

# CL

CHRISTIAN LEADER

September / October 2021

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## Labor, Leisure & Rest

The magazine of U.S. Mennonite Brethren

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## Saying yes

Tree rappelling requires trust

I put one foot in front of the other, the suspension bridge swaying with every step.

"Eyes ahead," I repeated to myself, knowing one glance toward the ground would leave me frozen in fear. But I hadn't walked all this way in the New Mexico heat to back out now.

The circumstances that led to my participation in tree rappelling at Ascent, the new national high school camp for U.S. Mennonite Brethren youth, were coincidental, but I learned a lesson about faith that day.

Tasked with photographing free time activities on Glorieta Adventure Camps' 2,400-acre campus had left me scrambling to find who was doing what when and where.

So when I ran into a group going tree rappelling, I asked if I could tag along, not really intending to participate in anything other than conversation and documentation along the way.

But when given the opportunity to strap on a harness, I said a tentative yes. Being away from home emboldens me, I guess.

Harnessed and helmeted, I ascended a rocky ledge, which was joined to a platform in the trees by a narrow bridge. Clinging to the netting on each side, I took one shaky step, then another, my eyes glued on the platform, intent on reaching it.

My relief at a successful crossing was short-lived, however. After helpers connected my harness and explained Rappelling 101, they instructed me to back to the edge of the platform. Heart racing, I inched toward the edge. "Sit back to test the rope," they said. *Excuse me?* But there was no going back. Trusting the rope to hold me, I eased into a seated position over thin air, breathing easier once I discovered the rope held when grasped with two hands. Hand over hand, I lowered myself to earth.

By saying yes to rappelling, I stepped into something scary, keeping my gaze ahead and trusting the rope to hold. Similarly, walking with Jesus may feel scary, but he offers an invitation to fix my eyes on the road in front of me and trust that what I've secured my life to will hold—an assurance I won't fall or be left hanging.

I'm reminded of Peter, who, at Jesus' invitation, climbs out of the boat and walks on water. Peter's willingness to step out of his comfort zone enables him to do something remarkable.

The feature section in this issue explores work and rest—stories of faithful followers of Jesus being present and participating in the work to which God has called them.

Let's ask ourselves, to what is God calling us with a gentle, "Come"? I imagine we all receive invitations to face our fears—to traverse the wind, waves or a swaying suspension bridge and walk boldly ahead on wobbly knees.

What might there be for us to discover if we step out in faith? Might the fear fade if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus? ▀



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## Multiply board has “complete reset”

After repeated calls from the USMB Leadership Board for a “complete reset” of the Multiply Board of Directors, David MacLean, a Canadian who is the only board member who did not resign in September 2020 and who has been serving as chair, resigned his position on the board July 6, 2021, effective immediately.



“The reasons behind that request are not due to any inappropriate behavior by David,” Don Morris, USMB national director, writes in a July 20 letter to constituents. “This petition for resignation was the result of long conversations ... last fall and now recently about the position held by the USMB Leadership Board along with the Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC) Leadership Board that a *complete Multiply Board reset* was expected last fall, but never did occur” (italics by Morris).

The need for the reset came following a tumultuous season for the Mennonite Brethren mission agency that led USMB and CCMBC to form a task force in 2019 to review the ministry. The task force forwarded 18 recommendations regarding Multiply’s culture, board functionality and senior leadership, including the immediate formation of a new Multiply board, to the USMB and CCMBC executive boards as well as the Multiply board, and the three boards approved all recommendations. All Multiply board members, except for MacLean, resigned in September 2020.

In October 2020, the USMB Leadership Board appointed Aaron Halver-

son, Olathe, Kan., Yvette Jones and Fred Leonard, both of Fresno, Calif., and Vivian Wheeler, Blaine, Wash., to the Multiply board. Jones and Leonard resigned in December 2020 due to disagreement with some of the Multiply board’s decisions. In June 2021, Vince Balakian, Reedley, Calif., and Kathleen Sherman, Denver, Colo., were appointed to replace Leonard and Jones.

CCMBC representatives are Maryanne Berge, Saskatoon, Sask.; Chris Stevens, Waterloo, Ont.; Bill Seinen, Langley, B.C.; and Wendi Thiessen, Winnipeg, Man.

While CCMBC leaders did not support the USMB’s request that MacLean resign, the USMB Leadership Board persisted in its request.

“USMB leaders felt strongly that in order for USMB churches and leaders to have full confidence in the new path forward for Multiply, a complete board reset needed to have resolution,” writes Morris.—CL

## Registration opens for Celebrate 2022!

MB Foundation is pleased to announce registration is open for the fourth national gathering of boomers, builders and empty nesters. Celebrate 2022 will be held Feb. 25-27, 2022, in San Diego, Calif. Registration may be completed online by visiting [www.mb-foundation.com/celebrate2022](http://www.mb-foundation.com/celebrate2022) or by calling 800-551-1547.



“After 2019 we promised to take the event to the West Coast, and we believe the sun and sand will be a great place to

invigorate us during February,” says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO. “We are excited about bringing people together after months of isolation.”

Featured speakers Richard and Leona Bergstrom will focus on this year’s theme, “Reignite Your Calling.” The Bergstroms are the founders and facilitators of Re-Ignite, a faith-based ministry committed to helping boomers who want to serve God and make a difference in the world.

“We want Celebrate 2022 to rekindle our desire to live life according to God’s call on our lives,” Wiebe says. “We believe God will inspire us and relight our passion to serve him.”

A concert by Brush Arbor will be one evening’s entertainment as they share their harmonies and acoustical sounds.

For more information about Celebrate 2022 visit [www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2022](http://www.mbfoundation.com/celebrate2022), email [celebrate@mbfoundation.com](mailto:celebrate@mbfoundation.com) or call 800-551-1547.—MBF

## LEAD Cohorts start in September

The fall 2021 lineup of 14 LEAD Cohorts is starting in early September, and it’s not too late to join.

LEAD Cohorts offer meeting spaces for small groups of MB pastors, leaders and anyone connected to an MB church. Cohorts meet twice monthly for an hour via Zoom and are free with the exception of books if recommended by the cohort leader.

Topics this fall include church planting, holding strong convictions while having a loving posture, conversations with missionaries and more.

For more information, contact Janae Rempel at [admin@usmb.org](mailto:admin@usmb.org). Sign up for a LEAD Cohort today at [www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts](http://www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts).—

USMB

## Rempel leaving FPU

Valerie Rempel has stepped down as vice president and dean of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary at Fresno Pacific University to join The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) as a director of accreditation, effective Aug. 30, 2021.



Rempel joined the seminary faculty in 1996, was appointed dean in 2014 and vice president in 2019. She also served as associate professor and J.B. Toews Chair of History and Theology and was a past director of the Center for Anabaptist Studies. Tim Geddert, professor and program director of New Testament, will act as interim dean.

"We congratulate Valerie on her new position and look forward to seeing the impact she will have on the education of seminarians at the institutional level," says Joseph Jones, president of FPU. "Valerie's focus has always been to help students grow in their knowledge of and love for Jesus and his church and pass that on in their work and life."

ATS includes more than 270 graduate schools offering postbaccalaureate degree programs in ministry, teaching and research in the theological disciplines. —FPU

## Webinar series slated for September

USMB is sponsoring a two-part webinar series via Zoom with Ben Connelly, director of training at Saturate.

In "Discipleship in Everyday Life," Sept. 14, Connelly will lead an interactive discussion on disciple-making churches, discipleship environments and equipping people for peer-to-peer discipleship. In "Discipleship in Community," Sept. 21, Connelly will discuss

the role of the faith community and the need for various gifts in holistic discipleship. The webinar will include tangible steps to help people disciple and care for one another. Discussion will center around Connelly's new book, *A Field Guide for Genuine Community*. Each webinar will begin at 10:30 a.m. CDT and last one hour.

Register for each webinar online at <https://usmb.org/event/lead-one-webinar/>. For more information, contact Janae Rempel at [admin@usmb.org](mailto:admin@usmb.org). —USMB

## SDC holds online business session

Due to COVID-19, the Southern District Conference (SDC) held a two-hour virtual business session July 31 in lieu of its biennial convention. The session, attended by about 50 individuals, was moderated by SDC chair Brad Burkholder and broadcast from Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan. Participants could interact with Burkholder and the other presenters who were together at Ridgepoint. The webinar-style event allowed delegates to vote, download shared documents and ask questions via chat. Nathan Engelman, SDC secretary, provided technical assistance.

Delegates approved a budget of \$377,000 for 2022 and \$414,900 for 2023, affirmed the slate of nominees for district leadership positions and voted to change the official name of the district in legal documents from "The Southern District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America" to "The Southern District Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches." —CL

## Webinar focuses on protecting vulnerable

Central Valley Justice Coalition, USMB, Center for Anabaptist Studies, Every Neighborhood Partnership and

ESA Love, Inc., are partnering to present "Empowered to Protect: Becoming a church which protects the vulnerable and resists abuse." This two-part webinar series will encourage leaders to evaluate their organizations and equip them to adopt policies, procedures and practices that protect the vulnerable, hold offenders accountable and offer healing for both.

The webinars, held via Zoom, are scheduled for Oct. 11 and Oct. 18, at 11 a.m. CDT both days and will last 90 minutes. For more information or to register, visit [www.usmb.org/events](http://www.usmb.org/events). —USMB

## MWC Peace Sunday set for Sept. 19

USMB congregations are invited to observe Peace Sunday Sept. 19, 2021, together with the global Anabaptist church family. Worship and resource materials prepared by Mennonite World Conference are available online to congregations. The theme for this year's Peace Sunday is "Finding hope and healing in crisis."

Congregations that observe Peace Sunday are encouraged to contact MWC with their stories, reports and photos. These can be sent to [photos@mwcc-mm.org](mailto:photos@mwcc-mm.org). They will be shared with the global church community. —MWC

## EDC meets in person, online

A change in location did not hinder the celebration during the Eastern District Conference convention, held Aug. 7-8, 2021, at The Life Center (TLC) in Lenoir, N.C., and broadcast live on Facebook.

The convention was initially planned to be held at Valla Crucis Conference Center in Banner Elk, N.C., but because of COVID-19 concerns, the event moved to the more spacious TLC. The two-day event, attended by 84 individ-

# 5 minutes with...

uals on Saturday and 104 on Sunday, included worship, prayer, fellowship and a message.

In his welcome Saturday, EDC minister and TLC pastor Terry Hunt said the first day would focus on celebration.

"We're going to celebrate today," Hunt said. "We're here to praise the Lord."

Many pastors spoke briefly before inviting their church choirs to lead 30-minute segments of praise and worship, including songs in English, French, Lingala and Swahili.

Adding to the celebration, Hunt recognized Hermann Mputu, pastor of Christian Center the Hand of God, a Congolese church in Hamilton, Ohio, for completing his licensure as an EDC pastor. Others recognized for completing licensure but not in attendance were: Kinwa Nico, pastor of Royal Family International Church in Fairfield, Ohio; Yvette Ngale, associate pastor of Royal Family International Church; Amos Esekwen, pastor of Community of Restoration Church in West Chester, Ohio; and Lawum Kayamba, pastor of Disciples International Christian Church in Portland, Maine.

Following the celebration, attendees gathered for a catered meal.

TLC associate pastor Darrin Foddrell brought Sunday's message. Likening listeners to a spiritual team, Foddrell listed seven characteristics of a championship team: a common goal, commitment, complementary roles, clear communication, constructive conflict, cohesion and a credible coach.

"Today is the day that we step up our game," Foddrell said. "Let's be committed to serving God and to helping others."

Sunday's service also included prayer, Scripture reading, worship, an offering and a video from the Center for Anabaptist Studies.—CL



## Maria Mejia-Ng

Maria Mejia-Ng of New Life Community, a Mennonite Brethren church in Dinuba, Calif., is a serial entrepreneur. A native of Nicaragua, her most recent enterprise is called Radiant Valley Interpreting, offering written translation and live interpretation for schools, businesses, churches, and nonprofit organizations. Her previous enterprises have included a food pantry for students at Fresno Pacific University and College Minions which employs students for catering events.

### *How many businesses have you started?*

That question brings back some great memories. From 2011 through 2013 I served as a missionary with Students International. As the microfinance site leader, I helped many women start or expand their small businesses. I've started approximately 50 businesses—street vendors, craft and hammock making, beauty shops—but none of them were actually mine.

### *When did you first become interested in business?*

Growing up in Nicaragua I always loved to go to the bank with my mom and see all these working women with their heels and make-up. When I was 12 I asked my dad if I could take a typing course at a trade school. By the time I graduated from high school I had also taken their 3-year course in computers and accounting. At age 18 I was an agricultural loan officer at a bank and developed a huge passion for helping people grow financially.

### *What prompted the start of Radiant Valley Interpreting?*

Soon after finishing my master's degree in leadership at Fresno Pacific University, I applied for residency in the U.S. Unfortunately, you can't get a work permit while you're waiting for resi-

dency. For many years I had been interpreting, mostly on a volunteer basis. God showed me it would be okay to charge fees for my service to support myself. Many groups I had been volunteering for said, "Okay, Maria, what are your rates and when are you available?"

### *What special qualities do you bring as an immigrant entrepreneur?*

I've had to learn how to navigate two different worlds, not just bilingual but bicultural. For instance, in Hispanic culture you are taught to respect your superiors—you would never ask for a raise. In the U.S., asking for a raise shows initiative. I've been able to teach other Hispanic women not to sell themselves short. If they clean houses, I show them how to get a business license and be able to charge \$25 an hour instead of \$15. I love the chance to empower others.

### *How has your interpreting skill fit in with your church's ministry?*

New Life is here to serve our community which is 80 percent Hispanic. Every week we see people come who don't speak English. I grab my equipment and interpret for them. I also volunteer at the office on Mondays. God has blessed us all with different gifts and talents, and I want to make sure I use those given to me for his glory.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

## Worship is paramount

Worship empowers, energizes all of church life

Generally speaking, we all have some idea of what the church exists for; what we're up to, as it were. I think it's safe to say that the purpose of the church includes worship, Bible teaching (preaching), evangelism, service and relationship (community). This list is arguably not exhaustive, but it begins to capture an overall sense of what we are collectively as the church.

People seem reluctant to suggest that any of these things is the chief thing when it comes to life in the kingdom and fulfilling our purpose. Surely, they are all equally significant in the corporate life of Jesus followers. But is that really the best way to look at these ministry areas—as largely coequal?

As I consider this topic, I am of the opinion that there is one area that should be dominant. And that area is worship. This may seem strange coming from a lead pastor that preaches God's word every week. Historically, lead pastors were not often known for their artistic or musical skills, so worship often took a back seat to service, evangelism and especially preaching. Others could be counted on for worship; the pastor needn't overly concern himself. But my ministry story has its beginning in music and worship—really my “first love”—as I spent many years serving churches in worship ministry. Now serving as a lead pastor I am as convinced as ever that worship is paramount.

Worship is our intentional, active response to all that God is and does. We give to God all the honor and glory that he deserves. Truly it is what we are created for and it is the one thing that we will continue to do in eternity.

When we begin to grasp this, we realize that worship empowers and energizes all the other areas. Service, evangelism, Bible learning and even fellowship flow out of and are engulfed by worship.

We have begun to see this in significant ways at our church. When we launched the latest iteration of a mid-week prayer gathering, we agreed that we would center on actually praying, coming before God, being in his presence and not focus on talking about everything we should pray about. We spend the hour praying.

However, the planning team quite naturally started to include elements of worship as we gathered for prayer. A Bluetooth speaker is regularly used for songs and some feel free to sing along. Gatherers are also encouraged to quote Psalms or other Scripture passages as we spend that time with Jesus. Worship has more than enhanced our weekly prayer meetings.

Our church is blessed to have gifted musicians, and we have a great worship leader/planner. She has encouraged me to be mindful of and periodically preach on worship. More importantly, our congregation has actively been pursuing what it means to be a worshipping church.

Last spring, we had a worship night at the beginning of Holy Week. It was moving and meaningful, and I believe God was pleased. We have had two more since then, and we have seen our congregation grow in worship.

Let me say again, worship is paramount. As we get that, we become the church God wants us to be. ▀



Curt Vogt, Buhler (Kan.) MB Church lead pastor, attended Tabor College where he earned a bachelor's degree in music. He attended Denver Seminary where he earned a master's of divinity degree. Curt and his wife, Melissa, have served churches in Louisiana, California and Colorado. They have two adult sons and enjoy evenings out for dinner and playing with their new puppy.

# Through it all

God pursues us even as we wrestle with sin

I am honored and privileged to have been brought up in a godly home, where I was taught to love God, people and God's Word from an early age. I grew up primarily in Tulsa, Okla., with a few years in California and Texas as well. I gave my life to Jesus when I was 6 years old and always had a desire to know Jesus more.

But as I wrestled with acceptance from this world and conviction from the Lord, God interrupted my life to take control of my whole heart.

I went to a small, private Christian school and was very sheltered from the evils of this world. Faced with a decision to transfer to a bigger Christian school or a public school for my seventh grade year, I chose the latter because people at the public school didn't know Jesus, and I wanted to tell them about Jesus.

However, I was not prepared for the bullying that would come from being a new kid, as well as sin running rampant around me. I was the only student in my youth group at this public school, making it even more difficult. I felt alone.

Over the next few years through dating, basketball and building friendships, I began to feel accepted. Unfortunately, my desire to seek acceptance and make more friends led to an addiction to chewing tobacco, pornography and drinking before I even began high school.

I still loved God and wanted my new friends to know God. I invited my friends to youth group and wrestled with the convictions of sin throughout the week. On weekends, I struggled with sin temptations and did not always win. As I fought to bring my friends up, I more often found myself outmanned and brought down.

Throughout high school, I never had a close friend push me to grow in my relationship with Jesus. I felt somewhat abandoned by my youth group friends,

although I cannot place the blame on them. My dating relationships with girls were not helpful either.

My parents did an amazing job helping, but I needed someone who was going through what I was. There were a couple of small group leaders that were extremely helpful, but unfortunately I let fear and others' opinions of me prevent me from being transparent about my sin issues.

I'm thankful God was with me through all of this. After my freshmen year of college, God led me to an internship opportunity with the summer Christian camp that I went to every year with my youth group, Big Stuf. God interrupted my life and drew me closer at camp, as well as called me into youth ministry. I couldn't shake what God was doing! He started to change my desires and began helping me get rid of the sin in my life.

In February of my sophomore year, I felt the Lord call me to leave everything behind to pursue ministry in the fall. I was obedient to God's call, recommitting my life to Jesus, getting baptized in water and the Holy Spirit, and starting my journey toward youth ministry.

Throughout three years of seminary, I saw Jesus' faithfulness in so many ways. He created a way for me to play college basketball, to finish my bachelor's degree and to grow in the gifting that God has given. I got an amazing, two-year internship at an Assemblies of God church in Springfield, Mo., months after graduation. I met my now wife as well. God continued to place me in beautiful and healthy environments where I experienced God's presence and grew in the gifts that God alone gave me.

Jesus gave me peace through all of these difficult transitional decisions.

See TESTIMONY, page 30



John Leonard is the youth pastor at Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif. He and his wife of four years, Brianna, love serving God's youth and have a heart for the next generation.

They are passionate about teaching students to know God personally, to know the truth of God's Word and to be able to share the good news of Jesus Christ boldly with others. John graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration from Southwestern Christian University, received a three-year ministry degree in student ministries from Rhema Bible Training College and is pursuing a counseling certificate from Multnomah University. He served as camp speaker at Ascent 2021.

# Why aren't we MISSIONARIES?

( We are, no matter our job title. )

By Staci Janzen

Several years ago, when my son was in first grade, he angrily asked me why we weren't missionaries. His accusatory tone had me feeling slightly defensive about our career choices, and when I pushed him for more details, he matter-of-factly stated that you have to be a missionary to be a good Christian.

To give some context, his aunt, uncle and cousins had recently returned from serving two years as missionaries in Paris. After a few long weekends catching up with our family and listening to hours of stories, all my son heard was *delicious bread* and *Nutella*.

His very serious questioning of our vocational choices required an equally serious conversation about God's calling on our lives. My son's perception of working for God was traveling the world, living in famous places and eating great food all while sharing the gospel. He was comparing the circumstances of our country Kansas life to his cousin's exotic situation on the mission field. Even though it was easy to explain that Nutella wasn't on the menu



every day, it was more difficult to explain how God calls us to serve him and make disciples in any job we are called to.

I personally haven't felt called to overseas missions, and I can clearly articulate why I feel God calling me and my family to be right here right now in my rural Midwest town. However, explaining that rationale to a first grader who pines for adventure—and misses his cousins dearly—wasn't as simple.

The first-grade level conversation we had with our son began by asking him to think about school as a job. We discussed ways he can share Christ's love with classmates by being kind and inclusive. We also encouraged him to invite friends to church or over to our house to play. His question started a longer conversation that we continue to discuss as a family—how do we serve God wherever he calls us, specifically with our work?

It's no wonder that my son was so drawn to the stories from the mission field. Their excitement for their "job" was evident, and it is contagious. Of course, he wants us

“ My son’s perception of working for God was traveling the world,  
living in famous places and eating great food all while sharing the gospel. ”

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to serve God—it sounds awesome! My husband and I do not come home from work with exciting stories of changed lives. And, we certainly don’t have fresh bread around every corner—just wheat fields.

If I want to model the example for my son that my work is also a calling from God, I should be excited about it. I should be just as energized, and it should feel like the adventure it truly is. It’s easy for me to forget that God did call me to see disciples made through my work. He calls us all into missions, just not officially.

### God makes us unique

Each of us is called by God to do his work, but that work looks differently in each of our lives. God made us uniquely for his purpose, and we know this because he tells us so in the Psalms. Psalm 139:13-16 says, “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

Knowing that God uniquely planned all the days of my life, even before I was formed, allows me to confidently respond to my son that when I go to work, I am working for God even if missionary isn’t in my official job title. When God planned our days, he did so with the knowledge of our unique skills and gifts. He knows us on an intimate level and forges our paths accordingly. This allows us to see that our work has an eternal significance.

From a very young age, I have been a talker. Not only did I talk a lot, but I was also really loud. I still like to talk, but thankfully, with some time and grace, I can now control when I need to be heard and when it’s best to use my inside voice. It is humorous to think that I grew up getting in trouble for talking in class and now it’s my job to talk in class! God knew he would call me into the classroom, and he prepared me with skills and abilities that inform my work and make it truly a calling from the Lord.

My unique ability to talk too much also allows me to build relationships with students, coworkers and campus visitors. Quick conversations open doors for more con-

versations, and eventually an opportunity to talk about Jesus presents itself. Getting to those moments where the conversation shifts to the spiritual, where hard questions are discussed and hearts start to soften, I know I’m right where God has called me to be.

### God gives us confidence

As God makes each of us unique, he also places us into unique situations. Acts 17:26-27 says, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.”

His placements aren’t accidents. We can be confident that we are right where he wants us to be. We can rest in the assurance that our work is part of his plan. Regardless of the job we are in, whether it’s our dream job or not, God calls us there and creates us to make disciples. We are working for the Lord, not for men.

Vocation is a buzz word in the college world these days. It means to have a strong calling toward a career or profession. In a Christian context, it implies a calling to serve the Lord with your career.

My son has a few years left to go before he can get a job, but most of my students are only months away from starting their careers. The uncertainty around their very near futures often causes them to think less about vocation and more about salaries and benefits. The stress causes their minds to shift into selfish mode, and rarely can you discern big decisions in this state of mind. In their stress, God orchestrates conversations to remind them why we work. Thinking vocationally stills the worry about being in the right job or career path.

As the world changes, working for the Lord does not. As jobs become scarce and industries evolve, following God’s call in your work never goes away.

God made us for the adventure he set us on. Let’s lean into our uniqueness and answer his call.

*Staci Janzen is chair of the business studies department and an assistant professor of marketing at Tabor College. Janzen has degrees from Kansas State University and is completing her doctorate at Northcentral University. Janzen and her husband, Jimmy, live in rural Hillsboro, Kan., with their two children and are members of Hillsboro MB Church..*

# Taking God

A farmer, marketer and educator reflect on taking their faith to work

**M**y first job out of college was serving as a children's magazine editor at a large Christian organization. As I edited content for kids designed to help them grow in their relationship with God, it was easy to see how my work was contributing to the kingdom.

Many of my peers had a different experience. They worked in secular fields as realtors, mechanics, human resources specialists, teachers, nurses and administrative assistants. Most of them had jobs where they lived out their faith in more subtle (and at times more difficult) ways than how I lived out mine.

While we can't know an exact number, Christians who work for churches or faith-based organizations are certainly the minority compared to those who don't. Even the Apostle Paul, one of the most famous missionaries of all time, made his living making tents. And a study, "Christians at Work," conducted by Barna research in 2019 reveals that 55 percent of pastors had another career before pursuing vocational ministry.

Bible passages about work seem to assume that believers are using their skills and influence in a variety of vocations. Even Jesus was a trained carpenter. And Song of Songs, believed to be written by King Solomon, who possessed divine wisdom, says: "Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot," (Ecclesiastes 5:18).

The author doesn't specify which job a person should have, only that the worker should enjoy his work and be content in it because it is from the Lord. From the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1) to the future new Jerusalem (Isaiah 65), we can see that work is part of God's plan for his created beings.

I spoke to three believers living and working in the Central Valley of California who have found ways to "take God to work" with them in three very different career fields.

## Fruitful work

Josh Newfield, 38, grew up in Bakersfield, Calif.,

with a heritage in the farming industry and the Mennonite Brethren community.

"My grandfather on my dad's side was Mennonite and was born in Russia and came here when he was 8 years old," Josh says.

Growing up, Josh watched his father and grandfather work their family business, producing boxes for grapes.

"I was raised to know that working hard glorifies God and is part of what we do as Christians," he says.

Josh, who grew up attending Heritage Bible Church, observed how his father worked long hours in a stressful environment in a godly way. His dad would explain to his children that he worked hard because of his faith.

"I ended up in the farm management business by accident," says Josh, who originally studied psychology in college. "My father-in-law managed a farm that grew blueberries and pistachios, and I ended up seasonally managing the blueberry packing operation along with my other job."

Josh eventually went fulltime with the business.

"Packing blueberries, we worked long, long hours—seven days a week, 14 hours a day, for two months," he says. "It's kind of insane, but it's fresh fruit. It's coming in, and it's got to go out."

The remainder of the year, Josh worked in the field helping with irrigation management and pruning.

In 2018, when his father-in-law retired, Josh started his own farm management company and took over the pistachio clients. Josh's business, Newfield Ag Management, now manages 1,000 acres of



Josh Newfield

# to work

By Suzanne Hadley Gosselin

pistachios and has seven employees. Josh serves as an elder at The Bridge Bible Church and plays guitar on the worship team, but he sees his day job as an opportunity to proclaim Christ in simple, meaningful ways.

"I try to be a generous boss," he says. "The farming industry is stressful because you're dependent on factors outside of your control, like the weather. It's common for managers to take these frustrations out on their employees. That's not how I treat my guys; I show them respect. They notice and have even remarked on it. I'm able to say it's all because of my faith."

Josh, who is married to Tara and has four children ages 4 to 13, says it's important to him to live a consistent witness on the job.

"I don't want to have a work persona and a church persona," he says. "I don't want to be one guy on Sunday mornings and another guy at work."

He admits doing this can be difficult when job responsibilities mount and pressures arise.

"I still have to do good work," he says. "But I don't have to be a jerk. I can treat people with dignity."

## Pushing forward

Jara Hinkle, 27, works as marketing director at Organic Tagua Jewelry, a company founded by a Christian couple. Tagua sells jewelry and accessories crafted by artisans in Ecuador using the tagua nut.

"It's a generational art that's been passed down for many years," Jara says.

The founder of the company, who is originally from Ecuador herself, "saw that these artisans had the skills but didn't know how to make money doing it," Jara explains. "I love hearing about how these artisans can now provide for their kids and families through the jobs our company has provided. It's an amazing opportunity to help a community and push it forward."

Growing up, Jara was always interested in fashion. This led her to pursue a degree in fashion marketing at the University of Central Oklahoma, in her home state.

Jara says that working to honor God was a principle her parents instilled in her as a child.

She finds inspiration from Colossians 3:23, which says, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (ESV).

"I keep that in mind when I encounter frustrations," she says. "There are always frustrations in any job. Working for the Lord means I put in my best effort."

Jara's hard work has led to some lucrative opportunities such as managing a Charming Charlie store during college and nabbing a denim design internship at the Buckle following graduation. A few months later she married her husband, Stephen, and joined him in Florida where he was serving as a youth pastor.

Jara worked a few jobs in Florida before landing at Tagua, which was an answer to prayer.

"I wanted to work in fashion with a company that was fair trade," she says. "That combination isn't easy to find. But God provided it in my current job."

Early this year, Jara and Stephen moved across the country for a worship pastor position at The Bridge Bible Church. Now Jara works remotely, performing many duties for the company, such as graphic design, managing two websites, photography and even a little jewelry design. Jara loves that her job is fast paced, and she gets to do a lot of different things.

"I'm always researching different ways of doing things and trying to improve," she says. "I think I've been able to push the company forward and help us stand out from competitors. I love seeing growth."

Even though she's no longer in the office, Jara starts each day with prayer about her workday.

"I pray I'll have wisdom," she says. "I pray for my coworkers. It brings peace that gets me through the day."

Jara Hinkle



Jason Hodgson



### Agent of hope

Jason Hodgson, 44, has been working in education for 22 years. During college, Jason went on a mission trip to Romania and was moved by what he saw in the orphanages.

"My heart was completely blown away with the lack of hope in the children," he says. "I knew I needed to do something to make a difference in the lives of kids."

After earning a degree in English literature, Jason started out as a high school English teacher in the farming community of Arvin, Calif. The school was struggling academically, and half the students were English learners.

"It was a mission field," Jason says. "Most of my high school students had never left the city of Arvin. If we took them skiing or to the beach for an outing, it was the first time they'd ever seen these things. It's incredibly challenging to work with students who have little hope for the future."

While at the high school, Jason took on leadership of the Health Careers Academy program, which connected students with internships in health fields. After five years of teaching, Jason stepped into an administrative position as dean, and a year later, he became the assistant principal.

In these roles, Jason discovered that he could help adults rally around shared goals, which ultimately bettered the lives of students. Working with coaches and teachers, he developed culture and community pride. After six years in the assistant principal seat, Jason took a job as a middle school principal. He thrived being hands-on with students again and found many opportunities to live out his faith at work.

"I love trying to build people up by helping them develop a plan of growth and the belief that they can succeed," he says. "Each of my roles has been really challenging, which has allowed me the opportunity to show that my trust is in something greater than myself."

For the past five years, Jason has worked in district-level administration, most recently as director of professional development for the Panama-Buena Vista School District in Bakersfield. He was recently named one of 12 Leaders to Learn From by *Education Week* magazine for outstanding achievements in school district professional development. Over the summer, he took a position as superintendent of the Taft Union High School District in Taft, Calif.

Jason, who is an elder at The Bridge Bible Church, where he attends with his wife, Kerri, and their two teenaged children, believes God has intentionally led him every step of the way in his career.

"Most of my roles have been God events where I've been approached with an opportunity to help." And help he does, while modeling Christian faith and integrity, being transparent about his weaknesses and seeking to address the needs of those around him.

"God is the one who is working through me," he says. "I'm a selfish, sinful person, but his gifts in my life cause me to desire to invest in other people, create community and bring hope."

### Whatever you do

These three workers set an example for living out faith in the workplace. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." All includes work. At times we may feel like the purpose of work is simply to pay the bills, but we're created to find purpose and satisfaction through vocation, ultimately, to bring God glory.

Whether out in a pistachio field, behind a camera or leading teams and organizations, Christians can live out their faith in the workplace. As we seek God's wisdom to address job-related challenges, and seek to love like Jesus, his light will shine in and through us, bringing hope to dark places.

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

“  
So, whether you eat or  
drink, or whatever you do,  
do all to the glory of God.”

# Called to WORK *and* REST

Labor, leisure and rest are complementary gifts from our Father

By Ed Willms

I grew up in an environment where work was highly valued. Some of my earliest memories are toiling in dust and sweat amidst vibrant rose bushes and small cedars. At that nursery, I discovered the delight and joy of hard work. To roll up one's sleeves—those close to me rewarded and celebrated those who would “get'er done.” As I baked in the summer heat, a passion for a good day's work was birthed.

It was only years later that the shadow side of this aptitude became apparent. Work took center stage, nudging the ability to rest—to unplug and be still—to the periphery.

Pastoral ministry did nothing to spare me from this inclination. Instead, as life became more complex, as I tethered myself to an iPhone, as connections and opportunities grew, the notion of rest became exceedingly elusive.

When friends would ask how I was doing, my instinctive answer became “very busy,” as though my full plate were a badge of honor. The truth is it was my Achilles heel. I found myself aligning better with Martha, “distracted by all the preparations that had to be made” rather than her sister Mary “who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said” (Luke 10:38–42).

Not surprisingly, Article 16 of our Confession of Faith causes me to pause. It reminds me that our labor, our leisure and a day of rest and worship are complementary gifts from our gracious Father.

The opening paragraph of this article states: “We believe that God's act of creation is the model for human activity. While sin has corrupted work and rest, redeemed people are called to restore labor and rest to their proper place.”

How does one engage in this restorative activity in a culture bent on 24/7 work? How does one silence the relentless noise and clutter that is drowning out our desperate need for silence?

Our Confession invites us to reconsider the practice of Sabbath (the Lord's day).

In his book *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life*, Matthew Sleeth says, “Just a short while ago, almost everything in society stopped one day a week. Gas stations, banks and grocery stores locked their doors at night and on Sundays. No more.



We are no longer a society that goes to sleep at night or conducts business six days a week. Now we go 24/7...what got taken away is rest.... Subtracting a day of rest each week has had a profound effect on our lives.”

I have come to believe that if we truly desire to maintain and grow healthy and vital spiritual lives, we will need to rediscover the essence of Sabbath.

### **Twin perspectives on rest**

The Old Testament provides us with twin perspectives on why God focused so strongly on Sabbath rest, writes Mark Buchanan in *The Rest of God*.

**Sabbath is positioned as a return to Eden.** “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God.... For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8–11).

For six days, God created and worked, and it was very good. Then at pinnacle of the week, God deliberately stopped. God rested and pronounced the day “holy.” The all-powerful Creator who did not need to rest chose to make a full stop and set a day apart.

**Sabbath is viewed as a refusal to go back to Egypt.** The parallel Deuteronomy account says: “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.... Remember

that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:12,15).

The One who liberated his people from slavery exhorts them not to look back. The command to stop, rest and trust weekly is an invitation to live in freedom from the bondage and oppression of Egypt.

- What does a Sabbath day look like for us?
- How might we regain a new sense of a *holy day*?
- Are we living in freedom and trust or turning back to the bondage of work and self-reliance?

Jesus’ invitation might just be what we need today: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28–29).

I encourage you to read Article 16 of the Confession of Faith and the related Scripture references with your family or study group. Consider the questions above about how we approach the Lord’s Day.

*Ed Willms is executive director of the Ontario Conference of MB Churches. He lives in St. Catharines, Ont. This essay was first published in the Dec. 1, 2018 issue of MB Herald as part of an ongoing series on the MB Confession of Faith.*



## **USMB Confession of Faith Article 16: Work, Rest and the Lord’s Day**

We believe that God’s act of creation is the model for human activity. While sin has corrupted work and rest, redeemed people are called to restore labor and rest to their proper place.

### **Work**

As creatures made in the image of God, Christians imitate the Creator by working faithfully as they are able. They are to use their abilities and resources to glorify God and to serve others. Because they bear the name of Christ, all believers are called to work honestly and diligently and to treat others with respect and dignity.

### **Rest**

As God rested on the seventh day, people are called to observe regular times of rest. Rest is an act of thankfulness for what God has provided. It is an act of trust, reminding humans that it is not their work but God who sustains them. Rest is an act of hope, anticipating the future rest assured by the resurrection of Jesus.

### **The Lord’s Day**

Following the New Testament example, believers gather to commemorate the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week. On the Lord’s Day, believers joyfully devote themselves to worship, instruction in the Word, prayer, breaking of bread, fellowship and service. They limit their labor to work of necessity and deeds of mercy.

Genesis 1:26–2:3; Genesis 2:15; Genesis 3:14–19; Exodus 20:8–11; Leviticus 25:1–7; Deuteronomy 5:12–15; Psalm 46:10; Psalm 95:6–11; Ecclesiastes 3:13; Mark 2:23–3:6; Luke 24:1–36; Acts 2:42–47; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:5–6; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Ephesians 6:5–9; Colossians 2:16–17; Colossians 3:22–4:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–10; Hebrews 4:1–10; Hebrews 10:23–25; Revelation 1:10.

## Ascent creates community, memories

Future camps will build on first national summer event

**M**ore than 340 students, youth leaders and staff ascended New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains for Ascent, the new national high school camp for U.S. Mennonite Brethren youth held June 16-20, 2021.

Nestled in the southern Rocky Mountains about 7,500 feet above sea level near Glorieta, youth gathered for daily sessions, workshops, activities and more.

### Gaining momentum

Ascent replaces YouthCon, the once-every-four-years national youth event hosted by USMB Youth. The national youth committee shifted to a summer event because of a steady decline in attendance at the spring conference.

Ascent is intended for all USMB high school youth and will be held annually. In 2021, attendance included 239 students, 61 youth leaders and 41 staff that represented four of the five USMB district conferences.

"We're very excited that we had four of the districts represented," says SDC district youth minister Russ Claassen. "That was really, really cool.... While the numbers weren't huge, the representation was there, and it's at least something to build on moving forward."

### Sessions and workshops

Speaker John Leonard, youth pastor at Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif., centered four daily sessions on the theme, "Home: Remain in Christ." Using John 15:1-17 as his primary text, Leonard talked about abiding in Jesus, purpose, identity, producing fruit, loving God and others and making disciples.



Campers who hiked in New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains enjoyed an impressive view of the area around Glorieta Adventure Camps. Ascent, the name of the new USMB national senior high summer camp, is intended as a metaphor—ascending to a peak, looking back on the journey and gaining a new perspective for the future—for the role the camp experience can play in teens' spiritual lives. *Photo by Mike Klaassen*

"When God is your first love, your love for yourself and for other people is magnified," Leonard said. "My desire is to push you to know God more in a loving and real way."

Presence Worship from Wichita, Kan., facilitated worship during sessions, while Mike Klaassen from Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., and Jenn Tarbutton from Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., served as emcees, often opening sessions with a game and summary of the day before.

Representatives from partner agencies spoke, including Multiply, Tabor College, Fresno Pacific University and Faithfront. Both FPU and Tabor presented scholarship opportunities.

Students could attend four of 14 workshops offered Friday and Saturday. Youth pastors, agency representatives and program team members led the workshops. Most workshops were offered twice, with popular topics includ-

ing an interactive workshop that emphasized problem-solving, generosity and choosing to work together instead of competing; prayer and worship; trusting God when plans don't go as expected; identity; personality and relationships.

### Free-time and late-night activities

Each day included free-time activities, and although COVID-19 restrictions limited availability, options included a mountaineering obstacle course, tree rappelling, drift trikes, a zip line with a drop, waterfront activities, sand volleyball, gaga ball, mini golf, disc golf, a super swing and white-water rafting.

At the end of the day, late-night activities included "Moonlight Madness" with 2,400 glow sticks and music on the field, a counselor hunt, a show by illusionist Zak Mirz and an 11-act talent show featuring singing, card tricks, painting with ketchup and more.

During Saturday's night of worship, recent Multiply TREK participants shared, and students gave an offering of more than \$1,700 for Multiply, designated for music ministry in Niger, West Africa.

## Redefining success

As a result of COVID-19, Kyle Goings, USMB Youth chair, says the planning team did not rely on high attendance to define success, instead looking to create community on a national level and memories to serve as markers on students' spiritual journeys.

The team seeks to continue to spread the word about Ascent.

"We've got several churches that we've been talking with that were interested in coming that weren't able to, or that would like to in the future, so I'm excited about the potential," Claassen says. "I'm excited about continuing to build momentum and just seeing what God's going to do with that." —*Janae Rempel*

For more on the preparations for Ascent: <https://christianleadermag.com/usmb-youth-anticipates-first-ascent-summer-camp/>.

For more on the decision to move to a summer camp: <https://christianleadermag.com/national-summer-senior-high-camp-planned-for-2021/>

## Ascending above adversity

Ascent leaders forced to be flexible when plans changed

The room was dark, save for a subtle glow from the skylights above. No lights shone from the stage, microphones were silent and no graphics graced the screen. This was the scene during a camp-wide power outage on

the second full day of Ascent 2021, the new national senior high summer camp at Glorieta Adventure Camps in Glorieta, N.M.



**239 campers and  
61 youth leaders**

from

**19 churches** coming from  
**6 states**

that represented

**4 USMB district conferences**  
plus

**26 program team members**  
that included

**6 planning team members:**

Russ Claassen, SDC district youth minister; Kyle Goings, USMB Youth chair; Stacie Myers, camp director;

Mike Klaassen, Jenn Tarbutton, and Jared Menard  
and

**15 agency representatives.**

The group downed

**3,240 bottles of water**  
and raised

**\$1,700 for music ministry**  
in Niger, West Africa.

**The 4-night camp** included  
**4 main sessions**

with speaker John Leonard and

**14 workshops** and  
**6 students**

accepted Jesus for the first time.

As the planning team scrambled to continue the session, restore power and make alternate plans if electricity remained off, the Presence Worship band took the stage. Accompanied only by guitars and a cajon, more than 300 voices lifted together in praise:

*"I'm gonna sing, in the middle of the storm. Louder and louder, you're gonna hear my praises roar. Up from the ashes, hope will arise. Death is defeated, the King is alive."*

The power outage illustrates an overarching theme of Ascent as God's faithfulness was evident despite numerous challenges, even when expectations, plans and power were stripped away.

"Even though circumstances took all kinds of distractions away, God was still right there," says Kyle Goings, USMB Youth chair and member of the Ascent planning team. "In fact, we could see him more prominent this year, because certain things were taken away and we had to rely on him."

## COVID-19 restrictions

Long before the COVID-19 pandemic, planning team members chose "Ascent" for USMB Youth's new summer camp, representing overcoming challenges when climbing to a summit and acknowledging the effort it would require of churches to get to Ascent.

But in 2021, more than the journey to camp proved challenging, as behind-the-scenes factors impacted the camp experience and caused leaders to remain flexible.

Some of the challenges stemmed from not knowing what to expect in a new location, says SDC district youth minister Russ Claassen. While YouthCon 2019 was held at Glorieta, Ascent occupied the opposite side of the property.

Students who had attended YouthCon may have arrived with expectations for location, activities and amenities, but COVID-19 restrictions brought changes.

The planning team booked Glorieta's facility in summer 2019 before COVID-19, intending to host a test run with SDC youth in the summer of 2020. That event was cancelled because of the pandemic, but the planning team proceeded with Ascent, although unable to predict what New Mexico state restrictions would be.

Whether required to keep doors open for sessions—meaning air conditioners were turned off—a change in session location or fewer activities available, pandemic-related changes impacted many aspects of Ascent.

For example, the original intent was to hold sessions in the 800-seat Moody building, which housed display tables at YouthCon, staggering schedules and sharing facilities with a family camp also using Glorieta's property. But about two months before Ascent, the planning team learned that COVID-19 regulations would require the two camps—and the staff members who served them—to separate completely, leaving Ascent with access to only half of Glorieta's staff.

No longer able to share the other half of camp, Ascent moved across campus to the 500-seat Aspen building, limiting the audio/visual capabilities of the Glanzer Pro Audio team. The move also eliminated a central gathering space, but that change had the benefit of limiting distractions from being in close proximity to another group.

"That's one of the blessings that COVID brought, if you could say that, was that we had to go to this group camp location," Claassen says. "While the camp hub and the nicer housing are already in place at the conference center (on the other side of camp), I think the pros of having our own space...outweigh that."

With only half its staff available to serve Ascent for the week, Glorieta scaled back its activities. Goings estimated only one third of activities were



In an earlier session, students nailed their confessions to two wooden crosses. Friday the campers retrieved their notes, which camp staff had replaced with the message, "You are forgiven." "Students were impacted by that," says Kyle Goings. *Photo by Janae Rempel*

available, and required signups at registration added to the confusion.

"We feel bad because people paid a lot of money and people prayed for and worked hard to get there," Goings says. "We were disappointed as well that we just couldn't offer what we originally (billed) for. But we have great youth groups and great churches. There was very few complaining."

Of youth leaders completing a *Christian Leader* survey about Ascent, 80 percent of responders said their students were able to participate in some of the activities they wanted, with the remaining 20 percent saying students got to participate in all activities they wanted to.

Another result of being short-staffed meant there was no one to operate the

camp coffee shop, so the planning team bought truck loads of bottled water, snacks and coffee.

"More people were so thankful and happy and impressed that we offered free snacks," Goings says. "That might be a thing that we return to next year."

## When plans change

On top of changing logistics, unplanned events prompted reliance on God, Goings says.

Initial reports during Friday's power outage—caused by a blown transformer—led leaders to believe power would remain off the rest of camp, although it was ultimately restored in about an hour and a half.

During Presence Worship's acoustic set during the outage, a student from Lighthouse Church in Wichita, Kan., collapsed—she was attended to by medical staff, taken to the hospital and later cleared to return to camp—leading to corporate prayer at the edge of the room.

"We talked to several youth groups af-

terwards, and they said that time where Jake (Stemo) led spontaneous prayer was one of the most powerful moments for them all of camp," Goings says.

As the student received medical care, leaders cleared the room. Two individuals shouldered the wooden crosses on which students had earlier nailed their confessions and brought them to the field below, where speaker John Leonard, his voice carrying without amplification, encouraged students to follow Jesus' example, be empowered by the Holy Spirit and to love God and others.

"If you want to grow closer to God, lead other people closer to God," Leonard said. "Don't think that God can't use you to rescue people from the gates of hell."

Leonard concluded by inviting students to retrieve their notes from the crosses, which the team had replaced with notes reading, "You are forgiven."

"We eliminated everything but the gospel, and that's what shined that night," Goings says. "Looking back,

that's my favorite memory.... It's just fascinating how it impacted the students."

The acoustic set on the field was a student favorite, Claassen says.

"Sometimes what happens in an unplanned circumstance teaches us something that we can incorporate into our planning," he says, adding, "Even if the circumstances are not ideal or are very difficult, God can do amazing things. I think it makes us more aware of God's presence and the reality of his power and his direct interaction with us in moments of crisis or inconvenience."

Also unplanned was a night of worship that exceeded its allotted hour and lasted until 1:30 a.m.

"We (had) people come up and speak," Goings says. "That was totally not planned. ... Complete strangers before Ascent (were) circling up and praying for each other and crying and confessing of sins and repenting and glorifying God."

The evening was another moment where Goings saw God move.



Speaker John Leonard centered his four daily sessions on the theme, "Home: Remain in Christ," using John 15:1-17 as his primary text.

*Photo by Janae Rempel*



A camp-wide power outage Friday evening was one of several times Ascent camp leaders had to unexpectedly adapt to change. That evening's acoustic worship time and outdoor service was especially meaningful to many campers and staff.

*Photo by Mike Klaassen*

“On the schedule it was simply a night of worship where we can hear about missions,” Goings says. “But what it turned into being, what God used it for, was hopefully—and this is our prayer now after Ascent—that it is a moment of the start of a revival.”

### Impact

Responses to the CL survey indicate Ascent had a positive impact. Of youth leaders who responded, all said their students viewed Ascent positively and grew spiritually, and that at least one of their students took a step to begin or strengthen their relationship with Jesus.

“Ascent met each of our students in different ways,” says Drew Pankratz, youth pastor at Greenhouse Community Church in Saratoga Springs, Utah. “Some students needed this week to re-focus on Jesus and make their faith their own. Other students heard the gospel and experienced Jesus’ love for the first time.”

Others said Ascent ignited students’ passion for Christ, caused students to focus on God’s calling and less on others’ view of them, gave confidence to share Christ and prompted discussions about leadership.

Likening the planning team’s work to farmers, Goings says the team can plant seeds but is unable to make them grow.

“We would love to plan a program and move of the Holy Spirit, but it never works out the way we thought it does,” Goings says. “That’s part of the beauty of it is because even the planning team is surprised and thankful when we see God move in a big way and small ways.”

Ascent will return to Glorieta in June 2022, and Claassen says the planning team is brainstorming ways to make the experience even better.

“Now that we’ve been there and we’ve seen some of the things that are important to our group that were missing, we have ideas and we’re already talking about how we can make that happen next year,” Claassen says. “Overall, my

impression was it was a very good, positive experience that we can build on.”

—Janae Rempel

## SDC, CDC host summer camps

### District camps resume following COVID-19 break

USMB high schoolers and youth group sponsors weren’t the only ones who enjoyed a summer camp planned just for them. About 480 children and youth plus approximately 155 counselors and staff from churches in the Southern District (SDC) and Central District (CDC) Conferences at-

tended district-sponsored camps held in Kansas, Oklahoma and Minnesota.

Both districts cancelled 2020 summer camps due to the coronavirus pandemic and camp organizers were glad camps could resume in 2021.

“It was so good to be back at camp this summer,” Russ Claassen, SDC district youth minister, says. “Even amidst all of the unknowns and constant changes that were being thrown at our planning teams, it was worth it. Energy was high, and I think everyone was just glad to be together.”

### SDC camps focus on “Home”

The SDC Youth Commission has organized summer camps for grade school, middle school and high school students going back to at least 1964—a 56-year streak that was broken by COVID-19.



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When the Youth Commission was selecting the theme for its activities during the 2020-21 school year, they decided to focus on abiding in Christ and Christ as our home, Claassen says.

"We chose the theme (Home) prior to COVID-19 keeping everyone at home," he says. "Little did we know the additional meaning that 'home' would take on during COVID-19."

Camp speakers addressed the theme of abiding in Christ in age-appropriate ways, incorporating props, stories and illustrations. Kids Camp speaker was Tena Loewen, an elementary school teacher from Hillsboro, Kan. The Kids Camp Worship Band was led by Colton Olsen of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, and included musicians from a variety of SDC churches.

Junior High Camp speaker DJ Toelle, youth pastor at Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., spoke twice a day and a music team from Presence Worship, Wichita, Kan., led the camp worship times.

SDC camps supported a common offering project: raising funds for a music ministry in Niger, West Africa. Junior High Camp contributed about \$700 and Kids Camp added about \$920. Ascent attendees also gave to the project that benefitted Multiply, the North American Mennonite Brethren mission agency.

Kids Camp, for grades three to five, was held June 29 to July 2 at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kan. One hundred and forty-four campers plus 40 counselors and 27 staff enjoyed the three-night camp. Camp director J.L. Martin reports that eight students accepted Christ for the first time.

Campers got a taste of college life, sleeping in the dorms, eating in the cafeteria and attending sessions and activities at various places on the campus. The schedule was packed, with twice daily chapel times followed by mod time, meals, an all-camp activity in the evening and activity blocks in the mornings and afternoons.

The activities are a unique feature of Kids Camp. Activity options included cooking, crafts, drama, photography, science, movies, Book Club, drawing, table games, "spa" time for girls and various sports.

SDC Junior High Camp, for those who have just completed sixth, seventh and eighth grades, was held June 2-6 at Sky Ranch Cave Springs located in the northeast corner of Oklahoma. Camp director Dustin Dick, Buhler (Kan.) MB Church youth pastor, reports that the four-night summer camp drew 238 campers representing 17 churches, 37 counselors and 16 staff.

Morning sessions were followed by cabin discussion times. Afternoons included pod competitions and free time. Pods were groups of about two dozen campers who competed for points in a variety of activities, including water contests, "human" games (the human knot and human foosball), constructing a "tank" with cardboard and duct tape and pre-session games.

The shift to an afternoon of free time is one of the ways Junior High Camp differs from Kids Camp. Cave Springs' Edge zipline is Oklahoma's longest zipline and each camper could ride the zipline if they chose. The Springs waterfront offered a blob, superslide, dock, paddle boats and water inflatables. Other activities included a basketball court, sand volleyball, paintball, laser tag, skeet shooting, gaga pit, human foosball and snookball.

In 2021, the SDC Youth Commission and USMB Youth partnered to create Ascent, a new national camp for high school students, as reported in this issue of CL. While the 2021 Ascent planning team was comprised of SDC personnel, in the future planning team members will be recruited from across the USMB family, Claassen says.

## Two camps in one

In addition to Ascent, high school students in the Central District Conference



Junior high and high school campers at Sand Hill Lake Bible Camp enjoy the camp setting in the woods of Minnesota. This year the CDC camps combined had 87 campers and 38 staff.

*Photo by Karri Muff*



Following each session, SDC Kids Camp campers gathered with their counselors to reflect on what speaker Tena Loewen had shared in her messages that focused on the theme of "Home." *Photo by SDC*

had the option in 2021 of attending the district summer camp held Aug. 2-7 at Sand Hill Lake Bible Camp in Fosston, Minn. The CDC Youth Committee, partnering with churches of the former Mennonite Church USA North Central Conference, hosts the summer camp for youth ages 10 to 18.

CDC Summer Camp, coordinated by Ron and Karri Muff and Les and Gail Hostettler, both of Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church in Ogema, Minn., is really two camps in one. Campers age 10 to 13 are part of junior camp and students age 14 through 18 attend senior high camp.

Each camp typically draws 50 to 60 kids and has its own camp director and programming. Each camp has its own chapel, recreation and dorm facilities. Campers do cross paths in the dining hall and shower house. A crew of about 35 volunteers serve as counselors and staff and are assigned to a specific camp.

This summer Jeremy Allard, a pastor from Sheldon, Wis., served as the senior high speaker. Jon Fiester, pastor of Renewal MB Church, Rapid City, S.D., was the junior camp speaker.

Students at both camps spend the morning in worship, small group time and hearing from the speaker. Recreational activities, including sports, water activities and crafts, fill the afternoon. In the evening, campers spend the early evening playing games and conclude the evening with a session.

### Connections a priority

Claassen and the Hostettlers agree that camp is a place where students meet God.

SDC's Claassen says camp is a time during which God will "soften hearts, strengthen faith, find reconciliation and draw people to him."

Camp speakers, worship leaders, workshops, counselors and other camp

elements work together and are used by God as campers decide to follow Jesus or recommit their lives to living for Jesus," Claassen says.

As Les Hostettler reflects on his decades of camp experience, the sense of family and community and the growth he's seen in young people has kept him involved.

"I've had good talks late at night," Hostettler says, recalling one midnight conversation in particular. "The Lord gets our attention when we are most receptive, and if that's at 1:30 a.m., then that's okay with me."

Gail Hostettler says, "We make our plans and then watch what God does. The Spirit has done things at camp that we have stood in awe of." —*Connie Faber*

Read an extended report on SDC and CDC summer camps at <https://christian-leadermag.com/category/news/>

## Making a move

New location provides opportunities for Renewal

When Michele Fiester saw a former Chuck E. Cheese building sitting empty, she thought it would be a great space for a church.

Michele and her husband, Jon, planted Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D., in 2018, renting a conference room in the Dahl Arts Center downtown for the church's Sunday gatherings.

Two years later and cramped for space, the congregation was looking to make a move. But with lease prices reaching \$20 per square foot, finding an affordable option was proving challenging.

When, months later, the former restaurant still sat empty, one phone call changed everything. The Fieters learned the property owner would lease the space for a third of the expected rate, prompting a move for Renewal MB, which has, in turn, opened new doors for ministry in the neighborhood.

### Cramped for space

Renewal launched in 2018 with a 5 p.m. Sunday service, targeting members of the community who might not be able to attend church on Sunday morning.

But, with just one large room and an office, the conference room lacked a place for outreach events or kids programming, and not many children came.

According to youth leader Abby Hoehne, who began her time with Re-

newal as an intern from Lake Region Mennonite Church in Detroit Lakes, Minn., and has now volunteered there more than a year and a half, three or four youth might attend a church event downtown.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the congregation created a space for kids' programming by setting up temporary partitions in a hallway.

"After COVID, we weren't allowed to do that anymore, so we had nowhere for kids to go during service," Michele says. "It was just one space. Those were probably the biggest limiting factors for that particular space. It really made us pursue even harder, where is God leading us? Because we know God wants us to do more ministry than just Sunday afternoons."

### An empty building, an opportunity

In March 2020, Michele noticed the empty Chuck E. Cheese building across the interstate from the mall where she took her daughter to aerial gymnastics class. Michele says she thought the building was a nice size with plenty of windows and would be non-threatening for visitors.

"Our mission and our purpose is to reach people who have been hurt by the church or who don't want anything to do with the church, so we've always wanted a space that was very neutral," she says. "This was perfect in my mind."

When Michele suggested to Jon that Renewal should inquire about the building, she says he agreed it would be a good fit but thought it would be too expensive based on the price of other buildings they had considered.

As months passed and Michele continued to see the empty building, in December or January, she again told Jon she thought they should at least call.

When the Fieters made the call, the property manager quoted a rate of \$9 a square foot—already less than half of what was expected—causing the Fieters to pray and crunch numbers. The

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next morning, they received a text that the owner wanted to lease the building to Renewal for \$7 a square foot.

“That’s a third, pretty much, of what going rate for leasing space in Rapid City is,” Michele says. “We’re like, ‘All right, it’s meant to be. God’s basically gifting us this place.’”

So, Renewal decided to lease the 7,500-square foot unit, the largest space in a building with multiple units.

Renewal receives a monthly subsidy from the Central District Conference and has done fundraising in order to lease and remodel the space.

With Jon having construction experience—he discovered he had previously worked for the owner of the building—the owner allowed him to do the remodeling work.

After a month of 12-hour workdays, Michele says, the building was ready to open by Easter.

The new sanctuary is about the same size as what Renewal had previously, but the church now has a classroom, nursery, a commons area with a coffee shop and a commercial kitchen.

Renewal held its first service in its new space in March 2021, about one year after Michele first noticed the building sitting empty.

“We have had a lot of generous friends and families and churches that have been able to help us get to this point,” she says. “We still have a long ways to go, but it’s super exciting. God’s provided every step of the way of what we’ve needed, and it’s just been awesome to see the doors he’s opening up to us here.”

### Open doors

Renewal’s new location has provided more opportunities for outreach to people living in a nearby apartment complex.

The Knollwood Apartments across the street provide low-income housing to several thousand people, Michele says.



Due to several homicides in the community, Renewal MB Church hosted a movie night for the neighboring apartment complex inside their new facility at the request of the apartment manager. This spring the church plant leased a 7,500 square-foot space and after working on remodeling the former Chuck E. Cheese building, the congregation held its first service in the new facility in March 2021. *Photo by RMBC*

The complex is prone to gang violence, she says, and frequently makes the local news for incidents of violence.

“A lot of the stuff that’s happened has been in this neighborhood right across the street from us,” she says. “So it’s a little scary at times, but I know that God wouldn’t put us here if he didn’t have us here for a reason.”

Following the neighborhood’s second homicide in a week, the city held a neighborhood block party in early July with the theme, “Standing together against violence.”

According to a Rapid City Municipal Government Facebook post, the purpose of the event was to show community support for residents and connect

neighbors with mental health support and mentoring.

Tyler Read, community engagement coordinator for the Rapid City Police Department, said this in the Facebook post:

“The police department, the city, they can’t do all the heavy lifting on this. The community needs to be a part of this, all of the community. And there are solutions. I’ve seen it in action. Please come out and show these kids and these families that we do care, that we are invested in them, and their voice matters and their safety matters.”

The Fiesters attended the event and invited their neighbors to a monthly movie night—something the apartment

complex manager was hosting until her equipment was stolen.

Working together with the manager, Renewal contributed equipment for an outdoor movie night at the complex in June. The Fiesters borrowed a popcorn machine from sister MB congregation Bible Fellowship Church, and Renewal provided drinks and candy for the event, attended by 50 people, primarily children.

“(We) made a lot of really cool connections with people and have been able to get into the community much, much quicker, because it’s already something that they were doing that we could just step into where God’s already at work,” Michele says.

One teenager helped carry equipment back to the church after the event and has since started coming to church on his own, she says.

The next month, because of the recent homicides, the apartment manager asked if Renewal would be willing to hold the July movie night inside the church—an opportunity Michele says the church welcomed.

Again, 50 people attended, included three or four families. Seven of those children came to church the following Sunday.

“That just made my heart really glad because we have been praying for kids to come to our church and come in the building and that we would have kids to teach and love on,” she says. “It was awesome to have them show up.”

#### Expanding kids’ ministry

Throughout the week, children from the apartments have started coming across the street to the church, so

Hoehne—who hopes to join the church staff part-time and eventually be a youth pastor—has begun planning weekly lessons on Wednesdays and Sundays, with worksheets, games and supervision. Some kids come hungry, and Renewal provides food from the church food pantry.

“We’ve got to do something because these kids are not (from) strong homes, so they need somewhere healthy for them to grow, especially with Jesus,” Hoehne says. “Those kids are going to be the future leaders of our church if things keep going as they are.”

On a given Sunday, about 15 children attend church, ranging in age from 0 to 18.

“Now we (have) younger ones, and hopefully we can lead them in the right direction because there’s a lot of hurt and brokenness in those apartments,” Hoehne says. “Those kids need to hear, ‘Jesus loves you.’”

As Renewal beefs up its youth ministry, the hope is to rent a next-door unit for a youth room.

“It’s awesome to have this youth movement going when we’ve prayed for that for three years,” Michele says. “We’ve been meeting since 2018 and have not seen a lot of youth coming through our doors. It’s been really, really encouraging.”

Since March, five families from the apartment complex have started attending Renewal regularly, with two additional families coming from another complex a block down the street.

“It’s been really awesome to see how God is working, just because we moved locations,” Michele says. “It’s definitely a shot in the arm for us, so to speak—a boost of purpose.” —*Janae Rempel*

*Renewal has a security system and would like to install security cameras. The building owner has offered to contribute to the project if Renewal installs cameras for the entire building. To donate to this project, visit [www.renewalmb.church](http://www.renewalmb.church) or write the Fiesters at 10760 Canyon Place, Rapid City, SD 57702.*

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## Our joint mission

Time to again multiply impact in global missions

For decades, the Canadian Conference of MB Churches (CCMBC) and U.S. Conference of MB Churches (USMB) has joined together in ownership and partnership of a global mission agency that is now called Multiply. Multiply has gone by many other names. Names such as Board of Missions and Services (BOMAS), MB Missions and Services International (MBMSI), MB Mission and now Multiply.

On Multiply's website, the mission statement at the top of the "About" page says it simply: "As the mission agency of the MB church in the U.S. and Canada, our mandate is to help multiply disciples, churches and missional leaders in 68 countries around the world."

What began as a collective effort to send missionaries to India, now the largest national MB conference in the world, is an effort that now realizes teams and missionaries throughout the world. Many of these mission engagements have resulted in the birth of national conferences that then become a part of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB). While I won't report on ICOMB in this article, it's significant to witness how the number of national MB conferences continues to grow. Thousands upon thousands of people have become followers of Jesus through this mission endeavor. From India, DR Congo, Paraguay, Uruguay, Portugal, Lithuania, Germany, Thailand, Peru and Malawi, the list goes on and includes national conferences in most of the major continents of the world.

Many of us are aware of the recent critical challenges that Multiply has faced. These challenges include a major budget deficit incurred just months into a merger with the C2C church planting network in January 2018. To make a very long and complicated story short, this deficit, along with noteworthy leadership trials, resulted in a demerger in June 2019. Subsequently, a task force was established to look deeply into Multiply's culture and problems, ultimately delivering a report to the owner conferences in July 2020. This season was a test for Multiply's resolve,

its ability to withstand major hurdles and for remaining unified for the mission. Although the complete outcome of this test is yet to be seen, it's apparent that many positive things are now emerging from the morass.

Multiply's finances are now stable, with reserves having been considerably restored. However, finances are only one part of the puzzle and without a culture shift and new healthy pathways forward, Multiply would still be unstable. Although my involvement in Multiply has limits, my perception and evaluation are that our mission agency is returning to health. Continuing "rehab" is essential, and eagle-eye watch care over the critical changes that are still in process is paramount.

With all of that said, I believe it's time for our U.S. family to support Multiply as we once did. Trust was broken through the events listed above, and it takes time to trust once more at the same level as we did previously. Some would even say trust was shattered. But I believe we can justifiably open ourselves back up to trusting once more, building it back slowly as we watch and listen and especially as we fervently pray for our missionaries and the fundamental pieces of the organization that keep things afloat.

Pray for the selection of the next general director. Pray for the global lead team and the executive team. Pray for our missional mobilizers and missionary care personnel. Pray for those in charge of the finances and daily operations. Pray for continuing heightened transparency and accountability.

I'm aware that some individuals and USMB churches began diverting donations previously supplied to Multiply. I get it. It's difficult to invest in an agency that has broken our trust. But I want to encourage us to begin investing again in this, our mission agency. Recent stories indicate that much life transformation is happening. THAT'S why we do missions. THAT'S why we give, to help make transformation happen. It's about people—coming to know Jesus and learning how to be disciples. I'm ready to start trusting and investing in THAT—again.■



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.

## MILESTONES

### BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Crysta Thompson, Willow Greer and Jasmine Casper were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus**, Aug. 1.

Tory Somage and Fernando Garza were baptized Aug. 1 at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.** Vicki Greenbush was received as a member.

Mace McCabe, Isaac Spicer and Abby Yutzy were baptized and received as members at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church**, July 18.

Mat Cazer, Deandra Cazer, Aisha Hunter, Raegan Wilkinson, Kreg Price, Dodger Sithammavong, Olivia Hare and Debra Kinyon were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**, June 27.

John Huebert, Carissa Huebert, Avery Unruh and Kara Unruh were received June 27 as members at **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**

Josh Aquino, Jessica Aquino, Leroy Bumbaca, Manuela Lopez, Nayeli Mendez, Mike Naylor, Nori Naylor, Matilde Ochoa, Armando Zamora, Johnny Vasquez, Erica Vasquez and Kelly Friesen were received as members at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, June 13.

Kason Javorsky was baptized at **Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla.**, May 30.

Five people were baptized May 30 at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Alaina Winter, Adalynn Winter, D'Asia Cox and Colton Rempel were baptized May 9 at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**.

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 also received as members.

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

### WORKERS

Adam Johns concluded his service as youth ministry leader at **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**

Renee Marple concluded her service as facilities manager at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**, July 31.

Milt Friesen concluded his service as associate pastor for music and worship for the classical service at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Jodi Gossen concluded her service as secretary at **Crosspoint Church, Enid, Okla.**, June 4.

Travis Schmidt was installed as lead pastor at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church**, June 13. Gaylord Goertzen concluded his service as interim pastor April 25.

### DEATHS

**Berg, John S.**, Fresno, Calif., member of Bethany MB Church, Fresno, Feb. 8, 1926—March 18, 2021. Parents: Henry and Elizabeth (Beier) Berg. Spouse: Esther (Peters) Berg. Children: Marilyn Nachtigall, Carolyn Jost, Kathy Nachtigall, John D.; eight grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren.

**Brandt, Stan**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Nov. 8, 1945—July 7, 2021. Parents: Edward and Evelyn Brandt. Spouse: Carol. Children: Melanie, Heather Ward, Stacy Harder; five grandchildren.

**Buller, Johnny Roy**, Owasso, Okla., member of Discovery Church, Collinsville, Okla., June 29, 1930—Dec. 13, 2020. Parents: John P. and Katherina Rempel Buller. Spouse: Dorothy Wedel. Children: James, Allen, Ernest, Jonathan, Linda Winkler; 16 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

**Faul, Doris E.**, North Newton, Kan., member of Harvey (N.D.) MB Church, May 13, 1921—July 21, 2021. Parents: L.J. and Hulda (Graumann) Seibel. Spouse: Otto (deceased). Children: Brenda Tofteland, Julene Pottenger (deceased); three grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Faul, Jane**, Hurdsville, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., Oct. 11, 1943—Jan. 18, 2021. Parents: Vernon and Elizabeth (Fuhrman) Sommer. Spouse: Ronald. Children: Brenda Neufeld, DeeAnn Wichert, Don; six grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

**Faul, Joyce Ann**, Fargo, N.D., former member of Harvey (N.D.) MB Church, April 4, 1934—March 10, 2021. Parents: Ludwig and Hulda (Graumann) Seibel. Spouse: Willis. Children: Willa Macomber, Jocelyn Wiens, Monte, Tamara Reimche; 12 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren.

**Faul, Kenneth**, Harvey, N.D., of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, Oct. 13, 1943—July 2, 2021. Parents: David and Louise (Bader) Faul. Spouse: Karen. Children: Joe, David; five grandchildren.

**Fry, Rosalie Ann**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, May 21, 1940—July 1, 2021. Parents: Frank and Anna (Goosen) Kliever. Spouse: Charles Irving Fry. Children: Rachelle Epp, Scott, Shawn; six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

**Fryatt, David**, Reedley, Calif., of Reedley MB Church, Jan. 27, 1937—June 7, 2021. Parents: Edwin and Thelma (Cox) Fryatt. Spouse: Diane. Children: Pamela Gadea, Christopher; six grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

**Gerbrandt, Eugene**, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Oct. 23, 1928—July 4, 2021. Parents: George and Anna (Klassen) Gerbrandt. Spouse: Berdine (deceased), Rachel. Children: Stan, Rod, Dan, Becky Long; eight grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

**Harms, Tim**, Davis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, March 26, 1958—June 13, 2021. Parents: Menno and Jane (Croissant) Harms. Children: Ashley Somawang, Garrett, Courtney Davey, Mitchell; two grandchildren.

**Hostetter, Karl**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, May 17, 1932—June 16, 2021. Parents: Harry and Marjorie Hostetter. Spouse: Thelma. Children: Gregory, Douglas; four grandchildren.

**Kliever, Lowell**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Nov. 26, 1932—July 23, 2021. Parents: H.B. and Eva (Peters) Kliever. Spouse: Alvina (deceased). Children: Nancy Weis, Jerry, James, Wayne; eight grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

**Penner, Arlin LaRue**, Bentonville, Ark., Nov. 17, 1945—Dec. 28, 2020. Parents: Walter Leslie and Laverna Jost Penner. Spouse: Lois. Stepchildren: Cynthia Hammond, Trish White; six grandchildren.

**Ratzlaff, Dorothy**, Visalia, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, March 5, 1930—June 19, 2021. Parents: Peter K. and Mary (Thiesen) Warkentin. Spouse: Albert (de-

ceased). Children: Suzi Grunau; two grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

**Ratzlaff, Kenny Ray**, Bangor, Mich., former member of Corn (Okla.) MB Church, Sept. 3, 1947—July 11, 2021. Parents: ElRoy Harvey and Erma Jean Ratzlaff. Spouse: Patty Koehn. Children: Nathan, Kent; three grandchildren.

**Regier, Isaac "Junior" Stanley, Jr.**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Nov. 9, 1955—July 12, 2021. Parents: Isaac "Ike" and Ruby Regier. Spouse: Teresa. Children: Isaac "Tommy," Matthew, Timothy; seven grandchildren.

**Schultz, John L.**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Aug. 1, 1931—July 3, 2021. Parents: John and Lena (Loewen) Schultz. Spouse: Viola Ruth "Vi" Funk. Children: Donna Hensley, Darrell, Debbie Maberry (deceased); five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

**Unruh, Richard Stanley**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church and professor at Fresno Pacific University, Jan. 25, 1945—May 7, 2021. Parents: Menno and Leonora Unruh. Spouse: Pat. Children: Beth; two grandchildren.

**Vogt, John Edwin**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, July 9, 1924—May 15, 2021. Parents: Cornelius and Marie (Heidebrecht) Vogt. Spouse: Hilda Ann Thiessen (deceased). Children: Brenda Plett, Janette Brubacher, Mike; seven grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Warkentin, Larry**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church and professor at Fresno Pacific University, Aug. 14, 1940—April 5, 2021. Parents: Pete and Marie Warkentin. Spouse: Paula. Children: Rick, Rhonda Langley; two grandchildren.

## REACHING IN

### DISCIPLESHIP

**The Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, missions team hosted a "Sharing Your Faith" workshop led by Multiply missionaries serving in France.

### FELLOWSHIP

**Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, hosted a pool party Aug. 14 with free pizza and drinks.

**North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, held a singspiration ice cream social Aug. 8 hosted by the church's men's quartet. The event included worship and ice cream.

**The Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)** congregation held a summer campout July 23-25, including a worship service.

**Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, held a dinner and ice cream contest July 23 with burgers and 16 flavors of ice cream in three categories: traditional, biblical and Bakersfield.

**Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, held a potluck meal followed by sharing about the history of the church, July 18.

**Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** hosted "Church at the pond" July 18 with brunch, a worship service, testimonies and baptisms.

**The Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, congregation hosted a pool party July 18.

**The Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, congregation held a church-wide campout Aug. 6-8. The congregation hosted an all-church pizza party and pool party July 11.

**Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, held worship in the park July 11.

The congregation at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, hosted a worship event July 30 with watermelon and crullers. The congregation held a family fun night July 10 with yard games, popcorn, cotton candy, a fire truck and a movie.

**North Fresno (Calif.) Church** held a homemade ice cream contest Aug. 1. The congregation hosted a pancake breakfast July 4 before its worship service.

**Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** held an outdoor worship service June 27 with guest speaker Boun, a recipient of an Operation Christmas Child shoebox. Following the service, the congregation had a meal with proceeds going to OCC.

**The Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, congregation hosted a family fun night June 27 with food and games.

## Butler Church pastor Souk Sivongsay dies

Souk Sivongsay, 78, pastor of Butler Church's Asian Grace congregation in Fresno, Calif., died June 11, 2021. Sivongsay became pastor of Asian Grace in 2012 and served until his death.

Sivongsay is remembered as a humble man. "Perhaps the first word that comes to mind for just about anyone who knew Souk was 'humble,'" says Scott Holman, Butler Church lead pastor who served alongside Sivongsay for nearly 10 years. "His commitment to shepherd and care for his congregation was inspiring. I will miss working alongside him, his long prayers in Lao and perhaps his smile and laugh most."

Sivongsay was born Dec. 30, 1942, in Laos. He came to the United States in 1980 with his family and parents as refugees sponsored by the Christian Reformed Church. They attended a CRC church, and in September 1980 Sivongsay, his wife, Chanthalone, now deceased, and their children became Christians.

He was an air force pilot in Laos and after coming to the U.S., Sivongsay worked for Northwest Airlines for 27 years in mechanics and maintenance. He received a degree in theology from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Mo.

Sivongsay is survived by his wife, Phanh; children, Sudi (Tana) Sivongsay, Somino Sivongsay, Sipy (Billy) Cockerham; stepchildren, Phuang Phagnasay-Le, KP Phagnasay, Spud (Sheryl) Phagnasay, and Chai (Pathana) Phannaphob; seven grandchildren and eight step-grandchildren.



**Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.,** hosted a family night at the park June 23 with a meal and games for children.

**Mountain View Church, Sunnyside Campus, Fresno, Calif.,** hosted its summer kickoff June 13 with a meal and a water slide and pool for children.

## WORSHIP

**Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** held a worship night July 11.

**New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.,** hosted a worship night June 23.

**People from Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.,** gathered at Hanscom Park June 13 for music, prayer, a meal and fellowship.

## REACHING OUT LOCALLY

**Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.,** hosted a farmers' market July 30 with kids' games, balloons, bub-

bles, a meal, dance performances, giveaways, backpacks for kids and a message.

**Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.,** provided school supplies for children at Hillsboro Elementary School, funded by a grant from the Hillsboro Community Foundation, endowments and gifts from the congregation.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.,** provided 200 backpacks filled with supplies to school children in need.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.,** donated 1,643 cookies and volunteered 80 hours to its community partner, Salt + Light in June.

**Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.,** held a school supply drive in July for foster care families.

**Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.,** hosted 148 children for a week of vacation Bible school, which included teaching God's word, crafts, games and cookies. An offering of more than \$1,600 was collected for Hartland Christian Camp.

## CLEARINGHOUSE

### Local Church

**Director of Children's Ministries:** Shafter MB Church, Shafter, Calif., is currently searching for a full-time director of children's ministries. To view a full job description please go to <http://www.shaftermb.org>. Additional questions can be directed to Pat Coyle, senior pastor, at [pcoyled@shaftermb.org](mailto:pcoyled@shaftermb.org).

**Associate Pastor of Worship/Adult Discipleship:** North Oak Community Church in Hays, Kan., is seeking a full-time associate pastor of worship and adult discipleship. The position is part of a collaborative ministry team and will be responsible for overseeing the weekly corporate worship services, leading the music ministry, providing leadership for adult ministries including small groups and supporting other pastoral needs. Qualified candidates will be mature believers willing to become licensed or ordained for ministry. More information on the position can be found at <https://www.northoak.net/associate-pastor-search/>. To apply, please submit a cover letter and resume to [pastorsearch@northoak.net](mailto:pastorsearch@northoak.net).

### 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. Recent episodes include J.L. Martin, pastor of children and families at Hesston (Kan.) MB Church, providing tips for spiritually leading children; Matt Gallagher, counselor and therapist from Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., with help on raising teens; and author and speaker Mark MacDonald on how churches can be known for something significant in their communities. Subscribe on Apple, Google, or Spotify. Learn more at [usmb.org/lead-pods](http://usmb.org/lead-pods)

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From leaving college early to go to seminary, to moving out of state for an unpaid internship. I then moved halfway across the United States to California to youth pastor at Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif., four years ago.

I continue to see God's heart for all people. He uses my mistakes, experiences and personality to empathize with others and to reach more students to encounter the life-change, healing and freedom that come from Jesus alone!■

## Wichita church launches new name

First MB Church in Wichita, Kan., has changed its name to Ridgepoint Church, launching its new name June 13, 2021, with worship, food trucks, inflatables, yard games and more.

Lead pastor Brent Warkentin says the church's former name was confusing for some people.

"While we love our denomination and are very loyal to it, the name was a source of confusion to many people and was a hindrance keeping them from attending," Warkentin says. "Regularly, people asked us, 'What are Mennonites?' and 'Are you Amish?' or told us, 'We're not Mennonite—we can't come.'"

The congregation voted to change its name in November 2019 and, after progress was slowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, affirmed Ridgepoint Church as its new name in February 2021.

"From the beginning we wanted this decision to be made by our church family—not a select group of leaders or staff," Warkentin says.

Members of the congregation submitted approximately 250 potential names, a list narrowed to 150 after duplicates and names of other churches were removed. From there, 50 people representing a cross section of ages, staff, leaders and volunteers narrowed the list to 25, Warkentin says, before a Name Change Team reduced the list to seven.

After two rounds of voting, the congregation selected Ridgepoint.

"Our church's mission is to help people find and follow Jesus," Warkentin says. "We live near a major road, neighborhood and several businesses that have the word 'Ridge' in them, and we want to be more intentional and do a better job of pointing our community to Jesus."

The name change has already resulted in new visitors. "In the first weeks since rebranding and posting our new name to our outdoor sign, we've already had a number of families visit who specifically told us they saw our name change and decided to come," Warkentin says.

## Committed to transparency

Transparency is sharing information, exposing thoughts

When I agreed to take on the responsibility of being the USMB national director back in 2016, I made a commitment to our constituency and to myself that I would seek to be as transparent as possible. I remain committed to that, although I have found it frustrating at times because circumstances don't always allow for as much transparency as I would like to provide. There are many times that I would like to say something about something only to realize that if I do, I'll be breaking a confidence or will be speaking harmfully about someone or what they have done. So, it's a challenge and a dance to know how much to reveal at times.

But after evaluating the openness that I've committed myself to, I realized I can do a better job of being more open. When I look at Jesus' ministry, I see transparency. Although he spoke in parables that weren't always easy to understand, he was using that as a novel method of teaching. It got people thinking and asking deep questions. But when Jesus interacted with those closest to him, he was crystal clear, to the point and sometimes pretty intense in saying what was what. So, as I look at that model, I need to be more like Jesus.

That doesn't mean being brutally opinionated or making hurtful comments just because I think something is true. It means revealing pertinent and useful information whenever possible. It means exposing my own feelings and thoughts about things but doing so as a sound leader and not as a complainer, gossip, busy-body or dripping faucet.

Being transparent also means admitting that I have made a lot of mistakes over the past five years while in this role. Many mistakes. It's amazing that God

not only forgives me for those but oftentimes also mitigates the ramifications of my blunders. He's good at that. Yet for the many times that I have not done this well—being appropriately transparent—I apologize to you. I pray to be able to do better in the future.

I'll be honest—sometimes I'm quite drained by the tough issues that come to me on almost a daily basis. Yet, I feel that God has placed me in this role for a purpose. Obviously, I don't enjoy many of the demanding problems that come my way, but God gives grace and just enough strength to deal with them. I think it's through the prayers of many people that God graciously acts and supplies what's needed.

A huge part of this is also knowing that I certainly don't have all the answers about matters. So, I invite and will listen to feedback provided in a Christ-like way. When solutions aren't clear, it helps to have more opinions and good interactive conversations. It's quite apparent to me that others have sound insights and opinions that can improve future decisions—and this is a core benefit of being transparent. So, write to me, call me, share with me.

You may be thinking that declaring to be more transparent is just being pretentious and self-serving. That's not at all what I'm after. Communicating in a clear, open manner hopefully also exposes my inner motives. I want to be "seen straight through"—so that no one suspects of any posing or pretending.

As we continue being a people called by God to live according to his Word and principles, serving him and serving others, may we all aspire to be more open with one another, in ways that truly build up the body of Christ.■



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

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