volunteer crew captured video using seven cameras for the nine videos that was released on YouTube the same time as the album, set for mid-December.

“We wanted to capture the elements of what was going on,” Tichenor says. “That way if a listener is watching that video, say, somewhere else, they feel immersed into it. They feel the atmosphere, they feel the powerful spirit of God on it.”

Tichenor estimates he worked on the album between four to six hours a day for six months during the time Lighthouse held services online.

It took a team of 25 volunteers to put the album together, including video, audio mixing and mastering. Outside help to mix and master the album could have cost as much as \$9,000, Tichenor says, not including production costs.

“It’s all being made possible by people in the church, and that’s like the biggest statistic for me,” Tichenor says. “It’s been amazing the gifts that people have been given by God and their ability to serve and honor the church with those.”

As for what’s next, Tichenor says the team has already written two new songs

with the goal of recording more songs. He would also like to create a “poetry and prayer” album.

To listen to “Reason to Praise,” visit the Lighthouse website, www.lighthousechurch.tv, to find links to videos and streaming platforms.

“It’s not about being known, it’s not about putting something out there for the world to see,” Tichenor says of the album. “It’s about an offering to Jesus and an offering to our church.” —*Janae Rempel*

Churches provide support for schools

Schools, churches team up to tackle COVID-19 learning

This fall, schools and communities around the nation entered uncharted territory as they began the new school year during the ongoing threat of a global pandemic. For some U. S. Mennonite Brethren churches, this situation provided a unique opportunity to serve.

Two California churches, North Fresno Church and Mountain View Church, as well as Hesston MB Church in Kansas, are offering their church facilities as spaces for students to engage in distance learning or attend school with greater social distancing.

Supporting students, families

At North Fresno Church, 12 students sit at their own tables, each connected to his or her class meeting on the laptop or tablet in front of them. Each Monday, Wednesday and Friday, the Roadrunner Central program provides WiFi and a quiet study environment for students to engage in distance learning.

When students started school online in mid-August, not all families had learning spaces for their children at home, says Roadrunner Central director Amanda Garcia Beaulieu.

“We have students who need access

to WiFi because theirs at home is not the best; we have students that have families that only speak Spanish and so their parents cannot communicate with the teachers; we also have single parents who need to work,” Garcia Beaulieu says. “We also understand that being home provides such a big distraction to students. Being able to step into a ‘classroom’ setting with other students who are working on their own work makes it easier for them. We are also able to provide a safe, caring place for our students.”

All staff at Roadrunner Central are connected to NFC and are either regular church attenders or current or former interns of the Micah Project, a 10-month discipleship and leadership development program of NFC that focuses on biblical justice.

“We help (students) connect to their class, we help navigate the various programs that the school uses for assignments and tests, we encourage the students to stay focused and provide support for the small meltdowns that we have from week to week,” Garcia Beaulieu says.

Roadrunner Central’s 12 students range in age from kindergarten to sixth grade—students whose teachers had listed as either not logging in regularly or turning in their work.

Members of Mountain View Church similarly discovered that distance learning can be a difficult juggling act for students, teachers, working parents, stay-at-home parents and even grandparents.

“One of our favorite things to do at Mountain View is minister to kids and love our community,” lead pastor Fred Leonard says. “When we heard about how hard distance learning is on families, we just knew we needed to step in. It’s what Jesus would do.”

Twice a week from early September through October, MVC and 11 volunteers welcomed 23 kids from four different school districts to its Distance Learning Hub. The students ranged in age from transitional kindergarten—for



Students engage in distance learning at Roadrunner Central at North Fresno (Calif.) Church, which provides WiFi and a quiet study environment for 12 students ranging in age from kindergarten to sixth grade. NFC hosts the program in three rooms in its educational building, allowing for more students with social distancing measures. Photo: NFC.

students whose birthdays land after the kindergarten cutoff but before Dec. 8—to sixth grade. Registration for the hub cost just \$5 per family.

Students are set up in the church’s

classrooms and outfitted with headphones, tablets or laptops, reliable WiFi and their daily distance learning schedules.

Both Fresno churches have been

careful to take precautions to keep students and volunteers safe.

Each morning, volunteers, staff and students at NFC participate in precautionary measures, including temperature checks at the door, screening for possible COVID-19 symptoms and supplying each student with hand sanitizer. Students' tables are spaced six feet apart to allow for social distancing.

"Everyone wears masks while they are in the program," Garcia Beaulieu says.

At MVC, the students also sit at separate desks. Each morning at check-in, parents sign a COVID-19 waiver and students have their temperature checked. Hand washing and sanitizing is a regular occurrence throughout the day.

Students doing distance learning at both churches are also provided with

food during the day. At MVC, students enjoy snacks and a homemade lunch made by volunteers.

Fresno Unified School District provides morning snacks and lunches for all students learning at NFC. Each morning, a staff member picks up food from the neighborhood high school using meal vouchers provided by the vice principal of the students' school. Others have shown interest in volunteering to make lunch for students, Garcia Beaulieu says.

Opportunity for fun, ministry

These distance learning setups allow for students who have been stuck at home for months on end to enjoy in-person social interaction with their peers.

At Roadrunner Central, staff has been creative in creating games and

physical activities to get students moving while maintaining limited physical interaction between students.

"Our break time usually includes 30 minutes of stretching so each student can have their own space, and it gets them moving," Garcia Beaulieu says. "For our lunch-time activity, we are able to play relay games which gets the students running after a morning sitting in front of their laptop/tablet screen."

Lisa Fowler, children's ministry director at MVC, also says that the Distance Learning Hub has provided a unique opportunity for ministry.

"Some of the kids we serve need to feel loved by someone other than their families," Fowler says. "Distance learning has been hard for them. Being able to sit with kids and show up for them is one of the best ways we can share Jesus with them."

According to Fowler, several of the kids being served have never been to church, but on early release Wednesdays, the hub hosts Bible Club, where students worship, hear a Bible story, work on memory verses and play games.

"I love the way the kids' faces light up during Bible Club," Fowler says. "Especially the kids who have never been to church. They're having such a great time and we're planting seeds. It's really incredible."

Parents, too, are getting some relief thanks to the ministry. They are grateful to be able to catch their breath knowing their children are safe, having fun with other children and getting their work done.

"We had just talked with our daughter's distance learning teacher about our idea to pull her from public school to homeschool her ourselves when Mountain View Church advertised their new distance learning hub," Erin Coburn, MVC member and parent of a kindergartner, says. "It is clearly an answered prayer. We desired a safe place for her to learn while I could focus on my younger children. The icing on the cake is that she's learning about Jesus, too."

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Equipped with a desk, headphones, a tablet and reliable Wi-Fi, this student is ready for the school day at Mountain View Church's Distance Learning Hub. Twice a week beginning in early September, Mountain View Church and 11 volunteers welcomed 23 kids from transitional kindergarten to 6th grade to its Distance Learning Hub. Distance learning was put into place as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Ready to help

More than 1,500 miles away from Fresno in Hesston, Kan., Hesston MB Church is ready and willing to provide help to the local school district if the

need arises.

J.L. Martin, pastor of children and family, says that the church was approached over the summer by the superintendent of Hesston schools, Ben Proctor, about the possibility of hosting a class of elementary students if there was a need for greater social distancing in classrooms due to increasing COVID-19 cases.

"As school was preparing to start, the principals of the middle and high school took a tour," Martin says. "The principals decided to use Crosswinds Conference Center for the middle school kids and two of the churches for two grades at the elementary school."

Hesston MB was chosen as a potential site for a class of second grade students.

"Second grade teachers have visited the church several times to try and figure out how it would work, because it is more than just classrooms," Martin says. "It is also food service, bus drop off, PE, art, etcetera."

The school district follows certain "gating criteria" to help determine if and when they would need to provide

greater social distancing or even remote learning for students. The criteria takes into account the positivity rate and active case count in the county, as well as student and staff absences.

Hesston schools moved into the "orange" zone of the gating criteria in early November, which meant that teachers, students and parents began to prepare for the possibility of a couple elementary classes moving off-site to Hesston MB and Whitestone Mennonite Church.

As of early December, however, the church had not yet been called upon to host the class, in part due to the number of COVID-related absences in the school.

"They had expected to start having second graders at the church on Dec. 2, but decided they could still stay at school," Martin says.

Martin says that the church continues to stay in close communication week by week with the superintendent, so they are ready to begin hosting students at any time. — *Jessica Vix Allen with files from Allie Rodriguez and Janae Rempel*

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phone and called from Virginia. We talked for an hour.

Jan from my tennis team called because she is also a cancer patient. We discovered we have more than tennis in common; we are sisters in the Lord, often sharing mutually meaningful Scripture. Ann and Cathy, also from tennis, called regularly to check on me and my backhand.

My Bible study group assured me of their prayers.

I didn't darken the door of a store for months. My four children, who all live nearby, never went to buy groceries for themselves without calling to find out what I needed. Pretending it was Christmas in July, and August, and September and October, they gifted me with items from the really thoughtful to the really ridiculous.

My husband, Al, has been stellar, performing a thousand acts of tenderness and love, not the least of which was going to the grocery store almost daily to buy me a green banana when nothing else would go down.

Phone calls, texts, prayers, contact with distant relatives, edible fruit bouquets, warm cookies, cards and more

cards, love in so many forms showered down upon me, topped off with a huge vase of white roses from the young couple across the street to celebrate the final chemo session. They were keeping track all along, imagine that.

Surgery was successful; chemo has been completed, and the side effects are fading into memory. The future looks bright. Was I blessed? Abundantly. But what if the rigorous treatment hadn't produced the desired results? What if the future didn't look so rosy? Would all the blessings along the way be any less significant? Absolutely not.

Regardless of how God chooses to send them, his blessings permeate your crusty exterior, percolate within you and become a part of your whole. They are not dependent on the final outcome. Sounding something like the Apostle Paul, I would say that whether I live or whether I die, I have been outrageously blessed.

Did God meet the challenge of Malachi 3? More than my storehouses can ever hold. ▀

Church Planting Council approved

Council to encourage church planting vision

Following up previous conversations about USMB church planting, the USMB National Strategy Team (NST) presented its plan for adopting a new national Church Planting Council (CPC) to the USMB Leadership Board during its October online meeting. The Church Planting Council proposal has been in process for over a year, and it's now ready to launch as our national church planting program following the USMB Leadership Board's approval during that meeting.

The CPC isn't intended to substitute what district church planting boards have done in the past. Instead, it's envisioned that the CPC will maintain and encourage a national church planting vision, provide cohesion and communication links along with supporting our MB church planting efforts by offering specific and much-needed project management pieces.

"The CPC will be collaborating with districts and church planting boards, not competing with them," says Don Morris, USMB national director. "It's adding to what our districts are already doing. CPC members are people who are willing to serve on this national council because they believe wholeheartedly in church planting as a vital element of doing our part for fulfilling the Great Commission."

The CPC will be accountable to the Leadership Board through the national director who will also serve as part of the council. Fundraising will be a significant function of the CPC, and all financials will be handled and reviewed by USMB.

Brad Klassen, pastor of Copper Hills Church in Peoria, Ariz., and a prospective member of the CPC, says, "(Planting churches) is risky and takes sacrifice. Ask any healthy parent. Little love equals little risk or sacrifice. Ridiculous love equals ridiculous risk and sacrifice. Planting new



Mario Trujillo, left, and his wife, Stephanie, are leading City Church, a USMB church plant in the historic district of downtown Pueblo, Colo., located in the southern part of the state. "We have seen Jesus Christ meet people where they're at and Jesus has powerfully transformed their lives," Trujillo says. Photo: USMB

churches is the most fruitful way to reach new communities of people for the King with the stunning news report of what he has done for humans."

Morris adds, "The development of the CPC will supply some of the missing pieces that C2C, the church planting division of Multiply, offered to us when we engaged them for assisting with church planting initiatives back in 2016. When C2C demerged from Multiply and stopped serving USMB in this capacity in the fall of 2019, it left a real void.

"This new CPC will provide essential national synergy for church planting, adding the infrastructure that helps us strategize for developing more church planters and for initiating more church plant projects," Morris says.

"We do want to be careful that as a denominational organization the CPC doesn't create a lot of bureaucratic steps for planting churches," Morris says. "It needs to be uncomplicated. This group is simply helping fulfill the mission that we have collectively determined is a priority.

This is our national vision for helping move church planting forward."

Phil Wiebe, church plant pastor of Lakeview Church in Stansbury Park, Utah, says, "I church plant because it takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. A church plant can reach a different group of people than existing churches do. They also can go into new areas that other churches aren't going."

Brianne Shaw, USMB Leadership Board member, is an associate pastor of Lighthouse Church in Denver, Colo., itself a recent church plant that plans to plant another campus in 2021. Shaw says, "The church is the hope of the world and church planting is the mission of the church. We are called to make disciples of all nations, and that starts here. The new council will help us effectively streamline our efforts to that end. I believe that the strategy and vision of these leaders will help empower the future of the church and for that I am grateful."

Wiebe adds, "The harvest is waiting."
—USMB news story

A lifeline for sharing, sharpening

CDC pastors connect via weekly online gathering

As you read these words, the 2021 year has just begun. Yet, I am writing still in 2020—a year that will not soon be forgotten, yet (for some) might have seemed not to go fast enough. The Lord has challenged us to understand that expectations for a year may not be what one would expect.

In the Central District Conference (CDC), 2020 was the start of Rick Eshbaugh and me partnering together as district ministers to serve our pastors and churches. I will serve as part-time district minister while also pastoring here in Mountain Lake, Minn. In January and February, we worked to plan out our job responsibilities, and in mid-March, I was to head to my first set of national USMB meetings—mid-March—of 2020! These meetings would suddenly shift to a virtual meeting because of a virus starting to make news headlines. And so would everything else for much of 2020.

Whether it was the inability to travel to visit churches or not being able to meet for our national and district gatherings, 2020 felt a bit like the disconnect between where the Apostle Paul wanted to be and where the Lord had him—longing to see the brothers and sisters in other churches (Rom. 1:11, 15:32; 2 Cor. 1:15-24).

Yet, we have discovered that we are blessed to have means of connecting with the people we aren't able to see and can still encourage one another, despite not being in the same location. For Paul, it was a pen on paper. For pastors in the Central District this took the form of webcams on a weekly Zoom call.

What started in the early weeks of COVID-19 for pragmatic discussions, as we scurried to answer questions about doing services in nontraditional ways,

soon became much more significant. As the dog days of COVID-19 rolled by in 2020, this weekly hour became a lifeline of sharing and sharpening. Now, did each pastor attend each week? Of course not. Some weeks only a few dialed in. On other weeks, more faces appeared on my computer screen.

In these times of connecting, and throughout 2020, the Scripture that stayed on repeat in my mind was Paul's words he shared when he couldn't visit the church in Corinth: "Do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen" (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

Our time together helped remind us that the events we are living through are light and momentary. Light in that the heavy lifting of real hope was already carried. Not by us, but by Christ, who shouldered our sins at his death. And temporary not in that maybe 2021 might see some normalcy, but temporary as we look to the length of the eternity that remains ahead. Connecting helped remind us that what we see is not all there is, but that these days shape us for what is still to come—unseen, eternal, glorious days.

In 2020, these reminders encouraged us in ministry and shaped us for ministry still ahead. These reminders came as we pastors, brothers in faith, used the communication tool of our day. Would we rather meet in person?

Of course. But it seems that, like Paul's own trials, God redeemed a situation characterized by distance to work in ways only he could. ▀



Dan Strutz is the pastor of Community Bible Church, a USMB congregation in Mountain Lake, Minn. He and his wife, Susanna, came to serve the southern Minnesota congregation in 2015. In 2020 Strutz became the part-time Central District Conference district minister.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Matt Tabke and Brenda Kay were received as members at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**

Five people were received as members at **Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, Nov. 29.

Ivy West, Shawn Smith, Ren Richardson and Abby Brambrough were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) campus**, Nov. 15.

Jesus Lozano and Jericho Call were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) campus**, Oct. 25.

Leo Olea, Cece Olea, Yasmine Olea and Aaliyah Olea were received as members of **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, Oct. 18.

Wayne Chavez and Jennifer Chavez were received as members at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, Oct. 18.

Fourteen people were baptized at **Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo.**, Oct. 18.

Fifteen youth at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, were baptized in a backyard pool Sept. 30.

Lexi Milne and Sam Shoher were baptized at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, Oct. 4. Jaylah Hurley was baptized Sept. 27.

WORKERS

Brandon Burch concluded his service as pastor of worship and communications at **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Geoff Graves began serving as part-time director of operations at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**, Nov. 15.

J.E. Wadkins was installed as pastor at **Martin Box MB Church, Marshall, Ark.**, Oct. 25.

Marlin Hiatt concluded his service as pastor at

Fairview (Okla.) MB Church, Aug. 9. Travis Schmidt, Fairview MB youth pastor and worship leader, filled the pulpit for a time before retired MB pastor Gaylord Goertzen began serving as interim pastor in November.

DEATHS

Baber, Robert L., Omaha, Neb., member of Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Jan. 16, 1941—Dec. 3, 2020. Spouse: Bonna. Children: Bob, Marcus, Joshua, Kristin Rupprecht; 12 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Brandt, Lorraine, Reedley, Calif., member of New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif., June 16, 1930—July 22, 2020. Parents: Pete F. and Katherine (Landsead) Brandt.

Cardona, Alfredo, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Feb. 2, 1956—Nov. 29, 2020. Parents: Reyes and Maria de Jesus (De Lara) Cardona. Spouse: Elva Cardona. Children: Irene Davis, Myrna Mosqueda, Alfred Jr.; seven grandchildren.

Eitzen, Wesley Roy, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Nov. 18, 1926—Nov. 17, 2020. Parents: A. B. and Rubena Eitzen. Spouse: Laretta K. Martens (deceased). Children: Leland (deceased), Philip; five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

Enander, Ruben Lawrence Jr., Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, Aug. 20, 1933—Nov. 11, 2020. Parents: Ruben and Hilma Enander. Spouse: Lola Kleinsasser (deceased), Agnes Kleinsasser (deceased). Children: Glen, Helen.

Feil, Helen Elizabeth, Bothell, Wash., member of Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., Feb. 13, 1926—Nov. 11, 2020. Parents: Issac and Marie Reimer. Spouse: Earl J. Feil (deceased). Children: Janet Heffernan, Nancy Johnson, DeeAnn; three grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Franz, Elaine J., Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Nov. 11, 1942—Nov. 10, 2020. Parents: Albert and Bernice (Suderman) Karber.

Spouse: John L. Franz (deceased). Children: Scott, Sheri Lutt, John A.; nine grandchildren.

Friesen, Lawrence Ralph, Olathe, Kan., member of Community Bible Church, Olathe, Sept. 29, 1935—Oct. 28, 2020. Parents: John L. and Helen Friesen. Spouse: Ellen Blake. Children: Russ, Steve; six grandchildren.

Glanzer, Robert Lewis, Huron, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., Oct. 13, 1935—Nov. 2, 2020. Parents: David H. and Anna (Wollman) Glanzer. Spouse: Joyce Kleinsasser. Children: Kim Nelson, Michele Johnson; five grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Gregory, Marcus Lee “Mark,” Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Jan. 21, 1952—Nov. 28, 2020. Parents: Marcus Leon and Dorothy Ann (Scott) Gregory. Spouse: Valerie Weaver. Children: Leah Yoder, Lindsay Butler, Andrew, Claire Bowling; five grandchildren.

Hamm, Richard “Dick” Clark, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Oct. 24, 1937—Oct. 15, 2020. Parents: Ike and Esther (Hiebert) Hamm.

Heitkotter, Jody R. “Joe,” Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, May 14, 1946—Oct. 28, 2020. Parents: Perry and Sylvia (Marshall) Heitkotter. Spouse: Vanetta A. “Van” Griess. Children: Tonya Jo Bush, Kathryn Wilken, William Wilken, Tammy Shriver (deceased); seven grandchildren.

Kalal, Donald W., Omaha, Neb., member of Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Aug. 22, 1928—Oct. 14, 2020. Parents: Harry and Agnes Nelson Kalal. Spouse: Jackie. Children: Wayne, Rich, Jim, Kevin, Elaine Stoner; 17 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren.

Klassen, Lu, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Feb. 1, 1923—Dec. 4, 2020. Parents: Harry and Emma (Duerksen) Klierer. Spouse: Herman “Herk” Klassen (deceased). Children: Susan Frueh, Ginny Ott, Lynette Block, Bud, Barb Buller; 10 grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren.

Kroeker, Werner, San Jose, Calif., Mennonite

Church hosts Christmas light tour

First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., invited the community to enjoy a tour of Christmas lights in Wichita Dec. 16 with an accompanying “Christmas Light Tour Kit” and free pizza provided by the church. Although targeted for young families as a way to safely celebrate the season without leaving their vehicles, anyone was welcome to attend.

Participants drove to the First MB Church parking lot between 5 and 7 p.m., where they followed strings of 1,500 feet of Christmas lights directing them to stations where 50 to 60 volunteers distributed a map of the best lights in Wichita, candy canes, hot cocoa, a Christmas gospel message, invita-

tion cards for church ministries, Christmas light 3D glasses and a free medium pizza from Pizza Hut as supplies lasted. The church also provided a Christmas Family Kit with activities for families to do at home, including a cake mix so families could make a birthday cake for Jesus.

Student ministry pastor Kyle Goings, Kids Ministry director Cynthia Young and Connections director Jana Hildebrandt were the primary organizers of an event that quickly gained traction among the congregation and the community. The week before the event, organizers expected as many as 300 families to attend. —*Janae Rempel*

Brethren pastor in the Central and Pacific districts and Canada, MB liaison in India, and member of Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Clovis, Calif. Nov. 24, 1927—Nov. 4, 2020. Parents: Martin Abram and Helena (Epp) Kroeker. Spouse: Elsie Ann Bartel (deceased). Children: Steven, Karen, Janet, Rhonda Kunkel; five grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Loewen, Johan “John,” Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 25, 1933—Sept. 20, 2020. Parents: Peter and Mary Loewen. Spouse: Judy Loewen. Children: Peter, Mary (deceased), Susan Murphy, Tina Merklinger; four grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Naerebout, Charles “Charlie” John Jr., Hillsboro, Kan., attender of Hillsboro MB Church, March 8, 1956—July 5, 2020. Parents: Charles Sr., and Donna (Trim) Naerebout. Spouse: Teresa Anderson. Children: Chasity Warriner, Karen Hidalgo, Aprelle, Charles; 10 grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

Nickel, Mary Jane, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, April 14, 1927—Sept. 29, 2020. Parents: Gus and Agnes (Heinrichs) Reiswig. Spouse: Earl Nickel (deceased). Children: Janice Wilson, James; five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Pankratz, Allen W., Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Dec. 14, 1925—March 31, 2020. Parents: Sam and Helena (Wall) Pankratz. Spouse: Dorothy Funk (deceased). Children: Barbara Thiessen, Jerel, Krista Heinrichs; seven grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

Patzkowsky, Sam Jr., Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, May 5, 1923—Nov. 17, 2020. Parents: Sam and Amelia (Weber) Patzkowsky. Spouse: Pearl (Meisner) Patzkowsky (deceased), Dorothy (Kliwer) Nikkel (deceased). Children: Reon Friesen (deceased); Step-children: Wynetta Garrett, Keith Nikkel; two grandchildren.

Pauls, Henry, Dinuba, Calif., member of New Life Community, Dinuba, Oct. 2, 1932—Oct. 18, 2020. Parents: Jacob and Anna Pauls. Spouse: Adeline Pauls. Children: Elaine Flora, Juanita Koop, Mary; four grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

Penner, Irene, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB

Church, Feb. 11, 1927—Oct. 23, 2020. Parents: D.C. and Helen Kroeker. Spouse: Marion Penner (deceased). Children: Phyllis Meyer, Roger; five grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Peters, Laurene, Reedley, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church and serving 30 years at Fresno Pacific University and Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, Jan. 5, 1934—Oct. 18, 2020. Parents: William and Marie Kroeker. Spouse: Burton Peters (deceased). Children: Lynda Peters Mueller, Bryan; two grandchildren.

Priel, Rosann Marie Seibel, Hillsboro Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Sept. 12, 1946—March 3, 2020. Parents: Herbert and Bertha Zweigle Seibel. Spouse: Warren Priel. Children: Lisa Perret, David; four grandchildren.

Ratzlaff, Debra Lynn, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, July 28, 1951—Oct. 31, 2020. Parents: Chester Prentice and Jessie Mae (Jinkens) Payton. Spouse: Terry Lynn Ratzlaff. Children: Corey, Amy; seven grandchildren.

Reimer, Wilbur, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Aug. 3, 1926—Nov. 14, 2020. Parents: John J. and Alvina Reimer. Spouse: Verna Mae Epp (deceased). Children: Karen Ollenburger, Debbie Wahl; four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Roberts, Loyal O., Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, July 24, 1942—Nov. 12, 2020. Parents: Elmer A. and Julianna (Penner) Roberts. Spouse: Hazel Ann Kilpatrick. Children: Steven, Kevin, Susan Chesnut; four grandchildren.

Sawatzky, Annie, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 18, 1929—Sept. 24, 2020. Parents: Jake and Anna (Dyck) Reimer. Spouse: Gerhard “George” Sawatzky (deceased). Children: George, Richard, Ken; nine grandchildren, 14 great-grandchildren.

Schaffer, Thelma Jean, Fairview, Okla., MB missionary in Reynosa, Mexico, and member of Fairview MB Church, June 30, 1932—July 30, 2020. Parents: Raymond and Faye (Tigert) Lynn. Spouse: Ronald Haws, David Schaffer (deceased). Children: Kenneth Haws, Michael Haws, Roger Haws, Philip Haws, Douglas Haws; many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Walter, Lillian, Huron, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., Oct. 10, 1924—Oct. 24, 2020. Parents: Zack B. and Anna (Wollman) Wipf. Spouse: Marvin H. Walter (deceased). Children: Errol, Marty, Jeanette “Jan” Wallman (deceased), Nita (deceased); eight grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren.

Wiens, Edna M., Adams, Okla., member of Adams MB Church, April 20, 1918—Nov. 22, 2020. Parents: Jacob and Marie (Schroeder) Martens. Spouse: Dave A. Wiens (deceased). Children: LaNetta Sawatzky, Clarene Vogt, Mary Wohlgemuth, Judy Patterson; 10 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren, 14 great great-grandchildren.

Wipf, Rose R., Sioux Falls, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., Feb. 13, 1926—Nov. 7, 2020. Parents: Rhinehart and Rebecca (Walter) Gross. Spouse: Clarence Wipf (deceased). Children: Jerry, Dennis (deceased), LaDonna Francis; six grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN FELLOWSHIP

Enid (Okla.) MB Church hosted an “H2blowOut” Aug. 22 designed for vacation Bible school age children. The event included water activities, lawn games, free shaved ice and painting, entertainment from a Christian magician, ventriloquist and juggler, as well as a time of worship. The church also held a women’s brunch Nov. 21, addressing the topic of grief and lament. The congregation gathered Dec. 13 for music and its annual tasting party.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., served a free turkey meal after each service Nov. 22.

Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., held a Harvest Party Nov. 1 with food, games and a costume contest.

People from **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.,** were invited to spend a day or weekend at Carpinteria State Beach, including worship and trick-or-treating at campsites Oct. 31.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., held its fourth annual Trunk or Treat event Oct. 31. People deco-

Church holds “Easter in August” service

When Redemption Church in Owatonna, Minn., had to postpone its Easter 2020 plans as a result of the coronavirus, senior pastor Christian Kohs came up with a novel idea to hold an Easter service in August.

Around 100 people attended the Aug. 16 service, during which four people were baptized and five came to faith in Jesus. Redemption held a meal after the service. More than

10 families visited the church for the Easter service, with at least three committing to come to Redemption.

“We probably had some families that were like, ‘Hey, let’s check this out because this guy’s nuts, doing Easter in August,’” Kohs says. “We had all the invitations printed, the signage printed, let’s just do it. In God’s grace I forgot to put the date on there.” —Janae Rempel

rated their vehicle trunk and handed out candy.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church hosted about 400 people for a fall festival Oct. 31 with a Trunk or Treat. The church invited people to bring their own lunch, drink and chair to a Friendsgiving Picnic Nov. 22.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted a Trunk or Treat Oct. 31 with 40 socially distanced trunks with hosts wearing masks and gloves. The event included candy and food trucks.

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., hosted a Fall Family Festival with a campfire, hotdog roast and children's carnival activities, Oct. 28.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted an hour for coffee, tea and community for moms Oct. 24.

First MB Church, Wichita, Kan., held a live-streamed, digital Fall Connections event Oct. 13, featuring an evening of connection, inspiration and a guest speaker.

WORSHIP

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., held "20 Days of Worship" with a devotional directing people to more deeply worship God.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church hosted an outdoor worship night Oct. 25.

Parkview MB Church hosted a worship night Oct. 23.

CELEBRATIONS

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted The Christmas Light Spectacular, a drive-thru experience with more than 200 lighted trees, hot cocoa, Christmas inflatables, music themed-displays and guest appearances from Santa and the Grinch, Dec. 6, 9, and 16.

Families of elementary-age children were invited to a birthday party for Jesus at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.** The event included pizza and gingerbread house decoration.

REACHING OUT

LOCALLY

Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla., served noon

meals with the Meals on Wheels program the week of Sept. 27.

Enid (Okla.) MB Church gathered hats, gloves, socks and underwear to be distributed to people in need and encouraged people to include a verse or note of encouragement.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church accepted donations to share cinnamon rolls with all residents of Carrington retirement and assisted living facility and their healthcare workers.

The church also made 75 laminated placemats for Carrington residents with designs, drawings, seasonal themes, verses, comics and more.

Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., was invited to contribute 50 boxes of stuffing for the local food pantry's Thanksgiving meal.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church hosted a live Zoom webinar, "Navigating Grief, Loss and Disappointment during the Holidays" Dec. 13, with several church members and staff making space for people to lament during Advent. People from the church met for a prayer walk Nov. 1 to pray for the peace of their city.

Through partnerships, **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, distributed holiday food boxes to about 150 families for Thanksgiving.

The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., prepared food boxes for families in need and delivered the meals on Thanksgiving morning.

Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., held a Turkey Basket Challenge, with donations going toward more than 77 baskets of food for county families.

Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo., partnered with Community Ministry to bless 100 kids with Christmas gifts.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church collected \$1,225 to be put toward gifts for families in Dallas, Texas.

Daily vacation Bible school brought 58 kids to experience a week of happiness, excitement and the love of Jesus as they traveled to "Mystery Island" at **New Hopedale Church, Meno Okla.**

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted a Love Peoria Day Nov. 7 in order to meet the needs of its community as Jesus does.

Projects included picking up trash and helping in the community garden. The church hosted a

neighborhood Pie Night Nov. 18, with pies provided by gifts to the Love Peoria fund and whole pies given to people for free.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted free COVID-19 drive-thru testing in its parking lot Oct. 24, in partnership with Kaweah Delta, Tulare County Public Health and Houston Elementary. The church launched "GIVE SERVE LOVE," a three-week focused effort for its city, encouraging members of the congregation to give money to nonprofits, serve their city with one hour of time and love their neighbors. The church hosted its annual Christmas Store, partnering with low-income parents to provide new gifts for their children. Gifts were donated by the church and parents could purchase gifts at reduced rates.

GLOBALY

Women at **Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D.**, made 90 quilts and 126 school kit bags for Mennonite Central Committee.

Enid (Okla.) MB Church, collected 68 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., collected 97 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif., packaged 145 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., collected 112 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., collected 77 boxes for Operation Christmas Child.

After a box lunch fundraiser Nov. 8, 20 people from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, traveled to the Operation Christmas Child shoebox processing center in Dallas, Texas, Nov. 27-29, to help with the annual Samaritan's Purse project.

Youth and adults at **New Hopedale Church, Meno, Okla.**, helped package 12,343 meals for Stamp Out Starvation, a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide nutritious meals to people all around the world. The Brad Richert family shared with the church about their move to Papua New Guinea, where they will serve through aviation, beginning in 2021.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church

Senior Pastor: Fairview MB Church is accepting applications for a senior pastor position. Fairview is in NW Oklahoma with a population of 2,700. Pastor responsibilities include serving as the spiritual leader of the church, planning and coordinating worship services, cooperating with district and national denominational leaders, serving as head of pastoral staff, performing weddings and conducting funerals. If you are interested, please send resume to

jbrob1676@gmail.com

LEAD PASTOR: Hope Kingsburg, a warm, family-oriented congregation of about 100 people, is seeking its next full-time lead pastor. The 58-year old congregation is a blend of old and young, with age-appropriate ministries as well as a strong emphasis on intergenerational relationships. Our facility is strategically located in a middle-class neighborhood, directly across the street from a large junior high school. Ministry opportunities

abound with a large low-income apartment complex only ¼ mile away. We are seeking a highly relational bridge-builder, who is committed to Scripture and spiritual growth, who can form connections with people of all ages and who can wisely grow the church while respecting the heritage of long-term members. For more information, please go to: <https://www.hopekingsburg.org/> or email: pastor-search@hopekingsburg.org.

Is the church prepared?

We need a sense of urgency about Christ's return

Jesus will return to earth in great glory! Our USMB Confession of Faith states our collective belief this way: "We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ will return visibly and triumphantly at the end of the present age. The church must always be prepared to meet the Lord, living in expectation of his imminent return. As a family of believers, we firmly believe this will occur."

Studying the end times has been one of my passions for the past 40 years or more. I thoroughly enjoy digging into passages that speak of Christ's return and the events leading up to and after this future amazing moment in time. I know some people shy away from the prophetic portions of Scripture because they seem confusing and daunting, but I'm drawn to them.

I do have some definite beliefs as to how things will flow, but I won't share those here. There are many varied interpretations about the timing and placing of certain facets of these anticipated events. And we know for sure that it's futile and even wrong to try to pin an actual date on when these things will happen. But I will say that I believe the church is currently woefully unprepared for Jesus' return. I've also realized that numerous pastors and theologians believe we are seeing the signs indicating that it's close at hand.

In fact, a LifeWay Research April 2020 article by Aaron Earls titled "Signs of Jesus' Return" says that almost nine in 10 pastors "see at least some current events matching those Jesus said would occur shortly before he returns to earth," according to a new survey of 1,000 evangelical pastors focused on Christian eschatology or the study of end times.

Although this research doesn't mean it's inevitable that Christ's return will transpire within the next few years, it does give one pause as we think about what's been taking place in our world. Especially as we enter another new year, one that we all

hope is far better overall than this past year. Personal note: 2020 gets a one-star rating out of a possible five stars in my opinion!

Back to the question: Are these current worldwide happenings indicative of the end times? Well, in this same article, Earls says, "At least three in four pastors agree Jesus was referring to current events including the rise of false prophets and false teachings (83 percent), the love of many believers growing cold (81 percent), traditional morals becoming less accepted (79 percent), wars and national conflicts (78 percent), earthquakes and other natural disasters (76 percent) and people abandoning their Christian faith (75 percent). And more than half of all pastors surveyed indicate that they believe Jesus will return in their lifetime."

I guess we could shrug our shoulders and say, "So, what? Why does it matter, it will happen when it happens." But as I mention at the beginning of this essay, the church needs to be prepared, not shrug it off. And part of that preparation is a sense of urgency as we think about those who don't yet believe. Once Jesus returns, the opportunity for faith and salvation is gone for good. If we don't feel the urgency to witness about Jesus and to be faithful in proclaiming his coming, we need to ask the Lord of the harvest to supply us with that sense of urgency. This is not the time in history for the church to be complacent.

We may not like these words from Paul as he writes the second letter to the church in Thessalonica, "This (God's judgment) will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord."

No, I don't like to think about that. ▀



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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