

# CHRISTIAN LEADER

May / June 2021

Spirit-filled life Page 10

Awana connects with Karen families Page 17

Finding joy in the noise Page 31



## THE HOLY SPIRIT

The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren



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NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL SUMMER CAMP

GLORIETA • NEW MEXICO



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May / June 2021

## FEATURES: THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 10 Living a spirit-filled life  
BY KAREN HUEBERT-SANCHEZ  
*How the Holy Spirit uses his gifts to equip me for ministry*

- 12 Confessing God:  
An Antiphonal Reading

- 13 Promises, puzzles and Pentecost  
BY TRENT VOTH  
*Understanding Pentecost and confusing language in Acts 2*

- 15 Power to do the impossible  
BY PIERRE GILBERT  
*Because the Holy Spirit resides in our hearts, we can do “greater things”*

### FIND MORE ONLINE:

Hoping for more stories? Find these and more online at [www.christianleadermag.org](http://www.christianleadermag.org)

- Reclaiming Mondays  
BY BRAD BURKHOLDER
- Knowing the Holy Spirit  
BY LYNN JOST

## DEPARTMENTS

- 5 The news
- 7 5 minutes with...
- 17 Body Life
  - Awana connects with Karen families
  - Churches partner across denominations
  - Neighbors enjoy God's creation
  - Survey says...
- 28 Church news

## COLUMNS

- 4 Editorial  
CONNIE FABER
- 8 Frontlines  
CATHY BEACHY
- 9 Testimony  
JAMES MOORE
- 26 Mission & Ministry  
DON MORRIS
- 27 Vantage Point  
JORDAN RINGHOFFER
- 31 From the national director  
DON MORRIS

# Celebrating Pentecost

Recalling God's special gift

When our second child turned one, we planned a birthday celebration for her several days after her actual birthday because celebrating on the day itself wasn't very convenient. It wouldn't matter to her, I reasoned, and I didn't think it would matter to me. But it did. I quickly realized when March 3 came and we had nothing special planned, that celebrating birthdays in some way on the day itself was more important than I realized.

Annual celebrations are important because they are occasions when we remember something good or significant. This month, on Sunday, May 23, we have the opportunity to commemorate Pentecost, the beginning of the Church's mission to the world as recorded in Acts 2. Pentecost also marks the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and other disciples following the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Every spring thousands of Jewish pilgrims poured into the city of Jerusalem for two significant harvest celebrations—the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which included Passover, followed 50 days later by the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. The Feast of Weeks was a festival celebrating the wheat harvest that also commemorated the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai. According to Acts 2, while Jesus' disciples were gathered for Pentecost, they were also following Jesus' instructions to stay in Jerusalem and "wait for the gift my Father promised." God had something special planned for his disciples, and that was the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit filled the house where they were gathered, the disciples began to speak in the languages of the pilgrims that filled the city. The Bible lists 15 different places represented by these various languages and reports that Jesus' disciples grew by 3,000 that day. And when those pilgrims returned to their homes, they were equipped by the Holy Spirit to share the message of Jesus as Lord and Messiah.

Pentecost is often overlooked, but it is the anniversary of our commissioning by God and our empowerment by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of salvation and to invest individually and as local congregations in discipling others. I hope the feature articles in this issue inspire you to celebrate the gift and ministry of the Holy Spirit.■

**Response to Jan/Feb issue:** We have received a number of letters and essays regarding the Jan/Feb 2021 feature department focused on racism and the church. Because the CL no longer publishes letters to the editor in the print magazine, we have published all responses intended for publication online as letters to the editor ([www.christianleadermag.com/category/letters-to-the-editor/](http://www.christianleadermag.com/category/letters-to-the-editor/)). You will find short letters as well as longer essays responding to the Jan/Feb 2021 issue as well as letters on other topics. We value feedback from CL readers and invite you to submit letters to the editor and to leave comments on articles posted online.



Connie Faber

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

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## New USMB staff positions affirmed

The USMB Leadership Board (LB) approved two new national staff positions to provide leadership in church planting and leadership development when it met March 26-27, 2021, via Zoom. The board also approved an extensive evaluation of the *Christian Leader* and revisions to the plans for a national Church Planting Council.

The newly approved leadership development mobilizer will work part-time to “mobilize, oversee and maintain the leadership development programs for USMB, with an initial emphasis on establishing the National Leadership Pipeline,” according to the proposal presented by USMB Youth.

The National Leadership Pipeline (NLP) will provide summer internships offering training and experience for teens and young adults interested in church ministry. USMB Youth anticipates working with existing leadership development programs. A key component of NLP will be a website that serves as a hub, database, job bank and communication tool. The LB approved funding for the development of the website.

The LB also approved the proposal to hire a church planting mobilizer, at least half-time. The church planting mobilizer will be responsible for “establishing a national MB church multiplication vision through the strategy of church planting with potential work in church renewal/revitalization,” says the proposal. A key responsibility will be overseeing the Church Planting Council (CPC).

In addition to the church planting mobilizer, the CPC will include one person from each of the five district conferences plus two at-large members and the national director, when needed. The council will help facilitate a unified church planting vision, coordinate church planting projects and champion church multi-

plication as one of USMB’s three core commitments.

The board also approved a recommendation to form a *Christian Leader* Review Team to do an extensive evaluation of the magazine. A readership survey will be part of the evaluation.

The board also heard reports from the U.S. Board of Faith and Life, the National Strategy Team and the Congolese Task Force in addition to updates from the Pacific District Conference Hispanic Council, district conferences, Multiply, MB Foundation, the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), USMB staff and several inter-Menno-nite agencies.—CL

## USMB Ascent camp scheduled for June

General sessions at Ascent, the new USMB senior high summer camp to be held June 16-20, 2021 at Glorieta Adventure Camps in New Mexico, will feature guest speaker John Leonard, youth pastor at Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif. He will address the camp theme “Home,” based on Jesus’ command in John 15 that his disciples abide in him and remain in his presence.

Presence Worship from Wichita, Kan., will be leading the worship times during the week. Stephen Humber of Multiply will oversee the transitions from the worship sets to Leonard’s messages and coordinate the prayer room.

Hour-long workshops will also be available on two days. Students and leaders will have a variety of topics to choose from, including sports ministry, prayer and worship, evangelism training and missions.

The camp registration fee (\$400 for teens and \$225 for adults after April 30) includes 36 onsite activities, including zipline, mini golf, ropes courses, aero-tag and drift trikes. Whitewater rafting will also be available at an additional cost.

USMB Youth will post COVID-19 decisions on Instagram and Facebook and via the USMB Youth newsletter for youth workers. Changing COVID-19 protocols and guidelines have made it difficult to announce definitive plans but organizers hope to have as few restrictions as possible while still allowing people to feel safe.—CL

## PDC announces NGL grant program

In an April 2021 letter to Pacific District Conference (PDC) churches, Tim Thiessen, chair of the PDC Board of Next Generation Leadership (NGL) announced a shift in focus away from a summer internship program and toward new NextGen Leadership Development Grants for summer 2021.

The purpose of the grant is to provide PDC churches with funding and training for summer leadership development opportunities designed to encourage, call and empower future leaders for pastoral leadership, church planting and local and global mission work, in partnership with NGL, Multiply and USMB churches.

Designed for those 18 or older, ministry assignments will last between eight and 12 weeks. Churches will provide a mentor and housing, and participants and mentors will meet regularly for training and connection. Each PDC member church is eligible for a maximum of \$1,000 for one full-time ministry assignment, but churches submitting multiple requests may be asked to seek alternative forms of sponsorship.

Over the past 18 years, more than 250 future leaders participated in the NGL’s summer internship program. The shift in focus was made as a result of ongoing changes in state and federal policies, according to the letter. For more information, visit: [www.usmb.org/next-generation-leadership/](http://www.usmb.org/next-generation-leadership/).—PDC



## Generosity Challenge devotional translated into Amharic

The Seven-Day Generosity Challenge, a resource developed and distributed by MB Foundation, is available in four languages—English, Spanish, Russian and now Amharic.

A request for the study by Ethiopian churches was MB Foundation's motivation for the Amharic translation. With help from a pastor/teacher in Ethiopia, the study, sermon helps and discussion guides are now available as teaching tools for Ethiopian churches.

The Seven-Day Generosity Challenge was originally released in 2018 and can be used as a church-wide study, small group study or personal study. The daily devotionals in the study were written by pastors and teachers from seven countries and provide practical applications for living a generous life. More than 4,000 copies have been distributed in the U.S.

In addition, through MB Foundation's partnership with Mission Eurasia, approximately 10,000 copies have been made available in Russian, Ukrainian and Georgian.

"It is inspiring to see how God is using this resource to encourage generosity among his people through multiple languages," says Jon C. Wiebe, MB Foundation president and CEO. "He has reached further than we could have imagined."

All four languages of The Seven-Day Generosity Challenge can be downloaded or are available in hard copy



from MB Foundation. Go to <http://www.mbfoundation.com/sevendaygenerositychallenge> to download or order resources.—MBF

## TC reports increased enrollment

Tabor College's spring enrollment headcount is 601, 58 higher than this time last year representing an overall increase of 10.7 percent. The largest growth areas include the undergraduate programs and high school dual-enrollment participants.

"The fall-to-spring retention rate (92 percent) for traditional, residential students is one of the best we have ever experienced," says Rusty Allen, executive vice president for operations. Allen says faculty, residence life and student programming have contributed to this success.—TC

## SDC plans virtual convention

The Southern District Conference (SDC) will hold a virtual convention Saturday, July 31, 2021, due to the coronavirus pandemic. Delegates from SDC churches will gather virtually from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a business meeting and convention webinars.—SDC

## Multiply opens search for general director

In a March 24 letter to Mennonite Brethren pastors and leaders in the U.S. and Canada, the Multiply Board of Directors announced the search for a new general director and that as of April 15, Randy Friesen concluded his transitional leadership role with the mission agency. These leadership decisions

were made by the board at their March 8-9, 2021, meeting.

Friesen, pictured, served as the general director of the North American MB mission agency for 17 years. Multiply held an online Celebration of Service event April 11 to recognize Friesen's contributions over the 30 years he's been involved in MB global missions.



Veteran missionary Vic Wiens, who currently serves as the Multiply liaison to the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB), will provide interim coordination to the Multiply Executive Team and serve as a liaison to the Multiply board.—Multiply

## Canadian Conference proposes revision to Confession of Faith

The Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC) announced March 9 a Notice of Motion proposing that a revision of Article 8 "Christian Baptism" be accepted for inclusion in the CCMBC Confession of Faith.

In 2015, the Board of Faith Life, now called the National Faith and Life Team (NFLT), surveyed MB leaders across Canada to determine their support for, and concerns about, the MB Confession of Faith. In 2018, based on responses to that survey, the Board began a process of revising Article 8 "Christian Baptism." The process included feedback and discussion across the country through provincial conference conventions, a national summit, regional clusters of pastors and online comments.

# 5 minutes with...

The revision has been met with widespread affirmation, and the NFLT believes the revised Article is ready for inclusion in the Confession of Faith.

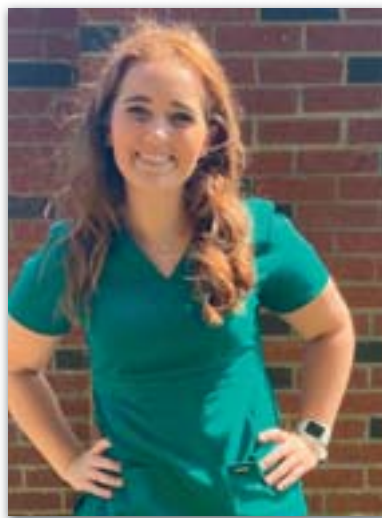
To read both the current and proposed versions of Article 8, visit: <https://www.mennonite-brethren.ca/notice-of-motion-article-8-of-the-confession-of-faith/>.—CCMBC

## Assembly 2022 to be hybrid event

Mennonite World Conference will offer the 2022 Assembly as a hybrid event with opportunities to attend in person or online. MWC assemblies are global reunions of the Anabaptist-Mennonite family that take place every six years. The assembly in Indonesia was first scheduled for summer 2021, but the COVID-19 pandemic prompted organizers to postpone the gathering to July 5-10, 2022, in Semarang, Indonesia, at the same venue.

Although live streaming has been part of the past two assemblies, the rapid development of communication technology has created new opportunities to meet virtually in 2022. The assembly team is exploring ideas such as hybrid workshops allowing interaction between online and in-person participants; on-demand workshop and plenary session videos; on-site and online exhibits; friendship or prayer groups; and virtual tours of Global Church Village.

Registration for the hybrid event will start in late 2021.—MWC



## Bailee Brown

Students for Life selected Bailee Brown from Corn (Okla.)

MB Church as one of 14 recipients of their 2020-21 national Christian Leadership Fellowship. A junior nursing student at Oklahoma Baptist University, Brown is leading an effort to establish a Students for Life organization on campus. Brown enlisted her church family to help her collect 2,363 baby socks for her project of taking the pro-life message to Christian schools in Oklahoma.

(See her presentation given at Corn MB Church at

<https://www.facebook.com/CornMBchurch/videos/248189330013250>)

### ***What was Students for Life looking for in their Fellowship recipients?***

The biggest thing was to understand why abortion is wrong. From a Christian point of view, I could share several verses that show life inside the womb. But also, as a nursing student I have studied embryology where we learned you can hear the heartbeat just three weeks after conception. In pathophysiology you learn about pain and as early as 15 weeks a fetus can feel pain. How can we say abortion is ethical if a fetus can feel pain?

### ***Why did you decide to speak in Christian schools for your Fellowship project?***

I graduated from Corn Bible Academy. I'm very passionate about Christian education and I remember when I was in school and someone younger would come in, we would really listen. As someone they can relate to, I can plant the seed in students' minds that abortion is a big deal—something they should really care about.

### ***What did you do with the baby socks?***

When I'm talking about why they should care about abortion I pull out a laundry basket of baby socks and dump it on the stage. I just keep going back for more until four laundry baskets of socks are spread across the stage. Each sock represents one little baby aborted in the U.S. every day. It's an impactful way to show that 2,363 abortions are happening in America every day—you can see it on the kids' faces.

### ***What do you hope to see come from your efforts?***

For starters, I want to be able to take some of these baby socks to a thrift store. My hope and prayer is that the nation's heart is changing on this issue. I've seen people of both parties come to the realization of how serious this is. Maybe one day one of these high school students who hears my speech will become a senator or representative and help make abortion illegal in this country.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

# Gather, create and learn

Center for the Arts is gateway to Jesus

A sophomore boy juggling baseball and voice lessons, a first-time pregnant mom learning calligraphy, a squirrely boy who wonders if dance might be fun, a shy girl who loves to draw, a Lego-loving boy, a free-spirited college student, a retiree undergoing cancer treatment. These are the people who walk through our doors each week, and *this* is Copper Hills Center for the Arts. We're a community gathering spot, a place to create and a space to learn. But first and foremost, we're a place where people feel welcomed and loved by amazing teaching artists who love Jesus more than their craft.

When we launched in fall of 2019, we had no idea our Big Dream would be interrupted by a worldwide pandemic. We had high hopes and were pushing toward them. And then it happened: we had to re-imagine, pivot and adapt with only five months of data to help guide our plans. Like all organizations, we had a mix of successes and failures.

Our infancy proved to be an advantage; we didn't have a precedent and certainly didn't have traditions. So, we just went for it. We failed fast and moved on. Or we found a successful tactic and stuck with it. By July 2020, we were able to safely offer a few in-person camps and began to transition our private music lessons back to being in-person. Many chose to remain online (and some still do). By November we felt an upswing and, much to our surprise, by February 2021 our Dance Studio was back to pre-COVID-19 participation and our Private Music Lesson Studio had nearly doubled.

Through COVID-19, our "how" became, and is still, an experiment. But our "why" became even more clear: people crave community, peace and love. And often they don't realize that Christ is the ultimate source. Our conviction to use the arts for this purpose grew. Dance as a gateway to faith? Yep. Voice lessons as a

path to peace? For sure. Robotics and rocketry to affirm creative problem-solving as a God-given gift? Musical theater to help kids find their lane? Creative writing and calligraphy to gain community and collaboration? Illustrating and cartooning to build imagination and to see God as the ultimate creator? Yes, to it all. It's great art with a greater purpose.

We see relationships growing and God-moments emerging when we take notice and take interest. Like Katie who recognized the stressed-out look in one of her high school voice students. She asked a simple, "How's it going?" and listened to the crazy week of deadlines the girl was navigating. Katie asked if she could pray for her. The girl responded with an exuberant "Yes!" Katie prayed for the girl, for the schoolwork stresses and for a clear reminder that the girl's value is not found in what she accomplishes but rather in who she is as a unique and beautiful person. Peace was gained through intentional interaction, in a random Tuesday voice lesson.

We see trust building when we take risks within the space of shared interest. Josh led his young dancers through a "repeat after me" exercise at the beginning of dance class. He encouraged them not to be afraid of looking silly, of trying new things or of falling down (literally and figuratively).

They experienced the impact of shifting focus away from self—self-doubt, self-consciousness, self-pride—and toward freedom. They could feel it. In that exercise, trust grew. We're eager to see what happens next.

Some say what we do is super cool, incredibly risky and highly unusual. Maybe they're right—but what we know for sure is that we get to use our God-given gifts to spread God's love. It's a wild ride watching this intentional intersection of art and faith. ▀



Cathy Beachy is the director of Copper Hills Center for the Arts, a ministry of Copper Hills Church, a USMB congregation in Peoria, Ariz., that utilizes the arts to connect with and serve their neighborhood. Beachy is a graduate of Tabor College and received her master's degree in Music Education-Choral Conducting from Arizona State University. She was the director of music and worship at First MB Church in Wichita, Kan. Over the past 20 years she has served in a variety of leadership roles at Copper Hills Church. She and her husband Brian have two sons.



# When God shows up

Encouragement comes in times of loss and danger

**M**y goal has always been to help people. That's why I became a police officer and why I recently stepped into pastoral ministry.

As a police officer, I've learned to wear many hats. I get to be a parent, a teacher, a spiritual advisor and a social worker. No two calls are alike, and I try to be an influence to others, especially young people. I've brought food to hungry children and toys and gifts at Christmastime to show them that as a police officer, I'll be there for them. I often pray, "Lord, help me say and do the right thing."

But as much as I enjoy helping others, there have been times where I've been the one needing help, and God has continually shown up for me. Four circumstances highlight the encouragement I received from God during loss and danger, and through it all, I've learned to depend on God. I hope that by sharing my story, people will find encouragement to keep going in life.

I lost my mom to cancer when I was a senior in high school.

Nobody can love you like a mother can, and every teenager wants a mother figure there to tell you everything's going to be all right. But I had to watch her suffer. I was on track to be the first boy in my family that my mom got to see graduate, but as the disease progressed, she whittled away before my eyes. She died about six months before my graduation.

I started getting to know God when my mom was dying. Growing up, going to church was a must. My grandmother was the enforcer. But it wasn't until a friend invited me to revivals at his church after my mom was diagnosed that I gave my life to God. I started to see what people meant when they spoke about God's peace and how he'd be a mother to you.

I was upset when Mom transitioned home, but God supplied all of my needs. My friend's family took me in. Other stu-

dents would come up to me and say their mom or dad told them to give money to me. I couldn't understand how God could show up in the middle of my pain, but he gave me inner peace that's hard to explain.

The challenges didn't end after high school, and I put God on the back burner. I had a few children and got married at a young age. Unfortunately, my marriage didn't last.

During this time some things happened that could've got ugly. I'll spare the details for the sake of the others involved, but I could have been hurt or killed. My prayer was, "Lord, send your angels to watch over me, so I won't do anything wrong."

As evidence of God's encouragement, one night I woke to see two men in white on either side of my bed. I saw this as evidence of God's protection and trusted him. God gave me peace and said, "If you can't forgive, how can I forgive you?"

Twice more I've faced danger, including surviving a car crash where I should've died and encountering a neighbor who tried to shoot me.

God's been good to me, and I've survived more than 27 years with the police department. It's tough for all police officers right now, and sometimes it is doubly tough for me as a Black officer working in my hometown. I've been called a traitor and worse.

In difficult times, I remember my goal is to influence young people and to serve. It's all worth it when someone tells me that if it hadn't been for something I did or said, their life would be in worse shape.

I'm able to keep going with God's help because I know it isn't always going to be like this. My hope is that one day people will see me—even though I am a police officer—as a child of God first. I know I'm not responsible for how people treat me,



James Moore serves as a Sergeant with the Lenoir (N.C.) Police Department and accepted a role as lead pastor of West End MB Church in December 2020. He holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in Christian ministry, both from Liberty University. James has an advanced certificate in law enforcement and is a certified school resource officer. He has two children, Ashley and Jamie, and one granddaughter, Aubrie. In his spare time, James enjoys playing golf and spending time with family and friends. He looks forward to having more time with his granddaughter after his retirement from the police department in August 2021.

See TESTIMONY, page 30



# Living a

# Spirit-filled

How the Holy Spirit uses his gifts to equip me for ministry

**I**t was a cold, winter Saturday in British Columbia, Canada. I was 12 years old, and my family was out for the day. I had nothing else to do, so I got out my Good News Bible and laid on the floor of our farmhouse with it open in front of me. After reading the four gospels I prayed, “Jesus, if this is true then I want to see and experience all of it, the miracles and the signs and wonders too! Show me a sign, and I will follow you with everything I have.”

I spent the next few hours reading, weeping and experiencing baptism in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus revealed himself to me in powerful ways that day. I felt a presence come over me, and I knew it was the Holy Spirit. As a young adult and now as a missionary living in Thailand, I have seen the Spirit encourage and equip people for ministry and mission.

I grew up in a loving church, which nurtured and disciplined me well in many areas—except in the power of the Holy Spirit. Back in those days, people in my Mennonite church did not talk about the Spirit, except to warn us about people who went off the “deep end” and got a bit crazy because they got caught up in the Holy Spirit. Because of these stories, the Spirit seemed scary to me and to many in my community.

While attending Fresno Pacific University, my hunger to know and experience the power of the Holy Spirit drew me first to a Foursquare Church. There, one Sunday in worship, the Holy Spirit gave me the gift of tongues. I had been praying and asking him for all the gifts. I wanted every gift he had to give, and I knew it would result in people coming to faith in Christ.

After that, I attended a Vineyard church for several years, where I learned more about the prophetic

gifts. I had supernatural encounters with strangers who spoke prophetic words over me. I am grateful for those years, immersed in a season of soaking in teachings about and practicing the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I was still skeptical at times and influenced by the stories of my youth, which led me to test everything I saw or heard with Scripture. I asked for all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and then promptly gave God my list of “demands” — just so we were clear. I told him I wanted the gift of tongues, but I wanted him to give it to me personally and not through someone praying over me. And he did. Later, I told God I wanted to be “slain in the Spirit” but only if no one touched or pushed me, and it happened spontaneously. Again, he graciously met me in my fears and gave me the joy of being slain in the Spirit.

## Desperate to be used

I grew in my trust of the Father to give good gifts to his children and his church. I saw the Holy Spirit use his gifts in my life to equip me for the ministry of evangelism in the jails and inner city of Fresno. I was part of a home group from Butler MB Church where I learned from Jesus how to discern the voice and will of the Holy Spirit. We discerned what the Holy Spirit wanted to do in and through each of us through community hermeneutics with fellow believers. We saw fruit from obeying the Spirit as people got saved, set free from evil spirits, disciplined and grew to be leaders in their churches.

When my husband, Ricky, and I arrived in Thailand with our YWAM outreach team, I was desperate for the Holy Spirit to use me. I was deflated by the language barrier. I couldn’t use my gift of evangelism, because I couldn’t speak the mind-boggling



# ed life

By Karen Huebert-Sanchez

tonal language. The Holy Spirit asked me if I was willing to be a fool for the gospel and invited me to greater dependence on him. He promised that he would do signs, wonders and miracles if I humbled myself and obeyed him. That started me on the journey of being quiet before God and listening to his voice. The Holy Spirit speaks to me and nudges me or gives me a message for someone, and that often starts a spiritual conversation or encounter.

When I am obedient to his instruction, I see the Holy Spirit open up opportunities for spiritual conversations and prayer times with strangers that are divinely orchestrated. Sometimes this takes some self-talk where I remind myself of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 4:10 that "we are fools for Christ."

I say a quick prayer and ask God to use my obedience to him to bring this person to salvation in Christ. Often, for example, I will be in a taxi in Bangkok with the driver, and by the end of our trip, I am able to pray with the driver. The Holy Spirit moves and touches people with the great love of the Father, to bring people to Jesus.

## Expecting powerful experiences

We have been in Thailand since 1993, and I've learned so much about how South East Asian churches work in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. In general, churches and believers here want all the gifts, every ounce of help God has to offer them to overcome torment from evil spirits, generational sin, witchcraft, family addictions and idol worship.

Take Thai and Cambodian believers that we work alongside of. Most of them came out of Folk Buddhism mixed with Animism and were gripped by fear and lies. They grew up highly in tune with the spiritual world. They have had real encounters with

demons and the enemy. It is easy for them to expect powerful experiences with the Holy Spirit. When they read Acts 16 where God uses an earthquake to shake open the prison doors for his children, they take it at face value and expect the Holy Spirit will still do that today for anyone who calls to him for help. It's freeing to do life, ministry and church with believers who are discerning but not skeptical of how the Spirit works.

Being involved in the church in South East Asia, I am so grateful for the space they allow for the Holy

“We saw fruit from obeying the Spirit as people got saved, set free from evil spirits, disciplined and grew to be leaders in their churches.”

Spirit to move and shake things up a bit. There are no bulletins in most churches, and time is fluid. If the Holy Spirit starts to move in a new direction, most pastors go with that Holy Ghost flow. One of my favorite metaphors for the Holy Spirit is that he is a river, flowing wildly at points and like a quiet stream in other moments.

When we lay down our Western need to control time and the order of events, believers are prompted to wade in deeply into what the Holy Spirit has for them, not merely dip their toes in at the edge. Some-

times a “rapid” might take you down the river, and the excitement is palpable and can help get you through a rough week ahead where you might not meet another believer all week.

### Embracing the Holy Spirit

The open mic time in our churches here is at the beginning of church, and it’s like “Chicken Surprise” in the college cafeteria—you never know what you are going to get! People sometimes share for long periods of time—sometimes uncomfortably long—and everyone honors and allows them to share freely. Someone will say that they feel led we need to pray for something as a church in that moment, and the church joyfully trusts that the Holy Spirit is present and using each person present, not only the pastor, and has good gifts to impart during our time together. N.T. Wright, in *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*, writes, “Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God’s new temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet.”

By embracing the Holy Spirit within each of us, I think the Spirit life is like a team sport. It levels the playing field, and we truly function as the priesthood of all believers, true to our Anabaptist heritage and values. The human-made constructs we struggle with in church, where church has become an institution or set of constitutions and bylaws, are shed when we experience the freedom and power of the Spirit to move us out of our routines.

The Spirit ignites, gifts and uses us, his children, for both his glory and to see the captives set free and come to know Jesus. He will come in power for you too, where ever you are, if you give him freedom to move within you. He shows up for us whether we are in a small farmhouse in Canada or in a mega city like Bangkok.

*Karen Huebert-Sanchez and her husband, Ricky, are part of Multiply’s Chonburi Team in Northern Thailand. Huebert-Sanchez is the founder and director of Abundant Life Home, an orphanage for HIV-positive children, and works with Standing Strong, a project for women coming out of the sex trade. The couple is also involved in leadership development, worker recruitment and church planting. They have four daughters.*

# Confessing God

## AN ANTIPHONAL READING

### Hear, O people:

The LORD our God, the LORD is one!  
Almighty in power,  
perfect in wisdom,  
righteous in judgment,  
overflowing in steadfast love.

**The LORD is our Sovereign,**  
who reigns over all things visible and invisible.

**The Lord is our Shepherd,**  
who rescues the lost and the helpless.

**The LORD is consuming fire, perfect in holiness.**  
The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in tender mercy.

**Holy and pure is the Father in all his ways!**  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
in whom we live and move and have our being;  
who hears us when we pray,  
who opens to us the way of salvation,  
who unites us in the one family of faith.

**Holy and true is the Son in all his ways!**  
Image of the invisible God,  
eternal Word who was made flesh,  
conceived of the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary  
to be Servant of all and Lord of all.

Made like us in every way, yet without sin,  
he suffered, was crucified and buried,  
and was raised to new life on the third day.  
Savior of the world,  
who loves us with an everlasting love,  
who reveals the fullness of the Father,  
who intercedes for us his followers,  
and calls us to be his witnesses  
until he returns in glory to judge the world.

**Holy and wise is the Spirit in all his ways!**  
Power and presence of God,  
divine Gift to all God’s people,  
who convicts us of sin, gives us the new birth,  
guides us into all truth.  
Enriches us with gifts for service,  
and cultivates the fruit of maturity.  
Divine Comforter and Counselor,  
who prays for us when we do not know how,  
who baptizes us into the one body,  
who gives a foretaste of the glory to come.

**Blessed be the name of the LORD!**  
Blessed be the name of the Father,  
the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
one God forever and ever! Amen.

*Article 1: God, Confessing Together: Readings for  
Congregational Worship  
Based on the 1999 Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith*



# PROMISES, PUZZLES AND PENTECOST

Understanding  
Pentecost and  
confusing language  
in Acts 2

By Trent Voth

**P**entecost, a 50-day time span beginning Easter Sunday, celebrates culminated promises and a new beginning. The story of Pentecost in Acts 2 contains some singularly unique events in Christian history which are clearly significant for our faith and give us a lot to wonder about.

It's not entirely clear what actually occurs. Things that I always thought happen don't actually seem to happen. For example, what, if anything, is on fire? And, perhaps most significantly, the problem that I once thought is being "solved" in the passage isn't and probably isn't even a problem at all. Ironically, despite part of this story being about addressing the confusion of language, there's some language in this story that confuses me. Like I said, much to wonder about.

Let me show you what I mean.

## Promises and covenants

In the Old Testament Pentecost was one of the feast days. Only they didn't call it Pentecost. That's the Greek word. They called it Shavuot (The Feast of Weeks), and it commemorates the offering of the "first fruits" of the harvest and, in Rabbinic tradition, the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt. Sinai, traditionally 49 days after the Jews were freed from slavery in Egypt at the first Passover.

Forty-nine is the Jubilee number, the number of years after which all debts were to be cancelled and slaves released. The Septuagint uses the word Pentecost to indicate the year of Jubilee in passages like Leviticus 25:10. Jubilee and the "first fruits" signal fresh beginnings. The giving of the Torah culminated the fresh beginning for the Hebrew people as well. Pentecost, occurring 49 days after the emancipation from slavery in Egypt (i.e., Passover) is the culmination of a promise and the establishment of the (now "old") covenant in the gift of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. That's Pentecost (Shavuot), a fresh beginning.

It's no coincidence that God (and Luke) saw fit to draw thematic connections between what happened to the first Christians seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection. During Pentecost, a "Jubilee's worth" of days after God freed everyone from our slavery to sin (on Good Friday, during Passover), God culminates the church's "new beginning" with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, fulfilling Jesus' promises in Luke 3 and Acts 1 and the prophecies of Joel 2 and Jeremiah 31 – the outpouring of the Spirit and the culmination of a new covenant. But, that's just the start.

## Breezy and burning questions

For instance, have you ever noticed that there isn't a "rush of a violent wind that fills the entire house" where the disciples are gathered? I'd always thought that they feel a "violent wind." In Acts 2, they don't feel a violent wind, but rather they hear a sound like a violent wind. Luke tells us exactly where it comes from—heaven. In the previous chapter, Jesus ascends from earth to heaven, now a sound comes down from heaven initiating the scene. Luke is "gluing" these two realms together.

Now after Jesus' ascension, there's a little bit of humanity in heaven, and, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, there's a little bit of heaven in humanity. But where is the "pneumatos" (the Greek word for both "Spirit" and "wind," i.e., the thing they heard) ultimately going? For attentive *listeners*, that may be a main theme of the rest of the Book of Acts.

Another enticing mystery is the meaning of the phrase in verse 3, "divided tongues like fire." We probably each have imagined what the scene looks like, but perhaps Luke invites us to think more deeply. For starters, I'm inclined to think that "divided tongues" in this instance means something more like the tongues were "distributed," rather than "bifurcated" tongues—as if these were "forked tongues"—which would raise other enticing questions. If "divided"



means “distributed” then there’s a whole new question. Are the tongues “like fire” or is the *distribution* “like fire?”

Should we envision tongues which look like flames (or flames which look like tongues) thoroughly distributed amongst the disciples? Or are these tongues thoroughly distributed “like fire is distributed,” i.e., spreading quickly from a source and engulfing the room? Or maybe it’s both. Whatever the spectacle is, it does appear they “see/perceive” something related to tongues. Therefore verses 2 and 3 engage their abilities to both “listen” and “see”—and that extends to us, at least metaphorically, as we read along.

### Confusing language

Despite all the dramatic sounds and burning questions, the real spectacle of the story is the explosion of spoken languages among the disciples. The languages catch the attention of passers-by, opening up Peter’s preaching opportunity. The languages are the part of the Pentecost event which solves a problem—just not the problem I always thought.

Whenever languages feature this prominently in a Bible story the connections to the Bible’s first language centric story seem obvious. That story is, of course, the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 when the world is divided into/by different languages. At Pentecost the Spirit brings reunification by bridging the language divide introduced in Genesis 11. The languages spoken by the disciples in Acts 2 represent the end of one facet of life and the beginning of another wherein all language-families will hear and give voice to the good news of Jesus.

So, on the surface then, it looks like the language conference in Acts 2 is a clear and direct refutation of the problem which began at Babel in Genesis 11. And it is, but then what is the problem at Babel in Genesis 11? Is the problem really the institution of languages? No.

And—the problem isn’t even the division that languages brought about.

Languages and division are God’s solution to a problem, a problem which the Tower of Babel represents. The problem isn’t languages or division, the problem is the magnitude of what can be wrought when humans are united in sinfulness. Counter-intuitively, division (by means of confused languages) is God’s solution to that problem!

Here are some of the ramifications of this realization.

Division isn’t inherently sinful. What is sinful often involves what we do to those from whom we’re divided. Followers of Jesus are prohibited from treating those we’re divided from with anything but agape love, but division isn’t, of itself, sinful.

Acts 2 isn’t even mainly a solution to the problem of language division, although it does address that aspect of life. Acts 2 simply presents a new solution to the same old problem of cooperative human sinfulness which God was addressing through dividing languages in Genesis 11. With Jesus, God’s plan entered a new phase, one which now offers a new solution to the old problem of cooperative human sinfulness. The newly available solution is cooperative human faithfulness, further facilitated by the arrival of the Holy Spirit. In the same way that we could bring about horrible things by sinning together, we can bring about even more beautiful things by being faithful together.

Up until Christ, “togetherness” was too much of a risk for God, both between God and humanity and among us. Therefore, the pre-Christ plan involved keeping people separated from each other and, to some extent, from God. That’s why the early phases of God’s plan largely revolved around a single, representative community (Israel) who were to keep themselves “separate” (i.e., “holy”). And even from among Israel, only certain individuals (priest, prophets, kings, etc.) had access to God’s spirit.

This phase in God’s plan was largely to set up the time when Immanuel God could join with us and inaugurate, demonstrate and culminate the newest and final phase in God’s divine plan. This newest and final phase centers on reconciliation and reunification, with Christ as our example and unifier, through the Spirit. In this new covenant we’re called to unity, and because Christ is the perfect priest, prophet and king, we are able to unify with God directly through him. As long as we’re clear about that, maybe it’s ok that Pentecost can be confusing.

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# Power to do the impossible

Because the Holy Spirit resides in our hearts, we can do “greater things”

One of Jesus’ most startling statements is found in John 14:12: “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” How can this possibly be true?

If we only had this verse to go on, the question would forever remain an unsolvable enigma. Fortunately, John does not leave us in the dark. Jesus’ departure opens the way for another agent, the Holy Spirit, to burst on the scene and offer supernatural help to the disciples. The Spirit will be a new helper (an “advocate”), who will remind them of all the things Jesus taught during his ministry, convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment and guide them into all truth (John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-15). And that is not all.

We also know that the Spirit takes residence in the hearts of men and women who have accepted Christ. The Spirit helps us resist sin, empowers for ministry, assists in prayer. The Spirit ennobles the human soul, transforms us into the image of Christ and enables us to love and to serve others (Rom. 8:26; 15:16; 1 Cor. 6:11, 19; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Gal. 3:2; 1 Thess. 1:5-6, etc.)

Many will counter that their experience of the Spirit does not even come close to what Jesus may be hinting at. For them, these words seem foreign, unreal and deeply inconsistent with their own lives. Who are the people doing these “greater things”? Where are the signs of such manifestations today?

## Doing “greater things”

I have always been impressed by charismatic Christians. They seem to have and live with an awareness of the Spirit that is, frankly, puzzling to someone like me. About 30 years ago, I had lunch with Rev. Canon Dr. Michael Green, a

self-declared charismatic, New Testament scholar and prolific author. In 2004, he published *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, a book that offers extraordinary insights into the ministry of the Spirit.

Green, who recently passed away at the age of 79, was the kind of person who had a powerful impact on every person he met. Though he was not a man of large stature, he was bigger than life. He was an exceptional teacher and a compelling preacher. Above all, he was an evangelist who delighted in engaging people about Jesus. He used his many talents and effervescent personality to train countless people in how to defend the Christian faith and lead others to Christ. He was filled and energized by what can only be described as the power of the Spirit.

I was so inspired by Michael Green that I wondered whether I could experience more of the elusive presence of the Spirit if I tried to be a little more like him. But I soon realized that any attempt to emulate this great man would result in abject failure, as I did not have Green’s outgoing personality nor did I possess his intellectual and oratory skills.

So where does that leave us? Does the Spirit energize only those men and women who have the Michael Green personality profile?

## The power of the Spirit

The Old Testament offers an important insight into this question. In the few instances where the Spirit is linked to specific individuals, the Spirit is given to enable them to complete tasks that were humanly impossible but necessary for the advancement of God’s project. In Samson’s case, for instance, the Spirit manifests himself by giving Samson superhuman strength to harass the Philistines who were at that time oppressing the Israelites (Judges 13:25; 14:6; 14:19; 15:14).



While Samson's experience of the Spirit may seem strange to us, it is important to remember that the manifestation of the Spirit is always adapted to the cultural and historical context in which it occurs. The key to identifying how the Spirit will manifest himself lies in determining what needs to be done to advance God's project in any particular situation whether it pertains to an individual or a community.

On a personal level, we all need the power of the Spirit to live with moral integrity and courage, two qualities that are desperately needed but are in short supply these days. It is always easier to go along with whatever the predominant culture is peddling than to challenge it. Deception and falsehood only take center stage when good men and women remain silent.

Churches also need to think carefully about how they respond to the world's (as the apostle John would say) relentless colonizing impulse. Secular humanism, an ideology that reduces men and women to the level of smart animals, leaving them without a meaningful past and no hope for the future, is doing irreparable damage to our society and especially so to our young people. While I do not expect Christian leaders to become professional philosophers, the time may well come for them to become a little more savvy with respect to understanding and challenging the destructive ideological shifts we are witnessing.

Those who feel that the world is spinning out of control may well be right. Human beings cannot live without a deep sense of the transcendent and the conviction that there is a personal God who loves them and has a future for them. Men and women live and die by the ideas they hold to be true. If we believe humanity is strictly the outcome of a mindless evolutionary process, we will see people as parasites to be eliminated or as tools to be used for the so called Greater Good. In that respect, it is worth noting that in the 20th century, atheistic regimes caused the death of nearly 100 million people. If, however, human beings are, as the Bible proclaims, the most precious of all the creatures God made, created in his image, that will entail entirely different implications for how we build our communities and treat each other.

If the kingdom of God is to expand despite these destructive trends, these issues must be addressed by men and women who are filled and energized by the Spirit of God.

### **Discerning and proclaiming truth**

The importance of truth cannot be overstated. Truth provides an indispensable insight into reality and produces life. Falsehood creates chaos and generates death. Nothing is more important than proclaiming truth, for it is the source and sustainer of everything

that is good. Little wonder it occupies so much real estate in Scripture.

Jesus describes himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). In John 3:21, he states that "whoever lives by the truth, comes into the light...." In 8:32, he adds, "Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." When Jesus tells his disciples about the helper who will come, he describes him as the "Spirit of Truth" (John 14:16-17, see also 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 5:6).

While no aspect of the Spirit's work should be neglected, I am more convinced now than ever that in these troubled times, what we need most is the ability to discern truth and persuasively proclaim it. Does this sound like an impossible task? Absolutely! And there lies our hope, as this also signals an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to act.

What about those who express skepticism about the reality of the Spirit today? First, we must remember that the work of the Spirit is not the stuff of headline news. While it is real, it is rarely visible to the casual observer. Second, we should never lose sight of the importance of human free will when it comes to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit does not compel. His influence is subtle, more like a light breeze than a hurricane. The Spirit gently invites and graciously nudges us to act. Christians who choose to feed the dark impulses of human nature will grieve the Spirit and seriously curtail his ability to express his presence (Eph. 4:30). To be effective, the Spirit requires our constant cooperation.

Michael Green had a most remarkable impact for the kingdom of God, not primarily because of his extraordinary skills and personality, but because he allowed God's Spirit to fill his heart and his soul. By doing so, the Spirit not only heightened his sensitivity to the spiritual world around him but also amplified the effectiveness of the great talents God entrusted to him.

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:15-20).

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## Awana connects with Karen families

Bethesda congregation reaches out to diverse community

Members of Bethesda MB Church in Huron, S.D. didn't expect they would be involved in cross-cultural missions and discipleship—until 15 years ago when immigrants from Myanmar, historically known as Burma, as well as Brazil, China, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, India, Nepal, South Korea, Vietnam and Puerto Rico became their next-door neighbors.

"God's bringing the nations to us and that's really cool," says Katelyn

Duba, a youth group and Awana volunteer at Bethesda.

Awana commander Brion Stahl agrees. "It's great how God has brought them here," he says. "We didn't have to get on a plane and go over there—they're just coming to us."

Prior to 2005, about 97 percent of children in Huron schools were white. Today 28 percent of kids in Huron schools are Latino while 21 percent are Asian. In 2018, the Huron area took in more people from abroad and Puerto Rico, as a share of its 18,800 population, than any other place in the U.S. In less than 15 years, the community has gone through a demographic transformation that usually takes generations, says a recent news report chronicling the changes in the community following a resurgence in the meatpacking industry.

Most of the Asian immigrants are Karen (kuh-REN), members of an ethnic minority group from Myanmar who left their homes as refugees to escape persecution.

One way the Bethesda congregation is connecting with these Karen neighbors is through Awana, a worldwide ministry for children that focuses on evangelism and discipleship. The Bethesda Wednesday night program invites preschool through middle school children to learn about Jesus through Bible memorization, Bible stories and group discussion. The clubs include Cubbies, ages 3-4; Sparkies, kindergarten through second grade; TNTers, grades three through six; and Splash for grades seven and eight.

Stahl and Duba serve along with 18 other leaders who help with memo-



Small group "book time" during Awana at Bethesda Church is when kids focus on studying and memorizing Scripture.

*Photo by Bethesda Church*

rization, teaching the lessons, organizing game time and leading singing time.

"We take our talents and our creativity, and we try to use them to reach whatever kids come in," says Stahl.

A typical Awana night at Bethesda has three parts—large group time, game time and book time. As a large group, kids hear the Bible lesson, which is always rooted in a passage of Scripture, and sing a few songs related to the lesson. For game time, the clubbers expend some energy and participate in activities chosen by the leaders.

The crux of Bethesda's Awana ministry, says Stahl, occurs during book time, which is spent in smaller groups divided by grade with a small group leader. The leader takes the clubbers through the Bible lesson and emphasizes the context of the verse or passage and also helps them learn the verse in a way that they will remember and understand. The leaders also explain the meanings of the words in the passage so that the students can easily apply the stories to their lives.

These small group leaders, which include Duba, experience the most direct interaction with the clubbers, says Stahl.

Duba, who grew up in Huron and attended Awana as a clubber, works full time as the communications and program director at Byron Bible Camp, located about 20 miles north of Huron, which partners with Bethesda for ministry in numerous ways. She also serves at Huron public schools as the assistant high school girls soccer coach.

All of these responsibilities give Duba the chance to minister to many of Huron's young people and especially to the young Karen girls who account for around 80 percent of the soccer team. She has been able to develop relationships with them and learn more about their lives, their culture and their spiritual perspective.

Most of the Karen families came to Huron to work at Dakota Provisions, a

plant employing 1,200 that provides full processing for turkey meat. Many of the Karen people immigrate to the Minneapolis area and then make their way to Huron, following other Karen refugees who began arriving in Huron in 2005 to work in the new meatpacking plant. Huron's Karen Association puts the town's current Karen population at about 2,500.

Most of the Karen people have some sort of faith or religious grounding. According to Anthony Lind, Bethesda's associate/youth pastor since 2010, Baptist missionaries shared the gospel with the Karen people in Burma in the early 1900s, which started a tradition of faith in Jesus.

Huron is home to several Karen churches. These churches have no programming for children, opening the door for Karen children to be a part of Awana. Bethesda congregants connect with parents and other adults through one-on-one interaction outside the church walls.

Lind says that Bethesda believers treat the Karen as neighbors and friends. Because of this, Bethesda has been able to minimize the cultural divide in Huron while still acknowledging, honoring and trying to understand the Karen culture.

The Bethesda congregation takes responsibility and ownership for reaching out to others around them, including Karen adults and children, and they don't always wait for the church to form an official outreach plan or coordinate something. They just do it on their own, says Duba.

"That's a huge part of it—just to take ownership," she says.

Duba has been able to build relationships with girls who attend Karen churches. She remembers one Karen girl sharing that Karen people know about Jesus but don't know what it means to follow him, and that their churches meet primarily for community.

Hearing this caused Duba to shift her approach from telling the girls she coaches about Jesus to showing them how to follow Jesus through her actions.

"It's cool that when I come to practice, a lot of them already know that I love Jesus, so they're a lot more open about it," Duba says.

Because of the changes in recent years in who attends Awana, the program has shifted its focus. Stahl says that leaders have been working hard to identify the differences between ministering to church kids and unchurched kids, both of which are equally represented on Wednesday nights.

The program now focuses on solid memorization and deeper analysis of Bible stories for church kids and emphasizes the basics of the gospel for the unchurched kids.

Another group that is special to Stahl is the foster kids who come to Awana.

"We have several families that have foster kids," he says. "Broken homes and hurting kids that we have a chance to minister to."

Leaders focus on loving and accepting the children for who they are.

"We mention a lot, especially in our large group, how God created them special, there's no one like them, he didn't make a mistake when he created them," Stahl says.

Lind attributes the success of the Awana program to the strong core of leaders that have opened themselves up to change and have welcomed clubbers from all different backgrounds.

In the midst of significant changes in the Huron community and in Bethesda's Awana program, the goal remains consistent. Awana's theme this year is "Know, Love and Serve Christ," and the believers at Bethesda have been practicing that themselves and inviting those around them to do the same. —Toby Penner

## Churches partner across denominations

The Life Center joins with county churches to demonstrate unity, serve community

In the Gospel of John, Jesus prays for His disciples shortly before his arrest and crucifixion, saying, “I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”

The Life Center, an Eastern District Conference congregation in Lenoir, N.C., is working to fulfill this call to unity by partnering with area churches to meet needs and serve the surrounding community.

Pastor Terry Hunt says that partnership with other churches has been a longtime priority for The Life Center.

“The Life Center has always been an outreach ministry church,” Hunt says. “We wanted to reach across denominational lines and not let that be a tool of the enemy to separate us. We wanted to break down barriers or walls that kept Christians from coming together.”

In the past year, The Life Center has been involved with several large collaborative events that were kickstarted by Jeff Burkheimer, senior pastor at Mountain Grove Church in nearby Granite Falls.

“It’s always been a passion of mine to want to see churches of different denominations and races come together in unity because it’s not been my experience that that happens,” Burkheimer says. “It’s been my experience that there’s competition.”

When he began a new role at Mountain Grove as senior pastor in January 2020, Burkheimer saw it as an opportunity to focus on pursuing this passion.

“Unity is at the very heart of Jesus’ message,” Burkheimer says, referencing

the passage in John. “My heart is for folks who feel like they don’t belong anywhere, especially don’t belong in our church. I spend a lot of time with folks outside the church and the number one complaint I get is, you guys can’t get along with each other, why would I want to be a part of that?”

So Burkheimer began thinking about ways to collaborate with other churches in Caldwell County to serve their community together.

“If the community saw not only that we can work together, but we care about them, maybe it can make a dent in that philosophy and break down some of those walls,” Burkheimer says.

### Unity among believers

After the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 and the resulting protests across the country, Burkheimer reached out to Hunt. The pastors met and discussed how they and their congregations, as fellow believers, should respond.

“We wanted to work together as churches so that not only the Christian community could see what we should be doing during this time period but also the unsaved community, unbelievers, when they see people that don’t look alike are willing to say, we are still brothers, we have the same heavenly Father,” Hunt says.



On October 30 of last year, volunteers from The Life Center dressed in costume and collaborated with four other churches in their county to host the Great Candy Parade, a drive-through style event. Nearly 800 cars drove through the parking lot of the Old Lenoir Mall during the event. *Photo by The Life Center*



Burkheimer then connected with Carrie Foddrell, who, along with her husband, Darrin, is an associate pastor and co-youth pastor at The Life Center. The collaboration effort quickly grew as other churches throughout the county began showing interest in partnering for ministry events as well.

“Other churches saw it and wanted to be a part, which was super encouraging because it really dispelled the myths that I had in my mind,” Burkheimer says. “There were other churches that wanted this all along.”

In the midst of racial tension, discussions about police brutality, a pandemic and a divisive election season, leaders from these churches gathered together to discuss ways to demonstrate unity among believers while meeting practical needs in the county.

“You can see how the whole community would be divided unless people intentionally sought the Lord for ways to harmonize and to unite the community,” Foddrell says. “We wanted people to see that even in the midst of chaos, even in the midst of killings, even in the midst of racial disparities...we’re still understanding the purpose of the church—it’s the house of refuge for all people.”

## **Creative partnership**

Like churches across the nation, The Life Center and its partner churches have wrestled with how to continue fulfilling the mission of Christ during a global pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, The Life Center would provide transportation for students to the church building on Wednesday nights, where youth workers would serve them through personal conversations, a meal, biblical teaching and help with homework.

The pandemic forced the Foddrells to come up with alternatives to in-person interaction with students for a time, such as texting, social media, video calls and dropping off notes and balloons at families’ homes.

Foddrell says they had to get creative in answering the question, “How are we going to minister the Word of God to these families and let them grasp hold of hope and know that Jesus loves them?”

When leaders from the partner churches began meeting last year to discuss ideas for collaborative ministry events, they considered how they might build events around upcoming holidays.

In October, the churches came together to put on a “Great Candy Parade” on the day before Halloween. The churches collected donations of candy ahead of time, and then set up tables in the parking lot of the Old Lenoir Mall for a drive-through event, complete with music, costumes and police assistance.

“It was just phenomenal,” Foddrell says.

The event was set to begin at 7 p.m., but Foddrell says they ended up starting an hour early because traffic had already begun to back up on the surrounding streets. More than 100 volunteers from five different churches assisted with the event, and nearly 800 cars drove through.

## **Meeting needs together**

Fallout from the pandemic such as school shutdowns and increased rates of unemployment and homelessness have greatly affected communities across the nation, including in Caldwell County, particularly in the area of food insecurity. This led the partner churches to develop the idea for the Thanksgiving “Great-FULL” Bag Giveaway.

The churches collected donations of food, enough to fill 500 grocery bags with a full Thanksgiving meal for a four-person family. Volunteers gathered at Hudson First Baptist Church to put together the bags, which were handed out Nov. 19, 2020, to families drive-through style.

As winter set in, the churches turned their focus to clothing donations. In early December, volunteers collected and sorted more than 3,500 coats, hats,

gloves and other articles of winter clothing. These items were then donated to South Caldwell Christian Ministries in Granite Falls and Yokefellow of Caldwell County, a crisis ministry in Lenoir.

In January of this year, with COVID-19 cases in the area rising, Samaritan’s Purse opened an emergency field hospital in Lenoir at the site of Caldwell Memorial Hospital. The mobile respiratory unit was in operation from Jan. 7 to Feb. 3 and served five regional healthcare systems.

Members of the partner churches gathered at the field hospital Jan. 6 with signs of encouragement for the medical staff and received a tour before the unit opened.

“The idea behind that was for us to come together, pray for our healthcare workers, pray for the team from Samaritan’s Purse, let them know that we’re supporting them,” Foddrell says.

Church members also donated meals and snacks to healthcare workers throughout the month.

## **Continuing to bridge the divide**

Burkheimer is excited to see the friendships formed between members of the different partner churches. He says they purposefully blend volunteers from different churches together when they assign tasks at each event.

“It’s been incredible,” says Burkheimer. “We’ve made some of the best friendships and relationships, definitely the best relationships I’ve had in the church world in my 25 years of doing this.”

Both Hunt and Foddrell also emphasize the value of churches pooling resources as a way to better serve their communities.

The church leaders have continued to meet together in 2021 to brainstorm ideas for future events and plan to continue the partnership in an ongoing effort to serve Caldwell County.—*Jessica Vix Allen*



## Neighbors enjoy God's creation

### Wilderness Program focuses on Jesus, people, place

Some residents of the Jackson Neighborhood in Fresno, Calif., have never traveled beyond the agricultural farmland of California's Central Valley.

One day in February, 50 neighbors travel east from the city as far as the eye can see as part of Neighborhood Church's once-monthly Wilderness Program.

As participants leave the smog of the city behind, the desert landscape begins to change. Irrigated fields turn into foothills. Flora and fauna appear. Black Oak trees wrapped in mistletoe raise their branches heavenward. Higher still, monoliths protrude along corridors carved as rivers of ice churned across the terrain years before, bringing with them granite from the High Sierras.

At 5,000 feet, the dry valley is but a memory. Grass blankets the ground, and 1,000 acres of forest, including cedar and pine, bring new and unfamiliar scents and sights.

Just 50 minutes from the valley, participants reach the gates of Sequoia National Park, greeted by a tree so large it would take 25 people, arm to arm, to circle its base. The Sierra National Forest is nestled in the rugged and snow-capped Sierra Nevada mountains—landscapes Neighborhood Church (NC) lead pastor Joe White says some Jackson residents have seen only on a postcard.

On this day, the Wilderness Program's destination is the privately-owned Hume Lake Christian Camps situated at one of the highest points of the park. Here, participants will spend the day sledding, hiking, shooting bows, canoeing on the lake, eating and learning alongside their neighbors.

Through the Wilderness Program, NC seeks to help its neighbors experience the beauty of God's creation, build relationships and gain a broader imagination for what the Jackson Neighborhood could look like.

"What the Wilderness Program does is it takes families who might have never been out of Fresno, and certainly have never been into wild places, and it brings them into an environment that awakens their soul, and it gives us the opportunity to point to Jesus," White says.

### Jesus, people and place

NC is located in the Jackson Neighborhood, an 8-by-12-block section of concrete the size of a square mile south-east of downtown Fresno. The neighborhood is home to some 3,300

residents, many of whom are undocumented immigrants. The average annual income in Jackson is \$26,000, and 71 percent of residents do not have a high school education. The neighborhood holds some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the U.S.

"It's historically neglected," White says. "(It) was ravished by economic depression and also racial segregation entrenched into law."

White sees the Jackson Neighborhood as the church's area of spiritual responsibility and describes NC's presence as "gentrification with justice," with a focus on caring for the most vulnerable and ensuring they have a part in the renewal of the neighborhood.

NC, which marked its fifth anniversary in January, focuses its activity on



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Wilderness Program participants explore God's creation in the forest during a recent outing. A ministry initiative of Neighborhood Church's nonprofit organization in Fresno, Calif., the Wilderness Program provides an educational and explorative experience for people who may have never left the city. *Photo by Neighborhood Church*

three core values: Jesus, people and place. Through more than 30 ministry initiatives, NC is dedicated to making lifelong followers of Jesus, serving practi-

cal needs and creating a neighborhood where people can flourish.

In addition to a weekly livestream gathering—meeting in person is paused

because of COVID-19—NC operates a small business that employs its neighbors and oversees a family of nonprofit organizations meeting needs in the neighborhood.

The Wilderness Program, a ministry initiative of NC's nonprofit organization, the Jackson Community Development Corporation, focuses on the core values of people and place, White says.

### **Creation declares God's glory**

Once a month, White and other volunteers from NC travel with their neighbors to the wilderness, places like Hume Lake Christian Camps in the Sierra Nevada mountains, Sequoia National Park, Yosemite, Kings Canyon or the local foothills.

Urban environments tend to point toward human achievement—with concrete instead of grass and lamp poles instead of trees—and are disconnected from creation, White says. The Wilderness Program provides an educational and explorative experience for people who may have never left the city.

"Most people don't leave this square mile, so they feel like the big fish in the small pond," White says. "When you go out to wild places, we are humbled by the fact that we are part of an entire ecosystem that God has given us to steward."

Although three national parks lie within an hour and a half's drive from Fresno, the wilderness is not readily accessible for White's neighbors as a result of barriers pertaining to cost, transportation, fear of wild animals.

"My neighbors have not grown up with the mentality that those mountains, they're public land," White says, adding that in some respects, the wilderness levels the field for people who are disconnected from those spaces.

"It's very equitable," he says. "In some ways, that's the beauty of public land. It doesn't matter what economic situation you're from or ethnicity you are, it's public land."



NC provides the experience at no cost to participants, including national park passes for families to use throughout the year.

"We pay every bill," White says. "We pay their gas if they're driving themselves. It's 100 percent taken care of—food and everything. ... The cost, that doesn't really matter. It's really about exposure. It's about people and place. It's about connecting people to God in a way that they would not be able to, given the concrete jungle that we live in."

The program combines elements of adventure, play, fellowship and an educational component related to the environment—perhaps learning about tree varieties or leaving no trace.

"What does it look like when God gets his way in a place?" White says.

"We see trees, and we see a care for the environment. We see birds. We see blue sky. These are all things that come out of the biology of what it means to live on this planet, and so as people who are Jesus people, we go, 'If God made all of this stuff, we want our neighbors connected to that, because what does the psalmist say?' 'The earth declares the glory of God.'"

### Sparked imagination

Whereas human ingenuity is evident in the city, God's handiwork is on full display in the wilderness.

"We see neighbors whose minds are blown that these things are so close to where we live here in Fresno," White says, adding later: "We hear a lot of stories like, 'I didn't know this was this close,' or 'Wow, this is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.'"

Matthew Fabrizio has participated in two Wilderness Program outings, traveling to Hume Lake and the San Joaquin River Gorge.

"I had a wonderful time at each," Fabrizio says. "The outing was organized, fun and enjoyable. My favorite part so far has been being able to get out into nature with a variety of different people in different places."

The experience brought new opportunities.

"For me and my wife, it has been a very enjoyable experience, providing awesome community-building opportunities," Fabrizio says. "I believe it has done the same for others, as well as the opportunity to do things that we might not normally choose to do."

White says the experience can have the effect of widening participants' imaginations.

"When you go to the mountains and you're sitting there in this wild place that isn't contingent on you and what you created, it sparks people's imagination for what our own neighborhood could look like," White says. "You're more willing to plant a tree when you've seen some that are fully mature. You're more

willing to grow some food in your front yard when you realize that the world is abundant and doesn't need you."

### More like heaven

NC has taken neighbors on between six to eight wilderness adventures, and White says he intends to continue through the year and hopes to receive a state grant to continue the program.

"We want to be in a loving relationship with people that leads to a relationship with Jesus," White says. "We want those folks to imagine ways that our neighborhood could look more like heaven."

As February's Wilderness Program at Hume Lake concludes, participants share about their experience before traveling down the mountain together. The



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trees thin. The air quality worsens. The valley is dry and desolate compared to the mountains, and returning to the Jackson Neighborhood brings homeless encampments and alleyways littered with trash. But there is possibility, as residents imagine what the neighborhood could look like if God had his way.

“We see the wilderness program as an on-ramp,” White says. “It’s an on-ramp for people to build relationships, see things they may have never seen before, open their imagination to what’s possible and deeply connect them to their place—the neighborhood that they come from—in a new way.”—*Janae Rempel*

## Survey says...

### CL readers invited to give feedback

The USMB Leadership Board, at the request of national director Don Morris, is conducting an extensive review of the *Christian Leader* (CL), utilizing the findings of the every-five-year CL readership survey.

Since 1974, the readership survey has given CL readers an opportunity to provide feedback, but for the first time, the 2021 survey findings will be used for a more extensive review and evaluation of the CL and C-Link by a designated CL Review Team.

“Our desire is that the *Christian Leader’s* content is truly meeting the needs and expectations of our MB family in ways that encourage, connect, challenge, edify and inform,” Morris says. “The readership survey will give us good information about this, but we’ll combine that with the work of a Review Team—selected people from throughout our USMB churches—for doing a much deeper analysis. This team will then provide specific recommendations to the USMB Leadership Board for how the *Christian Leader* can continue to be an award-winning magazine, while meeting the expected communication needs of our MB family.”

### History of the readership survey

The CL, first published in 1937 as a youth publication, became the official publication of U.S. and Canadian Mennonite Brethren in 1951 and since 1955, has focused its content on the issues and activities of U.S. Mennonite Brethren.

The readership survey is the primary method for editors and USMB leadership to receive feedback from constituents and allows CL staff to better understand ways readers use media and to gather demographic information. The first readership survey was conducted in 1974, and an every-five-year survey schedule was introduced as a goal in 1985, although that schedule was not always met as a result of budget restrictions or other reasons.

“I view the magazine as serving our readers, so input from readers is very important,” says CL editor Connie Faber. “The magazine not only helps to connect readers to their USMB brothers and sisters from across the U.S., but it also keeps them informed about the national conference. Since 2005, CL redesigns have coincided with important changes for our conference of churches, and the feedback from readership surveys has helped the Leadership Board and USMB staff make decisions about the magazine that better inform our constituency about what it is we do together.”

### Past survey findings

Over the years, the readership survey has asked specific questions pertaining to relevant issues, the responses to which have molded and shaped the current publication in areas such as printing in color, online publication, content and frequency of publication.

The 2002 readership survey explored adding color to the inside of the magazine, which, until 2010 was printed in grayscale, although the cover was first printed in color in 2005.

After the CL began publishing content online in 2008, the 2009 readership survey asked whether or not respondents read the CL online and explored how readers responded to the CL cover, how

clearly MB content was presented and preference on frequency of publication.

Frequency of publication changed in 2009 as a result of mid-year budget cuts. The CL published as many as 22 issues a year in 1985, but by 1995, that number dropped to 12. For the first time in 2009—the last time the frequency survey question was asked—a majority of respondents (38 percent) preferred publication every other month. The CL switched from monthly to bimonthly publication with the April/May 2009 issue.

According to Faber, the 2009 readership survey guided the 2010 redesign, marking the magazine’s first full makeover in 18 years.

To enhance online content, the CL added its biweekly electronic news digest C-Link in 2012.

The 2016 survey introduced questions pertaining to readers’ preference of reading the CL in print or online, revealing that 71 percent of respondents preferred in print only, 6 percent preferred online only and 23 percent preferred both in print and online. This was also the first survey following CL website upgrades intended to make CL content more convenient to access online.

The most recent redesign of the CL occurred in 2017, coinciding with the new USMB mission statement and core commitments introduced at the 2016 national convention. The redesign was also a direct result of survey findings. Editors adjusted the content based on readers’ preferences in the survey, which indicated that the “First Person” essays were most highly valued, followed by feature articles. As a result, the 2017 redesign enhanced columns and returned to a themed format in the feature department.

### Goals of 2021 survey

The 2021 survey targets readers in their 20s, 30s and 40s, as has the 2009 and 2016 surveys per LB request, in order to learn how to better serve and attract the next generation, Faber says.

“We hope that our content is of value to people in a variety of stages of life, and the readership survey is one way we can

improve our efforts to serve young adults and families with younger children,” Faber says.

Despite the target age range, CL readers of any age are welcome to provide feedback.

Some topics highlighted in the 2021 survey regard media use, perceived bias and readers’ preferences for accessing CL content in print, online or both. A new question in the 2021 survey asks readers if they are in favor of replacing the print CL with an online magazine, similar to action by the Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC) to transition the *MB Herald* to an online-only publication in 2020. CCMBC’s decision to end their print magazine was made in 2019, and the *MB Herald Digest*, a condensed version of the *MB Herald*, was introduced in fall 2020.

#### Survey and review process

The readership survey targets 10 percent of the approximate 7,000 CL readers.

The survey process began in early April with a request for USMB church administrators to identify those in their congregation in the targeted age range. Upon receipt of the lists, CL editors randomly identified about 700 people to receive readership surveys in the mail. The survey is also available online to anyone who wishes to complete it.

The deadline for readership survey responses is June 2, 2021. Those who complete the survey will be invited to enter a drawing to win one of three \$100 Amazon gift cards as a thank you. Historically, a thank you or incentive has been provided for readers who complete the survey, including a stick of gum with the request that readers give the editors “something to chew on” and later, a \$1 bill in every survey.

Once CL editors receive readership survey results via mail or online, editors will compile the data using Survey Monkey and provide it to a CL Review Team, consisting of Morris, representatives from districts—including district ministers and other individuals—and

members of the Leadership Board to analyze and evaluate the results.

The CL Review Team will seek to determine, among other items, the viability of the CL, the CL’s purpose and how that compares with current perception, recommendations for content changes, cost analysis, an evaluation of CL staff, a review of website and C-Link content, the value of a printed versus online edition of the CL and plans for the CL’s future.

The Review Team plans to complete its review by Fall 2021, in order to provide recommendations to the USMB Leadership Board at its October 2021 meeting. Implementation of recommendations is slated to begin with the March/April 2022 CL issue.

“Given that the 2021 survey is an extensive evaluation of the magazine, the

feedback from our readers will again be very important as the Leadership Board makes decisions about the publication and our communication strategy and for the editors as we work to produce a magazine that reflects the interests and priorities of our readers,” Faber says.

“Opportunities to read the CL online have increased and improved over the past 10 years, and it will be interesting to see with our 2021 survey how readers have responded to these changes. I don’t want to influence responses, but I do want people to know that their input is important and will make a difference.”

To complete the 2021 readership survey, visit [www.christianleadermag.com](http://www.christianleadermag.com) and look for the link in the upper right-hand corner. Watch for information about how to share your feedback with the Review Team. —*Janae Rempel*

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## Five years into our preferred future

Empowering local churches is motivating vision

In 2014, Mennonite Brethren in the U.S. pulled together a group of more than 40 representative leaders, meeting two separate times in two locations, Kansas City and Phoenix, for two days in each location for prayer and extensive dialogue around a new preferred future for USMB. The “future story” that developed from these vision-setting gatherings was ultimately shaped into a focus on networking and for enhancing the ministry of each local MB church. This vision was affirmed at the July 2016 USMB convention in Denver.

“Empowering each local church to reach their full ministry potential” served as the new motivating vision and theme for USMB. That continues to be what we strive to help accomplish through various initiatives, messaging, encouragement and coming alongside our more than 200 local MB churches across the country.

This theme and vision spoke powerfully about encouraging and supporting each local church to truly consider its God-given ministry potential. The community concept also spoke about an approach that didn’t involve churches functioning alone, but collaboratively through networks of churches that sought to develop a synergy of their efforts, producing greater kingdom impact than were possible by churches acting alone. Our USMB tagline emerged from this core concept: Increasing Impact: Together!

Many networks have already developed, and more are developing as pastors and leaders assemble through LEAD Cohorts and onsite local gatherings to discuss how they can have greater impact together. LEAD One events have also aided in this regard. LEAD Pods bring us together through online episodes with Mennonite Brethren sharing with other Mennonite Brethren pertaining to key ideas and specific issues. Additionally,

emerging “organic” connections provide MB leaders with places for encouraging one another with fresh ideas and sharing of burdens.

The focus in 2016 on the three core commitments of 1) local, national and global church multiplication/evangelism, 2) intentional disciple-making and 3) leadership development continues today. To this end, there are some new things that USMB hopes to implement soon to help augment this mission and vision over the next several years. Be watching for ways in which we can increase our capacity for the three core commitments. These are crucial ingredients as we maintain a passion for reaching people who don’t yet know Jesus and for assisting them in becoming his devoted followers.

Four principles guiding this spiritual and strategic journey from day one were:

- our evangelical and Anabaptist distinctives,
- a commitment to inclusion of the full diversity of congregations,
- the alignment of resources and structures for enhancing networking and
- the measurement standard of whether or not all actions help local churches reach their full ministry potential.

We still have a ways to go, but we’re dedicated to these same principles now and for the future.

Another desired impact of this determined vision was to eliminate organizational silos and to intentionally collaborate to serve the local church. To accomplish this, not only USMB but districts, agencies, schools and other various partners would all use this same strategic framework that encourages innovative processes and networks of churches. Silos are still present, but they



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

See MISSION & MINISTRY, page 30



# What is our purpose?

The PDC exists to be relevant, revitalized, reproducing

“**W**hy does the PDC exist?” This was the question Justin Manzey, consultant from Latitude Ministries, asked our PDC Executive Board. “At the end of this assessment process, as you look to call a new district minister (DM) to serve this piece of the USMB church family, what vision and purpose are you calling them to?”

When Justin sat with our board and asked this question in February of 2020, there was so much we didn’t know. We didn’t know how exactly to answer the question in a way we could all agree on. We didn’t know this would be our last face-to-face meeting for more than a year. We didn’t know the unprecedented changes we were all about to face. Less significantly, we didn’t know the person we would call as our next DM was sitting in that room. (I most certainly didn’t know that!)

However, what we did know is we wanted to find an answer to this question, together. From that mutual desire to lean in and better articulate our commitment to our Mennonite Brethren family, we began to find answers.

Why does the PDC exist? To be relevant, revitalized and reproducing.

We want to be **relevant** in our communities, for our communities. God is already at work in our world. His light is exposing the darkness around us and calling all people to truth and life (Isaiah 9:2; Matt. 4:16; Acts 26:18; John 8:12). This means that we, as followers of Jesus, have the incredible opportunity to be an incarnational presence in our communities. We do this by following the example of Jesus and the New Testament authors, sharing the gospel in unique ways to our unique communities. Relevance is not skinny jeans and quirky socks. It is sharing the hope of Christ through word and deed in the communities where God has called us.

We want to be **revitalized** in our spiritual lives. This is not a one-time event but an ongoing process of transformation that leads to life as a new creation (2 Cor. 3:18; 5:17). Just as Jesus taught us in Matthew 6 through The Lord’s Prayer (really, the disciple’s prayer), we daily need our Father to revitalize us for this inbreaking kingdom work. Through spiritual discipline practices of prayer, studying the Bible, fellowshiping with believers, etc., we experience the revitalizing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and are empowered to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our world.

We want to be **reproducing** disciples and churches. Bottom line, this is what all followers of Jesus have been charged with doing (Matt. 28:18-20). As USMB, we articulate this as a commitment to evangelism, church planting and discipleship (also known as leadership development). There are plenty of things that we can do as a family of churches, both in the PDC and larger USMB family. However, if we are not seeing people respond to the gospel, if we are not seeing healthy churches give birth to new churches, if our family members are not growing in faith...then what are we really doing? This was a humbling conclusion for our PDC Exec Board to come to, but one we needed to hear. Healthy churches, healthy followers of Jesus, will reproduce disciples and churches.

May each of us be humble enough to examine our own lives and the churches we are part of. Let us remember that God is uniquely calling us to our local communities and empowering us through the Holy Spirit, all so we might participate in the saving work of Christ, restoring people to relationship with the Father.

Relevant. Revitalized. Reproducing.



Jordan Ringhofer began serving as the Pacific District Conference district minister in 2020, after serving as lead pastor of Hope Kingsburg Church in Kingsburg, Calif., and as associate pastor at Hope Kingsburg from 2012 to 2014 and at Kingwood Bible Church, a USMB congregation in Salem, Ore., for the previous six years. Ringhofer has also served on the PDC Youth/Next Gen Board since 2009 and joined the Executive Board in 2010 after becoming chair of the Youth/Next Gen Board. He is a 2019 graduate of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and a 2006 graduate of Fresno Pacific University. He and his wife, Tristan, have two sons. Ringhofer can be reached at [jordan.ringhofer@fresno.edu](mailto:jordan.ringhofer@fresno.edu)

## MILESTONES

### BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Nathan Bloemhof was baptized and received as a member at **Shafter (Calif.) MB Church**, March 28. Tim Grooman and Helen Prine were also received as members.

Bret Pembroke, Chloe Miller, Hunter Wimer, Jaris Eitzen, Jenna Church, Laynie Gosney and Mackenna Schmidt were baptized and received as members at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church**, April 4. Wendy Baum, Grant Church, Mike Shaw, Jan Shaw, Steve Vogt and Michelle Vogt were received as members.

Sutton Patrick, Khloe Young, Michael Allen, So-rayma Paget, Emily Moore, Carol Riley, Carol Huebner, Gracie Cox, Katelin Reyes, Meekiah Noel and Dwinn Brown were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**, April 4.

Luke Marshall, Rachel Marshall, Addy Burke and Gage Gadreault were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, April 4.

Lily Garza, Kathy Eby, Mia McMahon, Charles Klucsarits, Alexa Rose, Tristan Bell, Emilee Barrett, Jennifer Bell, Chloe Ramsrud, Jason Bell, Ryan Gannaway and Austin Bell were baptized April 4 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus**.

Al Magnuson and Cheryl Magnuson were received as members at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, March 21.

Warren Simpson, Joanna Simpson, Joe Willems, Judy Willems, Roger Patrick, Dee Patrick, Angela Gandaro and Benjamin Moore were received as members at **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, March 7.

Three people were baptized Feb. 21 at **Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**

Dylan Fast, Presley Fast and Tara Pappilli were baptized at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, Feb. 7.

Glen Averill, Sean Averill, Karen Brown, Mike Bullok, Dawn Bullok, Roy Kassel, Jean Kassel, Adam Worrel and Ashley Worrel were received as members Feb. 7 at **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**

Gabrielle Clayton was baptized at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church**, Jan. 31.

Tristan Dust, Lori Bunnaw, Chris Bunnaw, Brad Bartunek and Lori Shuley were baptized Jan. 24 at **Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park, Utah**.

Michelle McOmie, Kymberli Cosner-Ferguson and Jack Ferguson were baptized at **South**

**Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus**, April 8.

Jamaar Borek, Spring Teichroew and Heather Turek were baptized at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, April 4.

### WORKERS

James Burkett concluded his service April 18 as adult ministries pastor at **First MB Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Clayton Paull accepted a call to serve as lead pastor at **Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)**.

Stuart Curry was installed April 11 as lead pastor at **Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, S.D.**

As part of the ongoing implementation of its church vision, **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, reports staff reorganization. Cece Olea began serving full-time as community strategies director in January. Jane Jantzen concluded her service as office assistant in February. Kelly Friesen began serving as on-call administrative assistant. Brian Hixson concluded his role as worship leader and choir director for the first service. Aaron Bryan concluded his service as worship leader for the second service. Christina Mejorado concluded her service as nursery coordinator, as did assistant Samantha Rodriguez. Tracy Bryan concluded her service as children's ministry leader. Jessica Aquino began serving as children's ministry leader. Erica and Johnny Vasquez are serving as interim worship ministry leaders.

Dwight Carter concluded his service as lead pastor at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, in March, after serving 12 years as lead pastor and seven years as youth pastor. A come-and-go breakfast and farewell service were held March 14.

Lu Ensz concluded 20 years of service as librarian at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**

### DEATHS

**Claassen, Eldon L.**, San Jose, Calif., member of the now closed El Camino Bible Church, Santa Clara, Calif., March 27, 1934—Feb. 19, 2021. Parents: Peter T. and Margaret (Rempel) Claassen. Spouse: Marcella (Dick) Claassen. Children: Phyllis, Brian, Jerome.

**Enns, Agatha**, Dinuba, Calif., member of New Life Community, Dinuba, Sept. 1, 1931—Feb. 11, 2021. Parents: Peter and Anna (Wiens) Friesen. Spouse: Leroy Enns (deceased). Children: Yvonne Fischer, Marjorie Ekk, Richard, Carolyn Ehoff; 10 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

**Frantz, Katherine (Kathy)**, Shafter, Calif., mem-

ber of Shafter MB Church, Sept. 1, 1928—March 3, 2021. Parents: Henry H. and Agatha (Williams) Nikkel. Spouse: Roger Frantz (deceased). Children: Thomas, Melissa Braun, Samuel; eight grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Franz, Minnie Henrietta**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, July 17, 1938—Jan. 12, 2021. Parents: Ben and Louise Karber. Spouse: Leo Franz. Children: Doug, Kaylene Friesen, Brian; three grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

**Friesen, Helen E.**, Beaverton, Ore., July 31, 1933—Feb. 2, 2021. Parents: Jacob and Anna (Berg) Dick, MB missionaries to India. Spouse: Walter D. Friesen (deceased), MB pastor. Children: Cheryl Weinmann, Gerald, Beverly Ecker, Nancy Friesen-Lewis, Rodney; 14 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren.

**Gosney, Don Leslie**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Dec. 25, 1955—Feb. 27, 2021. Parents: Jon and Mary (Dow) Gosney. Spouse: Susan (Gooden) Gosney. Children: Brian, Kelli Brueggen; three grandchildren.

**Loewen, Leola Fern**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, April 9, 1932—Jan. 3, 2021. Parents: Herbert George and Laura Alice Engel. Spouse: Eugene Loewen (deceased). Children: Chuck, Bruce, Suzann Tolladay, Jeff; 12 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren.

**Loveless, Gail Jeanette**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Sept. 24, 1947—March 30, 2021. Parents: Jake and Vivian Bergen. Spouse: Don Loveless. Children: Greg, Jill Toews; eight grandchildren.

**Madden, Derk John**, Tulsa, Okla., former MB pastor, died of cancer, Aug. 14, 1967—Nov. 9, 2020. Parents: Clifford and Mary Madden. Spouse: Connie. Children: Clay, Montana, Tristan, Ian.

**Minard, Elsie L.**, Omaha, Neb., member of Faith Bible Church, Omaha. June 6, 1960—Feb. 25, 2021. Parents: Don and Jackie (Culbertson) Maguire. Children: Charles B. III (deceased), Jordan L.; four grandchildren.

**Sperling, Aganetha Francis**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Nov. 24, 1925—Feb. 23, 2021. Parents: Isaac I. and Sarah (Rempel) Regier. Spouse: Ruben L. Sperling (deceased). Children: LeAnna Wiens, Merl, Larene Hester, Gale, Dale; 10 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

**Thiessen, Evelyn Jean**, Fresno, Calif., member of Butler Church, Fresno. March 14, 1939—Jan. 8, 2021. Parents: Fred and Evelyn Langenegger. Spouse: Richard Thiessen. Children: David, Mark, John; two grandchildren.

**McDonald, David P. "Red,"** Omaha, Neb., mem-

ber of Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Jan. 8, 1961—April 10, 2021. Parents: Paul and Marjorie McDonald. Spouse: Janet McDonald. Step-children: Brandon, Tara, Lanae; five grandchildren.

**Schrag, Donnie E.**, Stafford, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Oct. 24, 1953—Feb. 15, 2021. Parents: Marvin E. and Bertha Gehring Schrag. Spouse: Shirley J. Fahrney. Children: Jeff, Jean Cumbie; four grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

## REACHING IN

### DISCIPLESHIP

**Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, hosted a workshop on family discipleship March 5. The event included resources and snacks and was also offered as a live-stream option.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted Jesus School from February to May, a four-month journey of transformation helping people to notice Jesus' presence inviting them into a deeper relationship with him. The seven sessions involved spiritual formation and book reading.

### FELLOWSHIP

Deacons and elders at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church** hosted a free pancake breakfast April 4. On April 12, the MOMS group hosted the families

of those attending its monthly meetings as a sendoff for the summer. The event included bounce houses, weather permitting, and food.

**Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, served breakfast at church on Easter morning, April 4. The congregation held a Good Friday service with communion April 2.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, held hybrid Easter services April 3 with both indoor and outdoor options. Those attending the outdoor service watched a live simulcast video feed. The church held a Saint Patrick's Day Party March 14 with a cereal bar, temporary tattoos and family photobooth. The church observed Valentine's Day Feb. 14 between its outdoor services with Valentine's bags for kids, a valentine-making station, photo area and sweet treats.

**Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)** held a Maundy Thursday service April 1 where speakers shared thoughts on the seven last phrases of Christ.

**Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, hosted a sunrise service April 4 with communion, worship and a message of hope, followed by an Easter egg hunt.

**Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a Family Nite April 11 with food and fellowship. The church held a Kids Spring Spectacular March 31 with games, crafts, food and worship for children 4 years old through sixth grade.

**Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb.**, hosted a family fun night April 7 with a pizza supper, program and family service project.

**The North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, youth group delivered Valentine's candygrams including candy, a card and teddy bear to people at the end of its Feb. 21 service as a fundraiser.

**The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted Family Fun Day Feb. 21 after an outdoor church service. The event included tacos, slides, obstacle courses, games for families and a chance to meet pastors, staff and other members of the congregation.

**Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, hosted a previously-postponed Valentine's Banquet with a steak dinner and auction March 7.

### WORSHIP

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted Resonant, a curated space to experience Jesus in contemplation, art and creative expression, as well as a guided prayer liturgy, Feb. 17.

**The North Fresno (Calif.) Church** congregation distributed "Lent at Home" boxes and placed ashes on more than 60 people who drove through the church parking lot Feb. 17.

**Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a night of worship and reflection on Palm Sunday, March 28.

**Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo.**, had a "WORTHY" worship night Feb. 19.

### CELEBRATIONS

**The Mountain View Church, Sunnyside Campus, Fresno, Calif.**, held its grand opening April 18.

## Life group aims at singles age 40 to 60

The Flying Solo LifeGroup at First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., seeks to provide connection for what group leaders call an underserved demographic—singles in their 40s to 60s.

"We have women's studies and men's studies and then you have, generally, young marrieds things, or even young singles, but nobody thinks about those of us that end up single a little bit later in life, sometimes not through our own choices," says one of the LifeGroup's leaders, Meredith McFarland. "You don't see a lot of churches who have anything that targets that kind of demographic."

Talk of a singles LifeGroup began in late summer 2019 as a combined effort including McFarland, her sister, Melissa Dillon and June Rempel.

"I think when we really talked about it, the purpose was connection," Rempel says. "We feel like a lot of people who are single don't feel connected to the church."

McFarland agrees.

"Some of the feedback I've heard from other people that we've talked to within part of this group is it's not easy for someone who's all of a sudden widowed or divorced or someone who's never even been married to go into a Bible study full of married women or married men and feel like they really truly fit in," McFarland says.

Participation has ebbed and flowed since the LifeGroup's inception, which tries to meet every other Friday. Ultimately, organizers would like to gather the LifeGroup once or twice a month for Bible study and an activity, such as pickleball, volunteering or getting together for a meal.

With an April pickleball event and meal, leaders hoped to gain new interest.

"We chose 'Flying Solo' because it's not a group of not strong people," Rempel says. "Singles are tough. Singles have to figure it all out on their own, so 'Flying Solo' is about we're figuring it out but we want a group we fit into." —JR



**Lakeview Church, Grantsville (Utah) Campus** held its soft opening Feb. 21 to prepare for its Easter launch.

## REACHING OUT LOCALLY

The congregation at **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D.**, held a clothing exchange and giveaway April 10, offering free clothes to people in the neighborhood.

**The Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, congregation had opportunity to participate in a Holy Saturday prayer walk April 3.

People from **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**, donated more than 300 backpacks to the Cimarron PTO, which, in a partnership with the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, fills backpacks with food for a monthly distribution for students at food insecurity risk.

People from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, participated in an Easter sunrise praise and prayer walk carrying balloons filled with helium, April 4. The church held an outdoor sunrise service followed by an Easter worship service. Members of the congregation were invited to

participate in a 12-mile walk on Good Friday, beginning with breakfast and ending with a second meal and also including a devotional challenge.

**Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb.**, filled "Blessing Bags" with hygiene products, snacks and personalized notes April 7 for families to carry in their vehicles and give to people in need. As an Easter outreach, children in kindergarten through fifth grade decorated nursing home residents' windows, then had a glow-in-the-dark egg hunt.

The Missions and Outreach Committee at **Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, gave baskets of appreciation to educators at local schools and healthcare workers at a local clinic, hospital and retirement centers. The baskets included treats, Bible verses and messages of thanks.

Forty-two people from **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** cleaned the neighborhood and picked up 12 bags of trash March 27.

Volunteers at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, distributed 225 free "grab and go" meals in the church parking lot Feb. 28. The church also filled and distributed between 200 and 300 Easter baskets to children in its community.

People from **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, collected new or like new durable shoes for people experiencing homelessness.

In February, people from **Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, collected cereal and coffee for the Topeka Rescue Mission.

**Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, assembled 40 winter care packages for the Mission Southside Lakeview Heights Site. Members of the congregation collected Easter candy for Mission Southside.

People from **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, made Valentine cookies for shut-ins.

People from **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**, delivered 140 sacks of popcorn, each including a note of appreciation and encouragement and the church's name, to nurses involved with COVID-19 patient care.

## GLOBALLY

In February, the women's ministry service at **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, put together 48 hygiene kits for MCC.

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## CLEARINGHOUSE

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### Local Church

**Associate Pastor:** Willow Avenue Mennonite Church in Clovis, Calif., announces that a search for an associate pastoral position has begun. The search committee will begin the search immediately and present the candidate to the church council for approval. The church council will introduce the candidate to the congregation before final confirmation of the appointment. Interested persons should send an updated resume with cover letter and completed application to Pastor Audrey Hinds at [audrey@willowmennonite.org](mailto:audrey@willowmennonite.org). This position will remain open until May 15, 2021.

**Pastor of Worship/Adult Ministries:** Hillsboro MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., is seeking a full-time pastor of worship/adult ministries to be responsible for guiding the church in expressing love for God and his creation through worship and assisting the lead pastor in the equipping of the saints (roughly 50 percent worship, 50 percent adult ministries). Qualifications include holding a minimum of a bachelor's degree in biblical studies, music ministry, church ministry, or a related field; a personal and growing relationship with God, a teachable spirit and a lead worshipper; and experience (a minimum of one to three years preferred) in leading groups of people in worship. Interested candidates should send an application letter and resume with three references to the following email address: [hmbcsearchteam@gmail.com](mailto:hmbcsearchteam@gmail.com) View job description at: <http://hillsboromb.com/ministries/worship-adult-ministries-position/>

### Resources

LEAD Pods are the official USMB podcast devoted to leadership development and spiritual growth. This is Mennonite Brethren sharing ideas with other Mennonite Brethren—and beyond. It's the best of us to the rest of us. List on Apple, Android or Spotify on by visiting the USMB website,, <https://usmb.org/lead-pods/>

Visit <https://christianleadermag.com/classifieds/> for additional job openings.

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From TESTIMONY, page 9

but I am responsible for how I treat people. When you're in the ministry, it works the same way.

Whatever I face on my life journey may be hard at the time, but I know I might be able to help somebody else when they encounter a similar situation. I may get knocked down, but if I keep putting God first, I know I can accomplish all things. ■

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From MISSION & MINISTRY, page 26

have leveled off considerably over the past five years.

A National Strategy Team [NST] was called together to focus on strategic leadership issues to fulfill the future story including the vision, core commitments and providing empowering collaboration for forward progress. The NST has played a substantial role in the fulfillment of this vision. It was conceived from the beginning to

not only be a group who simply shared information but also a guiding coalition that sought to invest in the fervency of our MB family, initiating and generating action to fulfill the mission and advance the three core commitments while collaborating in every possible way.

We have five years of this new vision under our belt. We've gained much and we have much yet to do. ■

## Finding joy in the noise

Power of joy is never-ending for God's children

Are you hearing the deepening crescendo that I am? It's the menacing roar emanating from our American culture. It's the ever-expanding cacophony of the cancel culture, constantly "breaking news," COVID-19 related impact on people and businesses, the eradication (or seeking to) of cherished books like those written by Dr. Seuss, name-calling, political chaos, rioting, gang-related shootings, abortion on demand, infanticide, escalating publicly expressed blasphemy, immorality, shaming, blaming, gaming....

It's exhausting, and it's disheartening. You may not agree, but I see a rapid erosion of the good and moral in our nation. I wonder where it's headed and how quickly it will get there. Well, ultimately in the victorious return of Jesus. But, before that?

I don't watch much news anymore, especially national network news. The consistently negative content is too draining. I watch or read just enough so that I'm not overly ignorant about what's recently happened. Otherwise, too much of it affects my joy. And joy is something I believe God wants his children to experience on a regular basis. If that's true, what do we do with all of the noise listed above?

Yes, as the church we must minister in the name of Jesus in the midst of the cultural dynamics in which we live—as noisy as it is. We must spread the gospel as much as we can, speaking boldly within our context about Jesus and what it means to truly follow him. But that isn't the question I want to tackle here. It's more of, what do I need to do as a follower of Jesus for my own soul, my own discipleship in order to retain my joy in the midst of an off-putting world?

Succinctly, I need Jesus! I need his presence. I need to be with him in quiet solitude. I need to experience the inner,

quiet joy that the Holy Spirit brings even when things get ugly. I need to steadfastly worship, which is so much more than just singing. I need to remember his promises and that he'll never leave nor forsake me. I need more of Jesus and less of the world's howling drama. I need the energy he brings so that I have the God-given peace and fortitude to engage with and minister in this raucous age in which we live. If I don't have that consistent time with Jesus, the world just stinks—and so do I.

Our USMB staff chooses a verse at the beginning of each year to be our collective focus verse. We use the chapter and verse as the indicator for the time when we each stop during the day to pray for our conference of churches and God's blessing. The verses we chose for 2021 are Colossians 1:11-12: "Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (ESV). So, we stop and pray at 1:11 p.m. each day. Please join us!

His power brings us patience and results in joy. For us who are God's children, the power of joy is never-ending. Although no one fruit of the Spirit is more important than another, joy enables us to more fully encounter the other fruits of the Spirit in the way that Jesus did. It's not a faked joy. It's a sense of overall well-being because of our connection with Jesus. A sense of "it is well with my soul."

I need, I want, more joy in my life, or maybe it's to experience it on a steadier basis. When I allow the din of the world to dominate my focus, it intrudes on my joy. I crave the kind of joy that is rooted so deeply in my heart that nothing can cause it to waver, not even the noisiest of noise that radiates from our world. ▀



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

MAKE A PLAN TO PROTECT  
AND PROVIDE FOR YOUR FAMILY

# CREATE A WILL

Imagine having a plan that provides for your family and leaves a legacy. That's a plan that allows you to take hold of real life. | Timothy 6:19

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