

CHRISTIAN LEADER

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LUKE 19:10

USMB GATHERING 2022

USMB National Pastors' Conference and National Convention

July 26 - 30, 2022

Stoney Creek Hotel and Conference Center
Independence, Missouri (northeast Kansas City)

www.usmb.org

#usmb2022

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Influencing

We are all called to share our faith

When U.S. Mennonite Brethren convene this summer for USMB Gathering 2022, evangelism will be emphasized, and so we chose to also focus on evangelism in this first *Christian Leader* issue of 2022. Our goal is that these essays encourage and equip us to obey Jesus' command to spread the good news and to do so with a sense of urgency.

In the opening essay, USMB church planter Phil Wiebe says that evangelism is not optional, even for people like himself who see themselves as a "normal guy," not an evangelist. I resonate with Wiebe's confession. On occasion I've attempted to strike up a conversation with the person beside me on an airplane with the intention of sharing my faith, however in general I think of myself as a disciple not an evangelist. But Wiebe goes on to say that God asks all of us—not just those with certain spiritual gifts or an outgoing personality—to be fishers of men.

Author and pastor Gary Comer, one of the Gathering speakers, quickly said yes when asked to write an article for this issue. In his essay, Comer recounts his "conversion" from being a "teller" to an "influencer." Comer is convinced that a relational approach to evangelism is the best way to reach others with God's good news. He'll give us more details this summer about rethinking evangelism.

The Sunday school class I attend is studying the book of Acts, and recently we discussed the story of Philip and the Ethiopian finance minister recorded in Acts 8:26-40. Philip is given the opportunity to influence the court official, and he takes a deep breath (vs 35, NTE) and jumps into the chariot and the conversation. The final question in our study guide was, "How can you figuratively get into someone's chariot and ride along so that you have the opportunity to tell the good news about Jesus Christ?"

While I don't feel comfortable being an "evangelist," the idea of being an influencer is not as daunting. If you're thinking of a social media influencer, that might be intimidating. But I'm thinking about the people we influence through ordinary interactions and the ripple effect that our influence can have. I want to be alert to the opportunities I have to get in the chariot with folks who don't know Jesus, to ride along with those who know of Jesus but haven't committed themselves to him and to spend time with fellow disciples who would welcome someone to ride along with them. This year, I want to listen for God's Spirit prompting me to get in someone else's chariot. I invite you to do the same. ▀



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Gary Comer to speak at convention

USMB Gathering 2022, which includes the USMB National Pastors' Conference and National Convention, will be held in

Independence, Mo., July 26-30, 2022, with Gary Comer, author, professor and founder of Soul Whisperer Ministry, speaking during both events.



At the pastors' conference, Comer will lead interactive sessions based on his newest book, *ReMission*. Comer will also serve as opening speaker for the national convention, focusing on material from his book, *Soul Whisperer*, which addresses why the church must change the way it views evangelism.

Additional national convention speakers will be announced at a later time.

Save the date and plan to attend USMB Gathering 2022, where you will experience community, support our national MB family and be encouraged, challenged and resourced. We have missed in-person fellowship and look forward to gathering as a USMB family in July. —USMB

Giving Tuesday donations will fund core commitments

Donations to USMB on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021, totaled \$21,465. Donations will help fund USMB's three core commitments: leadership development, including the new Leadership Pipeline; church mul-

tiplication and evangelism and the new Church Planting Council; and discipling through a varied lineup of LEAD initiatives.

"Giving Tuesday funds have greatly helped us over the years to resource USMB mission and ministry activity among our MB family of churches," says USMB national director Don Morris.

Donors have contributed \$234,343 in the eight years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, a global day of generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. —USMB

New cohorts coming in February

A new lineup of LEAD Cohorts is coming in February, covering topics such as church planting, meeting missionaries, youth ministry, children's ministry and more. LEAD Cohorts are free online meeting places for anyone. The only cost is for books or materials as recommended by the cohort leader. Cohorts typically meet online via Zoom for about an hour every two weeks over a three-month span. Updated cohort information and links to sign up will be available in early 2022 at <http://www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts/>. —USMB

Leadership Board meets in October

The USMB Leadership Board met Oct. 29-30, 2021, in Phoenix, Ariz. In addition to hearing various reports and discussing a number of issues, the board took on four recommendations. The board:

- approved a sabbatical for Don Morris, national director, from April to June 2022.
- affirmed the *Christian Leader* Review report and recommendations. See story on page 25.

- affirmed Connie Nicholson, children's pastor at North Fresno Church, Fresno, Calif., as a member of the USMB Board of Faith and Life.

- approved the 2022 budget of \$964,500 as presented with a small adjustment made for ICOMB support.

In other business, the Leadership Board discussed the need to select new representatives to Mennonite World Conference.

It was reported that the National Strategy Team has suggested that USMB discontinue co-sponsoring webinars with other groups, given recent webinars that were not vetted well and included content that prompted negative responses.

In his report, National Director Morris gave an update on the Church Planting Council, including the names of district representatives: Ed Boschman, Pacific; Brian Harris, Southern; Henri Ngolo, Eastern; Christian Kohs, Central; and Aaron Hernandez, LAMB. Two at-large members and the church plant mobilizer will be added.

The board also heard reports from the Board of Faith and Life, USMB Youth, MB Foundation, Hispanic Council, Multiply and the district ministers. Donna Sullivan reported on plans for Gathering 2022 and Leadership Board chair Luke Haidle reported on meetings with the Canadian Conference of MB Churches. —CL

CDC approves constitutional changes

When the Central District Conference (CDC) gathered Nov. 5-6, 2021, for its 111th convention, business sessions included a vote to update the CDC constitution, times of celebration and candid discussions.

Friday's sessions included celebrations. Holy Jerusalem Pentecost Church, Coralville, Iowa, and Grace

Tabernacle Ministries Church, Indianapolis, Ind., were welcomed into the district. Representatives from Omaha's Iglesia Agua Viva joined CDC treasurer Rick Walter on the stage to celebrate that the church has completed payment on its loan from the district. Delegates also welcomed two new lead pastors to the CDC: Jon Annin, pastor at Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.; and Stuart Curry, pastor at Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, S.D.

Delegates approved changes to the constitution and bylaws. Proposed changes included removing references to the General Conference, which has dissolved, and bringing the constitution up-to-date with current practices. A new introductory statement was added that articulates the CDC vision and emphasizes its commitment to conservative theology.

Several speakers, including Luke Haidle, USMB Leadership Board chair and pastor of Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., and Don Morris, USMB national director, addressed concerns and questions CDC churches have about recent webinars sponsored by USMB, Christian Leader articles and events in the Pacific District Conference. Moderator John Langer announced that a task force will be formed to gather information and report to the CDC Executive Board about "where we are at theologically as a district," said task force chair Coalt Robinson, pastor of Bethel MB Church, Yale, SD.

Speaker Andy Owen, Multiply missionary, focused on the convention theme of "Therefore," taken from Matthew 28:18-20.—CL

PDC convention meets in Arizona

Seventy-seven delegates and 25 guests gathered at Axiom Church in Peoria, Ariz., for the Pacific District Conference convention Nov. 5-6,

2021. The theme was, "Relevant, Revitalized, Reproducing." Joshua Butler, co-lead pastor of Redemption Tempe, served as guest speaker.

District minister Jordan Ringhofer issued invitations for celebration and confession during the two-day event, acknowledging the diversity of the body and issuing a call for unity.

"We are interdependent churches," Ringhofer said. "We depend on one another."

Diversity was evident as delegates navigated sometimes tension-filled topics during the two-day convention. In his executive board report, moderator Pat Coyle touched on two situations he described as "deep waters"—a situation involving former district minister Gary Wall and the discussion being held by the Willow Avenue Mennonite Church congregation in Clovis, Calif., about becoming an LGBTQ+ affirming congregation.

Delegates approved a proposed amendment to a resolution passed in 2019 to increase the maximum corpus distribution for two years to fund hiring a new director of church planting and leadership development. Delegates also passed the proposed 2022 budget of \$636,027.

After lengthy discussion surrounding the nomination ballot, delegates held an election, and, in other business, heard reports from conference boards, church planters and missionaries and Fresno Pacific University, including an announcement of President Joseph Jones' intention to retire.—CL

"Resilient" theme of SDYC

"Resilient" was the theme when more than 360 high school students, leaders and event volunteers gathered Nov. 19-21 in Hesston, Kan., for the Southern District Youth Conference (SDYC) hosted by Hesston MB Church. The event, attended by 18

churches, included sessions, workshops, worship, free time, and late-night activities.



Speaking from the book of Daniel, Ryan Schadler, a former member of the University of Kansas football team currently serving as the Wichita (Kan.) Young Life College Director, spoke about Daniel's resiliency and uncompromising faith in challenging circumstances.

Students could choose two of 14 workshops to attend. An offering of more than \$900 was collected for Multiply's Ukrainian MB Summer Camp ministry.

Kyle Goings, Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., concluded his term on the Youth Commission. Derrick Austin, Cross Timbers Church in Edmond, Okla., and Michael Klaassen, Parkview MB Church in Hillsboro, Kan., were affirmed as new Youth Commission members.—CL

CDYC gathers in Iowa

The Central District Youth Conference (CDYC) was held at Inspiration Hills Camp near Inwood, Iowa, Nov. 18-21, 2021. Students and adults representing 10 churches and four states attended the event, which included sessions, service projects and late-night activities.

Dustin Galyon, owner of Galyon LLC: Keynotes and Seminars, and head coach of the men's golf program at Friends University in Wichita, Kan., was the speaker. Galyon's message topics included taking steps of obedience in following Jesus, identity, accountability leading to healing and hope and the story of David and Goliath.

Students participated in one of three service projects in Sioux Falls, S.D., Friday afternoon, with most helping with Thanksgiving preparations at the Union Gospel Mission.—CL

Davis to serve as U.S. ICOMB advocate

Bob Davis, of the Multiply Global Lead Team, has been affirmed as the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) U.S. advocate. Davis, who was named to this new position by ICOMB, Multiply and USMB, will represent ICOMB to the USMB churches.



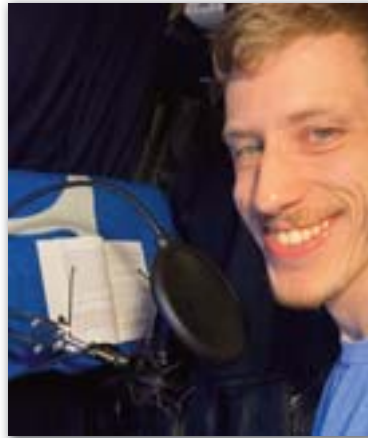
Since 2006, Davis has served with Multiply, the North American MB mission agency, first as a long-term missionary in Thailand and since 2018 as a regional leader and member of the Global Lead Team. Davis and his wife, Chris, divide their time between North America and Asia, where they serve at The Changed Life Center in Chiang Rai.

Davis, who has attended four ICOMB Summits as a translator, will continue to serve with Multiply while representing ICOMB, helping to facilitate engagement between USMB churches and the global family of MB churches and conferences.

ICOMB, the global family of MB churches, exists to connect, strengthen and expand its partner national conferences. ICOMB member conferences currently number 22 and The Philippines, Thailand, Uganda and Ukraine are in line to join.

—ICOMB

5 minutes with...



Tim Schoeneberg

To his surprise, Tim Schoeneberg's Sacred Music major at Tabor College prepared him for more than his role as director of worship at Ebenfeld MB Church in Hillsboro, Kan. It also gave him the technical skills for a new gig narrating audiobooks. He recently released his first book, the audio version of *Hungering for God* by Andy Ripley.

How did your education prepare you for this?

I used YouTube videos to teach myself the techniques for recording books. If I hadn't had the required Introduction to Worship Technology course that taught me how to manipulate sound through a sound board and edit recordings in a studio, I wouldn't have been able to understand what the tutorials were saying.

What else did you have to learn?

When you're next to a microphone, it's picking up all the clicks and pops your mouth makes. It kind of sounds like you're a mouth breather. And if you've just eaten, it sounds like you're in a flood. The tutorials teach you the basics of how to clear out your instrument and eliminate mouth noises.

How do you get into this?

Amazon created a website called acx.com to connect authors and narrators for audio books posted on Amazon, Audible and iTunes. I created my profile that gives authors a general description like the fact that I'm a recent college graduate with a degree related to vocal performance and what kind of material I'm interested in reading. I had 19 auditions before I got this book.

What are authors looking for in a reader?

They are looking for a conversational reader, someone who sounds like they're talking with someone, not at them. An author also wants a good match for their content. Someone who has a doctorate would read a book differently than a storyteller. The books I engage with are non-fiction. In my profile I chose religious books and business books.

What kind of book would you not audition for?

When I look at books, I research the author and on the book as much as I can. I have to feel that the content is worthwhile and the author has a good reputation. As a church minister I have a voice and need to read material that glorifies God.

What are some of the challenges?

Your voice is like a muscle. It can get tired. You have to keep building and strengthening it. And there's a lot of time commitment. People starting out don't make a lot of money on audio books. But as a worship leader this work can be part of my continued education and for now it helps supplement my quarter-time ministry role.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Great is his faithfulness

Every time I'm ready to give up, God is there

I can't count the times I've told God I was done. I'm a Latina, born into a low socioeconomic community in Dinuba, Calif., into a cycle of brokenness. The pain and loss I've experienced in my life has at times caused me to want to give up.

But each time I thought I'd reached the end of my rope, God showed me he's not done with me. God has been faithful, and I've learned to never give up.

My grandparents migrated from Mexico to the U.S., and my family history includes abuse, gangs, violence and drugs. Even though I saw so much brokenness around me, I knew I was different. My family only went to church when my parents had issues—they later divorced—but I somehow knew God was there.

When I was 11, I gave my life to Christ at a revival. At my baptism, I came out of the water and felt the tangible presence of God's Spirit. I think God knew I needed proof of his presence because the following years were extremely tough as my health declined.

I started losing my hair and coughing up blood. Inflammation caused my red blood cells to burst and come to the surface. I developed a tumor above my eye, and it became difficult to walk, meaning I had to be bathed and spoon-fed. I spent countless days in the hospital, but doctors couldn't figure out what was wrong.

When I was 16, an angel appeared to me in a dream. I was so tired of being in pain that I happily thought I had reached the end of my life. But the angel said, "It is not time to go yet. God still has so much more for you." I woke up sobbing. The next day, doctors diagnosed me with a rare autoimmune disease.

Because I was allergic to the medication used to put the disease in remission, doctors gave me a steroid and low dose of chemotherapy, but nothing seemed to get my body to cooperate. I wasn't always bedridden, and on my good days, I coped

with drugs and partying. In my family, I was not taught how to process our grief; we drank our pain away.

By the time I was 23, and without much family support, I was done. So, after a week of partying, I took a bottle of pain pills to end my life. I shouldn't have woken up the next morning, but I did. I lay there paralyzed, not knowing if I was alive or dead. God echoed the angel's words: "It is not time for you to go. I still have so much more for you."

From there I began to correct my course. God got in the mud with me and met me where I was. It didn't matter that I was broken and on drugs. He left the 99 for the one. His love, grace and patience won me over.

I can't say my life changed overnight—I had to work to break a lot of generational cycles—but I accepted God's invitation to do life together.

The real defining moment came when I had a baby. Doctors had told me I wouldn't be able to have children, but hearing I couldn't have something made me want it even more. I prayed for a miracle baby, and God gave me a daughter. Because I didn't want her to experience the brokenness I had growing up, I started going to church.

It was just my daughter and I when I met and married my husband, Leo, who was also divorced. My health had improved by this point, but when we wanted to grow our family, I couldn't get pregnant. Finally, through fertility treatments, I got pregnant with identical twins. After I got pregnant, the disease went into remission. But I lost one of the babies. The pain and circumstances surrounding the event tormented me. I remember looking at my belly and promising that when I gave birth, I was going to physically harm the person I believed caused the loss.

I carried both babies to term. Every week, my heart broke as I faced the fact that I would only bring one baby home alive. After a traumatic

birth, anger and resentment grew stronger in me. Again, I was done, but I knew I couldn't break generational cycles if I was in jail.

I told God I couldn't carry the anger any longer, and then I heard Christian rapper Bryann Trejo share his testimony of forgiveness after his twin brother was fatally shot. Because he decided to forgive, I saw that I could do the same thing. From that moment on, I've given God my all.

When Leo and I heard that Bryann was coming to Bakersfield, we organized an outreach event focused on reaching the streets—the gang members, drug addicts, homeless, prostitutes—because that's where we came from. Hundreds attended, and peo-

We chose to surrender and not give up. God has been working with us, and now we are working together to bring people to him. I have joy and urgency to reach the lost right here in our community. If God can bring redemption, restoration and healing to Leo and me, he can do it for anybody.

I am the fruit of Jesus going out of his way to meet the woman at the well. Like for her, it just took one encounter with Jesus to change my whole life. I firmly believe that if he did it for me, he can do it for others, and I want God to use me as a vessel to reach the lost. It is about meeting people where they are and loving them, getting in the mud and walking them through it. That is where true

“

God got in the mud with me and met me where I was. It didn't matter that I was broken and on drugs. He left the 99 for the one. His love, grace and patience won me over.

”

ple gave their lives to Christ, laying their guns and drugs down on the altar.

I discovered that every time I served, God gave me peace and healing. I started teaching a life skills class at a homeless shelter, and Leo began an apprentice program teaching young men to cut hair in order to provide an alternative to selling drugs or working in the fields. Little by little, outreach has turned into the way Leo and I live our lives.

transformation takes place. I get to plant seeds that I know will grow because his Word never returns void.

God's not done with me yet. I'm like a butterfly coming out of a cocoon. I feel like I've gotten a second act. I'm in alignment with God and am finally walking into my destiny. Every day I choose to surrender and pick up my cross, and I want to encourage others to do the same. ▀



Cece Olea is community strategies director at New Life Community in Dinuba, Calif. A Latina and first-generation college graduate, she is passionate about reaching the lost and being the hands and feet of Jesus. Olea is pursuing master's degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy and Ministry Leadership and Culture at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. She and her husband, Leo, have three daughters and one son.

By Aaron Myers

OPENING THE DOOR

Three ways to
initiate more
conversations
about our faith
in Jesus

How do we have conversations about Jesus and share our faith in everyday life? This is the question I am asked most frequently when I lead evangelism training. Most of us know that we should share about Jesus, but we just don't know how to do it.

Many of us walk in a sort of low-grade fear that if we try to bring Jesus into a conversation at work we will be summarily rejected or worse, fired from our jobs. If you've struggled to share the good news of Jesus at work, in your neighborhood or in the community, I'd like to offer three simple suggestions that will open doors to more gospel conversations.

Begin with curiosity

A place to begin is with curiosity. Sue Warnke, a follower of Christ serving in the San Francisco tech industry, recounts the time she was insecure about leading an upcoming sales meeting with a potential client. Her boss listened patiently and then offered simple words of advice, "Be fascinated. Don't try to be fascinating."

Warnke instinctively applied this advice to sharing her faith at work. She began being fascinated by prayerfully asking two questions as opportunity arose that allowed her to hear the stories of others: What is your faith background? How did you grow up?

These questions don't pin a person down into a defensive posture but simply allow them to share their journey. As we listen with an attitude of prayer, the Holy Spirit will help us hear the core concerns of their heart and to then know how to respond in ways that help them draw closer to Jesus.

Lifestyle of faith

Another way to be more active in sharing our faith anywhere, anytime with anyone starts with the shema, the ancient statement and prayer of the Jewish people found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

The shema paints a picture of a lifestyle of faith that no one can miss. It is not pushy, but it is out in the open. If we believe that the harvest is plentiful (Luke 10:2) and that the Father is drawing people to Jesus (John 6:44) then we need to live conspicuous lives of faith so that those seeking truth know who to come to with their questions.

It can be as simple as wearing a cross, posting a Bible verse at your desk or including a verse or important quote in your email signature. Further, as we are asking good questions and listening prayerfully to our friends, we can find ways to share stories from the Bible by saying, "That reminds me of . . ." and then sharing a relevant story of Jesus from the Gospels.

One way to initiate gospel conversations that I've found particularly helpful is to simply ask if I can pray when someone shares a challenge they are facing. If they hesitate, I follow up by asking, "If God could do a miracle in your life, what would you want him to do?" I then pray a quick prayer right then and there

with them. Prayer is a tangible act of kindness that few people decline and which hands off the heavy lifting to God. If God meets their needs, they're going to want to know him more.

"Loving loudly"

In Luke 7, Jesus is approached by a group of Jewish elders who plead with him to heal the son of a centurion who they love and value. It seems this centurion has done much for them, going so far as to fund the building of their synagogue. This man has loved so well that those who should have been his avowed enemies respond to his crisis with love and sacrifice.

A friend of mine calls this 'loving loudly.' When we love loudly, people take notice, and opportunities for gospel conversations arise naturally. When we respond to a co-worker's complaints of being stretched too thin with an offer to go make copies for them, that is loving loudly.

When we hear about a neighbor's illness and organize meals and make sure their lawn gets mowed, that is loving loudly. When we offer to go out of our way to help carpool another family's kids to after-school activities, that too is loving loudly.

Loving loudly at work, in the neighborhood and in your community will inevitably open doors to share about the love of Jesus.

As we find ourselves having more conversations about faith, we need to be prepared to share the truth of the gospel because in the end, "faith comes by hearing, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17).

When Jesus encounters the woman at the well in John 4, she returns to her village and says, "Come see a man who knew everything about me (Her Story). Could he be the Messiah (God's Story)?" Then she brought the whole village back to Jesus.

This story is instructive for several reasons. First, if Jesus thought it a good idea to use this particular woman, he can certainly use you. Second, this story helps us know what to share. We can begin by sharing our story, our personal testimony or a story of God's working in our life.

We also need to know how to declare the good news about Jesus. Find a simple gospel tool that will allow you to share the story in less than three minutes. My go-to resource is called the "three circles gospel." (To learn more about the "three circles gospel" tool, read this article: <https://www.everywhereeverywhere.org/articles/three-circles>).

And finally, the woman at the well brings her neighbors back to Jesus, and we can do that too. Perhaps the most powerful step you can take in the life of an unbeliever is to invite them to read one of the gospels with you. Bring them to Jesus and let Jesus speak for himself through His living and active word.

If we live a life of curiosity, if we live out a shema lifestyle and if we love loudly, we will find ourselves having more opportunities to share the hope we have in Jesus. And as we do that, we will begin to see our workplace, neighborhood and community transformed as more and more people step out of the darkness and into the light of Christ.

Aaron Myers is the digital outreach director for Crescent Project, an organization focused on seeing the day when every Muslim has an opportunity to respond to the gospel and be connected with a true follower of Jesus. Aaron, his wife and two teenagers live in South Dakota.



Effective fishing

How
to be a
church
that
empowers
believers
to share
their
faith

By Phil Wiebe

I am not an evangelist. I am super uncomfortable walking up to people and telling them about Jesus. Handing out tracts feels weird, and my insecurities with listening to the Holy Spirit's promptings to talk to strangers often leads me to let them walk on by. I freeze up even more when it comes to family and friends.

I am just a normal guy who fails, sins regularly, doesn't love preaching and struggles with a healthy prayer life and regular Bible reading. But I love Jesus and believe he is my King. He has called us to the Great Commission, and that means evangelism is not optional.

Unfortunately, for years, when I heard "evangelist" I thought of a super Christian—someone who is special, has the answers and is convincing. I am none of these. I am a pig farmer from the Canadian prairies who went to Bible college for a good time, not an education, and ended up pastoring in Utah because it sounded like a good adventure.

That adventure has turned into my entire adulthood pastoring in Utah. It is here that my view on evangelism has changed as I have witnessed countless people find Jesus for the first time. I have been blessed to have been given a front row seat to eternity. Here is where evangelism changed for me.

I believe there are other "average" Christians like me. They struggle with sharing their faith and don't think of themselves as evangelists. What I have learned in Utah is that we can become people who do this. Sharing my faith has become easier because the churches I have been a part of have made it easier. When our churches think strategically about sharing the gospel, our churches become places where people find Jesus and we become active participants in the body of Christ.

So, here are some of the strategic ideas that we have landed on for how we average Christians can become above-average at reaching our community here in Tooele County, Utah. A bunch of our ideas come from Pastor Paul Robie at South Mountain Community Church, a

very effective USMB church here in Utah. The church I am a part of developed others given our context.

These are not the answers for being a strategic church—there are all kinds of churches that reach all kinds of people—but hopefully some of these ideas can help you as they have helped us.

Idea 1: Context matters. Your context matters a lot. City people are not reached in the same way as country people. Conservative people are not reached the same way as you would reach liberal people.

When you go fishing, you bait for the fish you are trying to catch. If you want to be an effective fisherman, you should really figure out what kind of fish you have in your pond. In our case, the largest school of fish is conservative, religiously trapped people who typically have some connection to the Church of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons). You would need to figure out your context, but our fish are like this:

- They are used to going to church on Sunday.
- They are accustomed to having nice church buildings.
- They are used to having the same experience to any Mormon church they attend.
- They are religiously trapped.
- They are used to congregations that max out around 300 to 400.

This is why our church service is on Sunday morning and is in an actual building, not a school or theater.

Teaching grace is important to us. We make sure that everything we teach can be understood by teenagers. We don't use Christianese language without explaining it. We want people to understand and know Jesus, not be confused by theological terms that I can't even understand.

There is certainly more to it, but the main point is to be strategic in your context. We designed Sunday morning for the guest, because in our context the people we are trying to reach are used to church on Sunday morning. Everything we do during the week is designed for the believer.

Idea 2: Represent. If the gospel is the truth, then Jesus doesn't need salesmen, he needs representatives. Think about this by answering two questions: Who is argued into heaven? Who can touch a person's soul?

The answer to the first question is nobody. Salvation is not a "get out of hell free" card that we talk people into purchasing. Jesus wants a relationship with us. People need to know Jesus and his love for them. The best way to communicate this is to live it, show it and let people know who you belong to. Sometimes that is as easy as telling them you go to church.

The answer to the second question is that only Jesus touches souls. This means he is the only one who converts people. We have seen that clearly here in Utah.

Twice a year, we send a mailer to every home in our county letting the community know that our church is here and inviting them to join us for a new sermon series. Do they get junk mail and then show up at church and get saved? I don't think so.

Jesus is already working on them long before they get a flyer from a random church in a strip mall. We just create a place for Jesus to send his children. He is doing the converting. We get to represent him to our neighbors, friends and families.

Idea 3: The church is people. The church is not the program or the services, small groups, music, sermon, building or anything we use to worship the King. The church is called the body or the bride. It is alive! It is the people!

At some point we must own the fact that too often we call our "methods" of worship the church. All these things are what we use to worship Jesus. They help us connect with the King, but at the end of the day Jesus is the King, worthy of worship regardless of our methods.

If our methods are not the church, then we have huge freedom in how we worship Jesus. We can use our methods to represent Jesus in our context. The style of music can be used as bait for fishing. The style of preaching can be used for fishing. The service times, building and programs can all be used for fishing. Once you know your fish and what part of the lake they are in, you can use your methods to start catching them.

Final thoughts

I am not an evangelist, but the King and eternity are very real. Humanity belongs to Jesus. We have limited time to fish. I cannot say I am not an evangelist and use that as an excuse to not share the gospel. We are called to be fishers of men, so I want to figure out how to fish. I could cast my line and hope for the best, but I would rather take my boat to where the fish are and catch the most fish I can in the shortest amount of time. When I die, my ability to carry out the Great Commission ends.

I have shared ideas that I have seen work, and as I am involved in carrying out these ideas in our context, I close by saying always, always, always pray for the lost, ask Jesus to let you be part of the process, have non-Christian friends, be available and let Jesus do the heavy lifting. You can do that no matter what church you are a part of.

I love talking church with people, so if anyone would like to dig further, shoot me an email: phil@lakeview-churchutah.com. I am not an expert at any of this—just privileged to be invited along for the ride.

Phil Wiebe is the lead pastor of Lakeview Church in Utah and is the campus pastor of the Lakeview Church Stansbury Park campus.



By Gary Comer

This is my conversion story. Not my salvation story but the testimony of how I arrived at writing a whole book on changing how we view evangelism. Though at first blush this inkling of a thought might not seem significant to you, it landed me a teaching position at a highly prestigious seminary and has garnered an invitation to address U.S. Mennonite Brethren this July.

Though not everyone will see an urgency for change, these ideas hold something pertinent for Christians everywhere. It breathes the air of potential and promise to foster gospel growth in any believer and any church in the land.

I became a Christian while in college. Enthusiasm over my newfound faith was off the charts! Within weeks I was spending my free time sharing my faith on a major university campus. You might say, I epitomized the committed gospel “teller.”

Three days a week we ventured out in pairs to introduce ourselves to fellow students with the goal of explaining the gospel. I loved it—it was my gift after all! But over years of seeing less and less fruit from those cold-call efforts and after more than a decade of planting two churches, some-

thing seismic shifted in my thinking. Actually it was a series of tremors that hit simultaneously like falling dominos.

Domino 1: How do we reach those who begin further out?

A major tremor occurred when a desperate Christian wife introduced me to her entrenched atheistic husband. She handed him off to me with a despairing look, saying, “I’ve tried, but I can’t get through to him.” Not knowing what to do, I did something right. I asked my new atheist friend, David, if he would be willing to meet each week to discuss our beliefs, or in his case, the lack thereof.

Then, as if one skeptic was not enough, God brought a second skeptic from a premarital counseling connection into my life. Since the invitation to talk worked once, I gave it a second try. Yes, both were open to meet. The intuition set in motion results I could never have imagined.

After meeting weekly for nine and six months, respectively, both individuals came to faith, and I stepped back to take in what had transpired. On my whiteboard, I diagrammed three progressions each skeptic friend had

made. Later, I added a fourth. If it had only been one, I might not have seen it, but since God sent two to my door, these progressions came into focus. I noted how I would not have reached either one if I had not worked through sequential steps, if we had not made a journey through them together.

While studying John 4, the Samaritan woman's words jumped off the page as a prophetic word to our time: "You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep" (4:11). With numbers rising for those who are irreligious to the point of not being open to attend a church, reaching spiritually distant souls felt like looking down a well without a means to draw. I asked: Do we have an evangelism paradigm that is conducive to reaching people who begin further out? Do we have enough relational tools to enable the journey of processing to unfold? This critique birthed my engagement model, the Relational Evangelism Process.

Domino 2: How do we re-enlist and re-equip our members?

At the time when God was opening my mind to where we might need to go with evangelism, I was on staff at a major church in California. The conviction for a new paradigm was fortified when I saw Christian friends "checking out" from evangelism. I bumped up against negative "roll of the eyes" reactions in outreach and compassion ministries and an overall rejection from church members to the way evangelism was widely taught. Most didn't

want to have anything to do with what I call the one-hit-wonder pitch to a stranger. Christians deemed the "telling" emphasis as unnatural and insensitive to people's needs—and they didn't believe it would work, either.

It broke me to hear the visceral dissing of something so close to the heart of the Father. I made one big conclusion: The way people perceive evangelism is our greatest hindrance. We must see evangelism differently—in a way that is authentic and effective, so we can believe in it again. From the blank stares of believers in my trainings, many who had little clue on how to go about reaching unsaved people around them, it was rather obvious that we needed another kind of knowledge as well.

Inspiration to close the "know how" gap came from defining a repertoire of skills. Bereft of mission skills, evangelistic opportunities right before us fall away. We parallel the disciples in John 4 off on a fellowship food run instead of Jesus who has a thrilling conversation with a lost spiritually thirsting woman at a well.

How do we get positioned relationally beside a nonbeliever? How do we connect and deepen relationally so influence has a chance? How do we open up meaningful dialogues? How do we share our faith in a way that is resonant? How do we break through in reaching them? The need to address each of these dimensions with viable skills became super apparent to me.

From one domino to the next, God began illuminating concepts I had never before noticed in Scripture. Providentially, what I had experienced with my skeptic friends became a lens to the dynamic mission pattern of Christ. From hermeneutical interpretation, I titled my book *Soul Whisperer*. I sought to capture how Jesus spoke pinpointedly into each person's life customizing his words to their particular needs and storylines. To make his way of reading others practicable, I named this skill "The Gospel



Do we have discipleship all wrong? Backwards?
If spiritual formation is not about missional
formation, then believers' lives do not emulate
the One they follow.



Key," since it deals with discerning a preceding message—one that opens a deeper dialogue on what Jesus has done for them on the cross. I concluded: There's a key to the cross. (Wherever we teach this technique, God brings people to faith).

These tiny glimpses may give you a taste for what God was revealing and help to clarify what I mean by "influence." In our relationship sphere, are we close enough to unsaved people to allow them to see our faith and hear our "good news" message so relevantly that they want to respond and live it? Emphasis is placed not so much on "the telling" but rather "the taking." I offer a new way to engage evangelistically along with learning what is

involved and necessary for the formation of faith, an “influence paradigm.”

The drive for making this change was not just about reenlisting members and increasing gospel efficacy, it ran deeper.

Domino 3: How do we reframe spiritual formation along mission centrality?

Jesus’s words to his disciples, “I have food that you know nothing about” haunted me (John 4:32). Food? In the metaphorical context, fulfilling his mission assignment was what Jesus lived on (v. 34). It nourished him. The notion laid me bare. Is the Father’s mission my food?

I observed how Jesus’ actions flow from his being, not like a tacked-on activity from a discipleship list. It mirrors the intimate relationship between a shadowing Son to a leading Father (John 5:19–20). It reflects closeness to the Father who sent his Son to achieve his work in the world. But it’s not just for him. Jesus conveys transference to us: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21), and “Whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing” (John 14:12).

Meditating on this left me asking: Do we have discipleship all wrong? Backwards? If spiritual formation is not about missional formation, then believers’ lives do not emulate the One they follow. Unlike our Master, the most mission-minded person to ever grace this earth, why are so many Christians isolated from nonbelievers? Why are we ill-equipped and ineffective at reaching others? Something is off.

Whereas we define a “disciple” by such criteria as Bible knowledge, righteous behavior and fellowship, Jesus saw it as the embodiment of his heart, actions, skills and fruit. Both *Soul Whisperer* and *ReMission* (*ReMission* is a leadership conversation on raising mission health in the body), delve into the spiritual formation deficiency that exists today, with the aim of restoring truer alignment.

Closing thoughts

Thus, as strange as this might sound, *Soul Whisperer* is my attempt to redeem evangelism. I set out to write a

popularly styled, compelling and unpredictable script that would recapture Christians, re-enlisting them for the redemptive cause of Christ. In lieu of the traditional “telling” rendition, the revision espouses a relational approach that is respectful of the hearer, giving attention to what is necessary to draw the person to faith: a paradigm that is deeper for believers, transformative of their lives and exceedingly more effectual in reaching others.

By addressing these questions, amid a doctorate program that required me to research and write, God has accomplished something I never dreamed—my whole ministry shifted to helping churches in their evangelistic-mission development.

The conversion is complete. I went from being a “teller” to an influencer. From a generalist to a specialist. From developing a conviction to a definitive calling. From a simple-minded broken, searching student to multibook author and voice for churches to retool and raise their game.

My name is Gary Comer. I am a recovering “teller.” I will be speaking at your upcoming convention. My heart and passion is for the gospel. I believe with my whole being that we can aspire to something higher in following Jesus. And, that our churches can be far more effective at equipping and raising their people to reach our neighbors, community and world. Join me in Kansas City this July. Till then!

Gary Comer is the founder of Soul Whisperer Ministry, an organization dedicated to helping churches develop missionally. After planting/pastoring two churches, Gary was hired by Sandals Church, a mega-sized younger, postmodern congregation in Southern California, as their outreach director. During that five-year stint, he also served as a church planting coach for the Christian Missionary Alliance and worked as an international mission trainer with Serve U International, while completing his doctorate at Talbot Theological Seminary, where he has served as an adjunct professor. He has written six books. ReMission: Rethinking How Church Leaders Create Movement and his first book, Soul Whisperer: Why the Church Must Change the Way It Views Evangelism, are considered signature works.



We must see evangelism differently—in a way that is authentic and effective, so we can believe in it again.



Mission MB Church is building for the future

Texas congregation constructs new space, adds English service

For 15 years, the Mission (Texas) MB Church congregation has waited, worked, dreamed and prayed for an opportunity to expand.

Limited by space and lack of a parking lot, the congregation purchased land for a new building 10 years ago. But, sidelined by financial restraints, the project hit a roadblock. The congregation persevered in hopeful expectation, while the land remained empty and waiting.

Until now.

After getting the green light to build in 2019, the Mission MB congregation is not only erecting a new meeting space but has also added an English service in order to build for the future.

Watching and waiting

Mission MB was established in 1957. The congregation met in a wood-frame building until the early 1970's, when they purchased land in an area of the city where growth was expected and moved the building to its current location, placing it on a concrete foundation, covering it with brick and adding Sunday school rooms. The congregation later added new restrooms, a baptistery and an additional room.

But the expected city growth didn't happen.

"It's a neighborhood, but it's not what was expected as far as the growth goes," says church council member Moises Tagle.

Mission MB leaders first began talking about building in a new location 15 years ago, around the time pastor Rafael Nuñez began serving the congregation.

"The first few years that (Pastor Nuñez) was here, the church began to grow a lot," Tagle says. "We started looking at expanding."

Five years after those initial conversations, in 2010, the congregation obtained



In April 2021, the Mission MB congregation held a service in its still-unfinished space, which included an opportunity to write favorite Scripture verses on the frame and take ownership of the space. *Photo by Moises Tagle*

a loan from MB Foundation to purchase 5 acres of land, including a residential home, located in a more commercial area of Mission, a growing city of about 80,000 west of McAllen.

"It was a good opportunity for us," Nuñez says. "It's in the middle of the city. A good location."

According to MB Foundation vice president Bruce Jost, MB Foundation met with church leadership to provide guidance for the building process so the building would meet the needs of the church's ministry and be fully funded.

The project did not unfold as Mission MB leaders anticipated, however.

"We were thinking we were going to start right away, but we were not there yet financially," Tagle says. "They were going over numbers with us and telling us, 'You're not there yet.' For us, it was not encouraging at the time, but it was wise counsel."

Jost says MB Foundation sought more detail about design and cost to ensure the project would reach completion.

"Based on our experience, the proposed facility was going to be too costly," Jost says. "As we analyzed their financial statements and giving trends, we determined a construction budget that was affordable. Our encouragement was to work on defining the scope and cost of the project so that we could all count the cost as inspired by Luke 14."

So, for nearly 10 years, the project was put on hold.

Jost says he's seen the congregation display patience, perseverance and partnership on the journey.

"The church was persistent," Jost says. "They received our advice graciously and went to work on each step. All along they have been humble and focused on the Lord so as to reach their community."

Realizing a dream

In 2019, Mission MB leaders resumed conversations with MB Foundation about the building process.

"The things that led to the proper tim-



Mission MB's new building sits on 5 acres of land with room for a parking lot, one of the limitations of its former space. The congregation hopes to be in its new space in February.

Photo by Janae Rempel

ing were: construction drawings were complete, an experienced contractor had bid the project, attendance and giving had increased, their debt had been significantly reduced, the cost was manageable without deterring their ministry and the district was willing to partner,” Jost says. “They got serious about eliminating the debt from 2010, making extra monthly payments and several lump sum payments over the years to significantly reduce the balance. That was key for putting them in position to start this project.”

So, in June 2020—in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic—the congregation was ready to begin building.

“I thought about it a little. Do we start? Do we wait?” Tagle says. “I guess one of the things that personally I learned is when God opens a door, it’s open.”

With additional financing from MB Foundation, Mission MB moved forward with plans for a new 6,000 square

foot structure accommodating 200 people and essentially doubling the church’s current capacity.

The building includes a sanctuary, fellowship hall, kitchen, classrooms, a nursery, an interpretation room and a large area for parking off of a street that recently expanded into a four-lane as a result of anticipated growth in the area.

The congregation is helping with construction in order to limit costs, including painting and laying tile.

In April 2021, Mission MB held a service in the still-unfinished space to allow the congregation to write favorite Scripture verses on the frame and take ownership of the space. The church hopes to be in its new space in February and would like to sell its old building.

“I’m excited for what is ahead for Mission MB Church and the district,” Jost says. “This project is the first of its kind in the district for several decades. May it stir greater kingdom impact together in South Texas.”

Strategic outreach

Moving locations and adding space in a strategic location is just one part of Mission MB’s plan for the future. Another building block is adding an English service.

The church will continue offering two services, but has made the switch to English for one of them.

The congregation, which had previously offered interpretation from Spanish to English via headsets, discovered it was losing the younger generation to English-speaking churches, Tagle says, adding that about 80 percent of young people are now primarily English speakers.

“They go to school in English, and once they are stronger in English than in Spanish, then it becomes their primary language and the next generation will struggle with the Spanish,” Tagle says. “If we don’t address or provide something for our kids, then our grandkids might be going to different churches.”

Some opposition to the idea exists among the older generation.

“Yes, the older generation wants Spanish to continue,” Tagle says. “They want their kids and grandkids to speak Spanish. So there is that resistance, but it is the reality that we see around us. That, I think, is what pushed us.”

Beginning Nov. 7, Mission MB held services in Spanish and in English, with Nuñez preaching the message during the Spanish service, and, following Sunday school, Tagle giving the same message in English.

Adding an English-speaking service will also serve as an outreach to a neighboring trailer park where snowbirds from northern states spend the winter.

“There’s many that have a church (up north) and they come down here and look for a church,” Tagle says. “The whole idea of the English service is to broaden the people that we can reach.

We can attract both English speakers and Spanish.”

Everything, from the location to the building to adding an English service, is all part of Mission MB’s continuing plan for the future.

“The most important thing is the future,” Nuñez says. “We only do this for the glory of God.” —*Janae Rempel*

Resilient Conference offers encouragement

Lighthouse Church hosts free conference

Lighthouse Church, a USMB congregation in Denver, Colo., will host a free conference later this month with the goal of encouraging pastoral leaders as they seek to minister in a world and society changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Resilient Conference will take place Jan. 28-29 and will include worship, prayer, meals and teaching in large group and smaller breakout sessions over the course of the two days.

Lighthouse lead pastor Josh Shaw says the idea for the conference came during a staff meeting several months ago while staff and elders were reflecting on the ways God had helped the church to weather the cultural dynamics of the past two years from the pandemic, to economic downturn, to racial tensions.

“It started really reflectively, like ‘What is God doing in our church?’” Shaw says. “From there really came a passion among our leadership that if God decided to do some amazing things at Lighthouse...we’re certainly not the only church that has grown and seen a lot of life in this season. But also, how can we help others experience this?”

Due to the difficulty of travel during the pandemic, particularly outside of the country, they decided to focus on what they could do at their own facility in Denver.

“We landed on this idea of doing something local that would be generous and would bless pastors and leaders,” Shaw says. “Let’s use the money that we have reserved and let’s host something that hopefully helps them to learn how to be resilient or be blessed in their resiliency.”

Resilience in a post-COVID world

Shaw says that from his perspective as a lead pastor in a large city, it seems that many people are living in a new reality since the beginning of the pandemic and are working to acclimate to what life will look like going forward.

“The dynamic of the church has

changed; the landscape of the church world has changed dramatically,” Shaw says. “Really what it’s done is, most people who were on the fence are now off the fence completely. At least in Denver, you can’t rely on traditional metrics for church anymore; attendance, giving, salvations—the original ways that the church growth world has talked about church, it doesn’t work anymore. That’s mainly secular Denver; I can’t speak to the Midwest or the South. I live in a reality where most people aren’t Christians.”

Shaw believes pastors and church leaders everywhere should be ready to rethink ways to engage unbelievers. At the same time, he acknowledges many leaders are exhausted and lonely after the turmoil of the last two years.

“They got thrown a weird wrench in 2020 which was, ‘You have to go all live



Church life has changed for churches, including Lighthouse Church, over the past two years due to COVID-19 and other factors and the metro Denver congregation is hosting a free conference Jan. 28-29, 2022, to encourage church leaders to rethink ministry.

Photo by Lighthouse Church

video online,’ and they did that and it burnt them out,” Shaw says. “Now they’re being told, ‘Now you don’t need to do that; now you need to stop because people aren’t going to come to church unless you stop doing it.’ It’s like the goal post is changing every week.”

Shaw says the staff settled on “resilience” as the focus of the conference because of the etymology of the word. In Latin, “resilient” means “leaping back.”

“We want to help give people the tools to keep striving and keep going forward,” Shaw says. “Anybody you know who’s resilient is the type of person that can pivot when they need to pivot. They can go through suffering. That word means someone who’s been refined.”

Organizers at Lighthouse have focused on bringing in a diverse group of speak-

ers in terms of ethnicity and also church model and size.

Don Morris, USMB national director, will be a featured speaker and Adaeze Brinkman of Lighthouse will lead the worship team. The conference will also feature speakers and teachers from outside the denomination in order to present a wide representation of voices.

Participants can choose from a variety of breakout sessions to attend, with topics ranging from technology to prayer to the logistics of church planting.

“The conference is not so much a heady conference,” Shaw says. “The primary desire of the conference is to impact the heart. We really just want to love leaders and give them breathing room where they maybe haven’t taken a deep breath in a couple months or a couple years.”

“Generosity helps resilience”

It was also important to the staff at Lighthouse when planning the conference to be able to offer it free of charge to remove a potential financial barrier.

“It’s kind of hard to convince people that there’s no strings attached,” Shaw says. “We are trying to convince people that it’s worth coming because you don’t have the financial burden of paying \$300 a ticket.”

The church will provide the facility and food, and the speakers and teachers are donating their time for the event. Churches that are financially able are asked to purchase tickets to “pay it forward” and help cover the cost of attendance for others.

Lighthouse Church also engaged in fundraising along with other churches in order to offer around \$15,000 in grants to pastors and churches attending the conference.

Church leaders participating in Resilient Conference can apply for one of five different grants, each focused on a different need, such as new audio-visual equipment, staff training or a retreat for a leader or staff to take a time of rest.

“The goal is just anything we can think of that helps people be more resilient,” Shaw says. “We believe that rest helps you be more resilient; we think that financial generosity helps people be more resilient.”

Shaw has relied on word of mouth and Lighthouse’s many connections in ministry and church plants to spread the word about Resilient Conference, as well as promoting it through MB channels. He says that the goal is to see 200 people attend, with the hope that will represent around 30 different churches.

“We anticipate pastors will bring their elders and leaders,” Shaw says. “As many people as can come, we want to come.”

The conference is still open for registration. Registration, grant applications and more information can be found at resilientconference.com. —Jessica Vix Allen



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Trading bullets for Bibles

Congolese MB Church reaching out to militia groups

When Garry Prieb received a letter expressing an urgent request for Bibles in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), he knew just what to do.

A retired Multiply employee who grew up in DRC, Prieb mentioned the request—which came from Jacques Pilipili, the coordinator of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North and South Kivu in eastern Congo—in his July prayer letter. In an area torn by conflict, Pilipili sought to encourage members of the child militia to lay down their arms and pick up Bibles instead.

Upon receiving word of this request, donors sprang into action, mobilizing a network of connections Prieb has made over the years through involvement in MB mission work, pastoral ministry and work for other MB and inter-Mennonite agencies and universities.

As a result of these donations and an endowment at MB Foundation, Prieb sent \$10,000 to the MB Church of Congo to purchase Bibles, including 90 Bibles for members of the child militia in Kivu, as part of his continuing ministry in DRC.

Childhood friends partner in ministry

Prieb's investment in DRC stems from his childhood. The son of then-MBMS missionaries Arnold and Rose Prieb, he moved with his parents to DRC at age 1, where he grew up at the Kafumba Mission Station.

A graduate of Fresno Pacific University (FPU) and MBBS, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, Prieb has lived and worked in DRC, the United States and Canada, including teaching and

translation work in DRC, pastoral ministry in British Columbia and Fresno, Calif., serving as CEO of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission in Elkhart, Ind., serving on staff at both Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and FPU, and, most-recently, working half-time for Multiply by fundraising and making trips to Africa.

Although Prieb, who resides in Fresno, Calif., and attends Prodigal Church, retired from Multiply in March 2020, his involvement in DRC continues.

"People still wanted to give, and people in Congo were still wanting to ask me for help," Prieb says. "I just didn't know how exactly to go about it."

So Prieb began working with a childhood friend from DRC, Nzash Lumeya,

who grew up in Kafumba and now lives in Fresno and runs the 501(c)3 Lumeya International Ministries (LIM), to continue funding ministry in DRC. Today, most donations Prieb receives go through LIM.

These donations, together with funds from the Arnold and Rose Prieb endowment established at MB Foundation for work in DRC, have allowed Prieb's ministry, including Bible distribution, to continue.

Laying down guns

While much of DRC is more peaceful than in the past, conflict continues in the Kivu Province, where some 140 militia groups clash over minerals, territory and revenge.

"There's still rebel activity going on in

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As a result of donations from Garry Prieb's network and an endowment at MB Foundation, Jacques Pilipili (blue suit), the coordinator of the Mennonite Brethren Church in North and South Kivu in eastern Congo, distributed Bibles to members of the child militia in the Kivu Province in late July, encouraging them to lay down their arms. *Photo by Jacques Pilipili*

and around Bukavu," Prieb says. "The rest of the country is quiet."

In Kivu, Pilipili and Mennonite Brethren are focusing on reaching two militia groups, where many militia members are children between the ages of 12 and 16. About 1.1 million people have lost their lives as a result of recent conflict, Prieb says.

When the Congolese government began to crack down on violence in the last year, Pilipili saw an opportunity to encourage members of the militia to exchange their guns for Bibles.

In an email to Prieb, Pilipili said, "We are reaching two groups for Christ. I have the confidence and the trust of two militia groups that I can come in (and) encourage them about the Gospel."

Pilipili meets with child militia members in Uvira south of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, to help youth reintegrate into society and also to establish new MB churches in the area.

With the \$10,000, the MB Church in

DRC allotted \$2,500 each for Bible distribution among the four language groups in which Mennonite Brethren work: Lingala, Kituba, Tshiluba and Swahili.

While some of the Bibles were yet to be distributed at the time of this writing, with the \$2,500 allotted for the Swahili language, Pilipili purchased 190 Bibles, giving 100 to Mennonite Brethren whose homes had been destroyed by the May 2021 eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in Goma, the capital of North Kivu, and 90 to members of the child militia.

"These young guys, even though their lives were misdirected, they've been touched by the peace of Christ," Prieb says. "That's what I'm always thinking of. Who is the next generation that can teach them about Jesus to change their ways so that they stay in their tribal groups and reintegrate socially?"

In an email about the project, Fidele and Leah Renée Lumeya, consultants with the conflict, trauma and restorative

justice education program in DRC, spoke about Pilipili's faithfulness. Fidele is a brother of Nzash Lumeya.

"It has been through the faith and dedication of Pastor Jacques that these people have seen a Bible and heard the messages of love in their own language for the first time," the Lumeyas write. "That the words may penetrate the hearts of the listeners and end the violence, especially toward those most vulnerable, is always his hope."

Pilipili is encouraging child militia members to attend Bible school, and Prieb has offered to fund five scholarships for future pastoral training in Bukavu.

"We're trying to reach them for Christ, sensitize them, bring them back into their tribes so they can become responsible citizens," Prieb says. "We are providing some funding so that they can go to school and become more knowledgeable about the Bible, and hopefully, some of them will become pastors of the church there."

Church planting and other involvements

Prieb's involvement in DRC goes beyond Bible distribution.

Before his father died, Prieb asked what the most pressing need in DRC was.

"I said, 'Dad, what could I continue on and do in your stead?'" Prieb says. "He said, 'Leadership training in Congo is the most important need.' I took that to heart, and I've been doing it ever since."

Prieb's efforts are funded in large part by the Arnold and Rose Prieb Endowment, established at MB Foundation in July 2020 in his parents' honor after the foundation received an estate gift from a doctor friend of Garry's with a passion for ministry in Africa.

According to MB Foundation president and CEO Jon C. Wiebe, an endowment established by a legacy gift at death provides a gift that keeps on giving. MB Foundation has and continues to play several roles in managing the endowment, including serving as advisor, facilitator, administrator and conduit.

MB Foundation first helped the donor understand their charitable giving options and implement them to meet the donor's objectives, then worked with the estate administrator for more than three years to ensure the donor's charitable objectives were carried out properly.

"Now our role is to be the administrator and conduit for the funds," Wiebe says. "An endowment needs professional fund management to ensure the funds are properly invested and managed for the greatest kingdom impact. As conduit, we work with the fund advisor (Garry) to send the payout to the appropriate charitable beneficiary(ies)."

Each year, MB Foundation distributes a payout of about 4 percent to LIM for ministry in DRC.

Prieb meets monthly with Nzash Lumeya to pray about the money coming in, and every quarter, LIM sends money to the MB Church in Congo to fund scholarships for Mennonite Brethren theological students, church buildings, property for new church plants (some churches are being evicted when they cannot pay the rent), seminars and even pandemic-related health tips.

"Nzash and I always sit down with the leadership in Congo and say, 'What are your needs? What do you want to do?'" Prieb says. "So it's not us pushing or driving it. We want them to be the drivers. They say, 'We need to plant more churches', and so then we got involved in church planting and evangelism."

The Mennonite Brethren Church in Congo, Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo, was started about 100 years ago and has 86,000 members. The Kivu Province has 36 MB churches—including 34 in the south near Bukavu and two in the north near Goma—with 2,360 members. In 2020, funds from the endowment helped Congolese Mennonite Brethren plant 44 new MB churches, and Prieb would like to see even more planted in 2022.

"There's a whole network of people behind me," Prieb says. "It's God behind us that is doing this work." —*Janae Rempel*

Kansas church collects 1,101 OCC shoeboxes

North Oak Community Church celebrates exceeding their 2021 goal

More than a dozen children and adults gathered at the back of the North Oak Community Church (NOCC) sanctuary Nov. 15, and sang the familiar children's Bible song, "Hallelu, Hallelu," to celebrate the 11 stacks of Operation Christmas Child (OCC) boxes they had just counted.

The day before—Sunday—NOCC, a USMB congregation in Hays, Kan., had dedicated the 1,101 boxes the congregation had packed. The boxes filled the front of the church and a prayer was said

"that each child receiving the box will be impacted with the gospel message," says Pam Schmidtberger, one of the project coordinators. "Then we celebrated as a church family with a bounty of mini-muffins, juice and coffee, rejoicing in what God has done."

The celebration continued Monday when the crew of adults and children met at the church to do the final count, confirming that NOCC had exceeded its goal of 1,000 boxes. After celebrating in song, the volunteers loaded the boxes into a trailer, drove them to the local church which is the OCC drop-off site and then unloaded them again, concluding the 2021 OCC project.

An informal *Christian Leader* survey indicates that in 2021 at least a dozen USMB churches participated in Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse. While most churches

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Monday of OCC Collection Week, volunteers at North Oak Community Church stacked their 1,101 shoeboxes into groups of 100 before loading them in a trailer and transporting them to the local collection site.
Photos by NOCC

collected anywhere from dozens to hundreds of gift-filled shoeboxes, NOCC had the highest total of any USMB church of which the CL is aware.

Since 1993, Samaritan's Purse has collected shoebox gifts filled with toys, school supplies and hygiene items for children around the world. More than 188 million children in more than 170 countries and territories have received an OCC shoebox, delivered by local ministry partners as a means of reaching children with the good news of Jesus Christ.

"People are excited to be involved, I think, because it is a wonderful way to share the gospel in places you otherwise couldn't go," says Schmidtberger in an email interview.

NOCC has been an OCC participant for many years and in 2016 added the children's Sunday school packing party. This year the children packed 600 of the boxes.

"Our heart's desire is that God is glorified in the entire process," Schmidtberger says. "Every year looks different, so it is a faith journey for sure. Donors

change, situations change, but God, our Provider, doesn't."

Schmidtberger says the congregation participates in a variety of ways.

"There is somewhere everyone in church can plug in," Schmidtberger says, and her list ranges from making wooden toys and crocheting and sewing wash cloths, dresses and backpacks to promotion to funding supplies and shipping to working with the children's pack project to praying.

Schmidtberger appreciates the opportunity OCC provides the congregation to work together as a church to share the gospel. "Yes, it's a lot of work," she says, "but there is great joy when we work together on what God has called us to." —
Connie Faber

CL to implement six recommendations

Publication Council, review process established for CL theological content

The USMB Leadership Board approved six recommendations regarding the *Christian Leader* that are intended to rebuild trust and confidence in the USMB publication. The recommendations, proposed by the CL Review Team, include that the CL will continue to be published in print and that theological content will be reviewed by district ministers and the USMB national director.

"It was very clear that our MB family sees a lot of value in the magazine as a source of connection, information and inspiration," says Don Morris, USMB national director, in an email interview. "We think the new ideas and protocols for how each issue of the CL is created will help provide the kind of magazine that consistently accomplishes that going forward."

While the CL Review Team report affirmed the CL, the team also concluded that “for some in our constituency, there has been erosion of trust and confidence pertaining to some CL content and editorial perspective.” The Review Team concluded that “definitive changes need to occur” to ensure that the CL effectively serves the USMB family and made six recommendations.

“I believe by implementing the recommendations, there will be a considerable, positive change in the way the CL publishing process occurs,” Morris says. “There will be many more voices involved for providing creativity along with evaluation and even implementation of the magazine’s overall content.”

The first recommendation establishes the purpose of the CL as to draw USMB churches together by connecting, informing, celebrating, telling stories and sharing news; disciple the USMB constituency within the Confession of Faith, inspiring people to action; and direct the USMB family toward a unified vision, focusing on the three USMB core commitments and mission.

Three subsequent recommendations are related to the CL publication process and mark a significant change in the production timeline. The next recommendation has two parts. First, it establishes an Editorial Review Board that will “collaborate with the editor and associate editor in selecting themes and topics and isolating timely issues.” The board, which will consist of the CL editors, two district ministers and three or four at-large members, will also help to “discern ‘right voices’ to write specific articles.” The board will meet at least once a year.

In addition to forming an Editorial Review Board, this recommendation states that feature essays, the editorial and “other content that contains theo-

logical perspectives” will be reviewed prior to publication by two or three district ministers as well as the USMB national director.

Morris says, “I’m confident that this very intentional integration of more people, who will provide not only valuable input but also will provide watch care to help prevent stumbling blocks and/or issues that have the potential to create mistrust, will help our USMB family in building back trust, even if that develops slowly over time. We’re attempting to do everything we can to provide confidence as well as a high level of connection through the content of the *Christian Leader*.”

To create sufficient time for the district ministers and national director to review CL content, the Leadership Board’s third recommendation related to the publication process is that the publication schedule be lengthened to allow for “regular and increased communication with writers and reviewers.”

The final recommendation related to the extended production timeline increases the editor’s work week by five hours, beginning in January 2022. The editor has been working 25 hours a week. “With these changes in review and publication processes, it will undoubtedly add to the CL editor’s work time,” says the recommendation.

The remaining recommendations deal with CL format and circulation.

The fifth recommendation states that the CL will continue to be provided as a printed magazine with additional articles available online.

“The 2021 readership survey revealed that a large majority of readers continue to desire receiving and reading CL in printed form; many also enjoy the additional content that is available that CL online provides,” says the recommendation. “This was somewhat of a surprise to us (the CL Review Team.) (We) agree that there is strategic value

in continuing the printed form of the magazine.”

The sixth recommendation is that an intentional campaign for growing the number of households receiving the CL be developed and that sign-ups for C-Link, the CL biweekly e-news digest, be increased. The recommendation did not include a plan for how to accomplish the growth.

The recommendations, approved Oct. 29, 2021, by the Leadership Board, will go into effect Jan. 1, 2022. Due to the recommended changes to the CL production process, the July/August 2022 magazine will be the first issue to reflect the recommendations.

The CL Review Team report also affirms CL editors Connie Faber and Janae Rempel and designer Shelley Plett. The report also includes a list of 19 comments and suggestions, including a repeated request that the magazine content reflect the “theological conservatism of the majority of (the) readership.”

The report concludes with a list of six concerns and observations regarding how the magazine can better handle disagreements and critiques. Included in that list is the request that the CL’s statement that writers’ views are not necessarily those of USMB be given more visibility. “We need a better plan going forward to help deal with major critiques and disagreements,” says the report. “We did not arrive at such a plan.”

In addition to affirming the CL Review Team’s recommendations, the Leadership Board requested that national director Don Morris function as the magazine’s editor-in-chief.

Morris says he intends to appoint the Publication Council by January 2022 so that the group can meet in January and set the editorial calendar for the last three issues of 2022. —Connie Faber

mission & ministry

Pipeline will train new leaders

Leadership Pipeline providers portal for internships

Leadership Pipeline has been created to assist in identifying, inspiring and investing in up-and-coming leaders by giving them real-world ministry experience and training. The overall goal of the pipeline is to provide many more young leaders for our USMB churches and organizations.

“We want to create a pool of dedicated and equipped leaders that our MB churches can draw from—almost instantly increasing their kingdom impact when they hire them,” says Kyle Goings, chair of USMB Youth and youth pastor at Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan. “We want to develop more young leaders so that churches don’t feel they have to look outside USMB to fill their leadership positions.”

How does this new Leadership Pipeline work? Churches and organizations create internship opportunities and then undergraduate students apply for those openings. The internship, whether short-term or longer-term, provides training and experience in a desired ministry area. USMB Youth is putting the finishing touches on the brand-new Leadership Pipeline website that will serve

as the main hub for this exchange, allowing those offering internships to easily post their available positions, creating a candidate profile and job description and then matching that with interns looking for opportunities.

“When USMB Youth brought this idea to the USMB Leadership Board, it didn’t take long for us to realize that this could be a strong catalyst for developing much-needed new leadership for our churches, organizations and even for church planting,” says Don Morris, USMB national director. “USMB, along with other MB organizations, will invest in this not only financially but

made available through the hiring church or agency or through partnering organizations.

Over the past several years, USMB churches have often had to look outside the U.S. Conference for leaders as there has been a lack of existing “in-house” leaders. One of USMB’s three core commitments is to enhance leadership development.

Morris says, “Providing job opportunities for the purpose of testing and refining giftedness, increasing knowledge and experience and for allowing God to reveal next steps in a young leader’s ministry development is not just a good idea, it’s crucial for the future of our

USMB conference.

“We’ll witness greater impact by our churches through the development of new leaders, especially ones who already have an understanding of what it means to be Mennonite Brethren,” Morris says.

“We want to become a conference of churches that is known for our next-

generation leadership development, one that produces God-honoring and capable leaders who make a kingdom impact for decades to come,” Goings says. “If God is the foundation of a building, leadership development is the framework. Without those two things there is nothing on which to build.”

For more information or to get started in the pipeline process, email Goings or other USMB Youth leaders at info@usmbyouth.com or visit the usmbyouth.com website. —
USMB news story



for promoting it and making sure our constituency knows how to use it. This is a very significant initiative for our MB family.”

The Leadership Pipeline will provide a one-stop portal for internship opportunities. It is expected that these paid internships will be offered for a variety of ministry fields including youth, worship, kid’s ministry, education, arts, finance, tech and church planting. USMB Youth hope that the first internships will begin summer 2022. All internships will be paid positions with funds

The Bible in living color

Visiting Israel is life-changing experience

For many Christians, to tour and study in the land of Israel is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. For me, it has become a calling that began with an invitation to study in Israel in 2001. This invitation changed my life, my ministry and my understanding of Scripture.

My first trip to Israel came after many years of formal theological training and time spent as a pastor, preacher and teacher. I always knew that Israel was important for biblical and historical reasons. What I didn't understand was how visiting the land of Israel would increase my faith, deepen my confidence in the resurrection of Jesus and make the pages of the Bible go from black and white to vibrant living color.

On my first trip to Israel, I was riding on a bus from Jerusalem to the desert oasis of En Gedi, the site where David hid from King Saul, cutting off the corner of his robe in the process (1 Samuel 24). As we made our way across the desert of Judea someone on the bus suddenly yelled out, "Driver, stop the bus!" The driver pulled over and all of us passengers piled out.

At first, I didn't realize why we had stopped. Then suddenly it hit me. The entire desert hillside was carpeted with a lush variety of beautiful, fragrant wildflowers covering the barren land like a magnificent robe of royalty. With Bible in hand, our guide read aloud Isaiah 35:1, "The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (NKJV). God had spoken and it was coming to pass right in front of my eyes. Truly, a moment of faith-

building awe and expectation that God always keeps his promises.

Upon our return to Jerusalem, we made our way north of the Old City to a place known as Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb. For many Christian visitors to Jerusalem, this is the absolute highlight of the tour. As we entered the Garden Tomb a hushed quiet came over all of us. We could sense that this was sacred space, and a reverent and calming peace filled us. The guide reminded us that though no one knows the exact place where Jesus' body lay silent for three days, we do know that this tomb represents the fact that the tomb is empty and Jesus is not here, he has risen from the dead!

The moment I entered the empty tomb for myself, the words of the apostle Paul washed over my mind, "This is the gospel you have received and on which you have taken your stand...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15). At that moment, with all my senses fully engaged, I knew that my faith was anchored on a historical reality and that this moment solidified in my mind what I already believed by faith but was now also affirmed by sight.

Since that first trip, so many years ago, I have returned to Israel many times to lead, teach, study and pray. Going to Israel is like returning home. The day will soon come when Jesus returns and we shall all make it to the Holy Land as we join him there, to rule and to reign with him forever and ever. ▀



Frank Lenihan, and his wife, Debbie, have spent the last 20 years pastoring Lustre MB Church in Montana and leading study tours to Israel.

Lenihan holds master's degrees in Ministry and Jewish/Christian Studies and a Doctor of Divinity with a focus on modern Israel. The Lenihans have four children. If you would like to know more about traveling to Israel, contact Lenihan at: frazerm@gmail.com. If you have already been to Israel, Pastor Lenihan would love to hear your story.

Frontlines is a column written by USMB pastors. The definition of frontline is "a person or thing that is a part of a leading position" and pastors are leading our local churches and their insight into ministry and the USMB three core commitments: church multiplication and evangelism, leadership development and discipleship.

MILESTONES

BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Vicki Greenbush, Sidney Schultz, Kathryn Marshall, Antwon Marshall, Mark Marshall, Teanna Marshall, Fernando Garza and Shaymara Garza were received as members at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, Nov. 21.

Bentley Ewing, Gavin Ewing, Evyn Strader, Embassy White and Othniel Emmert were baptized at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church** Nov. 7. Chris Regier, Gina Regier, Jim Wichert and DeeAnn Wichert were received as members.

Three people were received as members at **Butterfield (Minn.) Community Church**.

Jennifer Bailey, Anthony Chavez, Jen Rosemeyer and Paytan Rosemeyer were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**, Nov. 7.

Graham Matlock, Claire Matlock, Bailee Gawith and Tylee Miller were baptized Oct. 31 at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**.

Rebekah Williams was baptized at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, Oct. 24. Jim Cypher and Brenda Cypher were received as members Oct. 17.

Celinda Sankowski, Imari Priester, Karter Green and Michelle Green were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**, Sept. 19.

Justin Byers, Ashleigh Byers, Madison Neufeld, Jennifer Zerbe, Jami Ortmann, Rebecca Reddig, Randy Reddig and Kathleen Damboise were received as members at **Lustre (Mont.) MB Church**. Kathleen Damboise was baptized.

Rob Lilyquist, Melanie Lilyquist and Jade Callister were baptized at **Lakeview Church**,

Grantsville (Utah) Campus, Aug. 29. Lauren Carman was baptized July 27. Anastyn Baker, Tara Baker and Willow Collings were baptized June 6. Paul Callister, Michelle Callister, Wil Peters, Linda Peters and Miya Fonger were baptized March 28. Nora Harper was baptized at **Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park (Utah) Campus**, Aug. 16. Alex Gray and Aubrielle Dust were baptized July 27.

WORKERS

Chris Regier is serving as praise and worship leader at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church**.

DEATHS

Bogar, Bruce Melvin, Billings, Mont., former pastor of Gospel Fellowship Church, Wolf Point, Mont., July 19, 1949—Oct. 23, 2021. Parents: Melvin and Sue Zora Bogar. Spouse: Melva Myhre (deceased), Connie Clark. Children: Colette Christensen, Brent, Blain. Stepchildren: Jonathan Clark, Lisi Wickham; seven grandchildren, three step-grandchildren.

Faul, Bernice, Minot, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., Dec. 18, 1928—Oct. 24, 2021. Parents: William and Louise (Frierer) Heizelman. Spouse: Robert Faul (deceased).

Fielding-Weisshaar, Janie, Wichita, Kan., of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, March 11, 1948—Aug. 28, 2021. Parents: Fredrick and Ruth Lorei. Spouse: Ronald Fielding (deceased), Edward Weisshaar. Children: Scott Fielding, Charla Fielding; four grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Harms, Don, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 28, 1936—Oct. 26, 2021. Parents: Jonas R. and Ella (Brandt) Harms.

Spouse: Ruth Harms. Children: Cindy, Carolyn Taylor; five grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Heitmann, Roger, Harvey, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, June 27, 1931—Oct. 19, 2021. Parents: William and Edna (Docter) Heitmann. Spouse: Eveline. Children: Doug, Lynn Eggers, Laurie Cain, Londa Neumiller; 11 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

Horn, Jacqueline, Visalia, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Aug. 21, 1957—Dec. 4, 2021. Parents: Thomas and Kaye Louise (Schwartz) Kesler. Spouse: Lawrence Horn. Child: Kaye Simons; two grandchildren.

Kliewer, Clara Elisabeth, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, July 6, 1926—Sept. 12, 2021. Parents: Bernard and Ada Wall. Spouse: Rueben Kliewer (deceased). Children: Diana, Carolyn Piper, Susan.

Lautt, Marlene Jane, Lodi, Calif., member of Vinewood Community Church, Lodi, April 14, 1939—March 19, 2021. Parents: Henry H. and Bertha Bartel. Spouse: Robert Lautt. Children: Rhonda Dueck, Candace; four grandchildren.

McConkey, Billy Dean, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, June 8, 1946—Nov. 23, 2021. Parents: Thomas and Vulah (Smith) McConkey. Spouse: Sharon Ryel. Children: Ricky, DeAnna Murray, Daisy Wallace (deceased); six grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Schmidt, Garth David, Fresno, Calif., attender of North Fresno Church, June 24, 1944—Sept. 16, 2021. Parents: Ernest and Evelyn (Strauss) Schmidt. Spouse: Tamara Jones. Children: Adam, Amanda Swanbeck; five grandchildren.

The Life Center celebrates 89 years

The Life Center, Lenoir, N.C., celebrated its 89th anniversary Oct. 17, 2021, with a special celebration service, including a reading of church history, youth and outreach updates and a message by Larry Smith, pastor of West End MB Church in Lenoir. A spaghetti meal followed the service.

The congregation celebrated six baptisms this year and has a membership of more than 125.

The church was established as the Bushtown MB Church in 1932. Under the direction of Terry Hunt, who became pastor in March 1986, the church expanded to two services.

After a night of prayer in July 1999, the congregation purchased a new property to build the church's current multipurpose building. The congregation voted to change the church's name to The Life Center in August 2002, and the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new facility took place Oct. 23, 2010.—*Janae Rempel*

Seibel, Robert George “Bob,” Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, March 9, 1935—Oct. 25, 2021. Parents: Andrew and Clara (Wittmeyer) Seibel. Spouse: Betty Friesen. Children: Mark, Tonja Nansel, Doug; two grandchildren.

Weems, Jim, Sioux Falls, S.D., member of Christ Community Church, Sioux Falls, and former MB pastor, Dec. 6, 1936—Nov. 25, 2021. Parents: Phil and Evelyn Weems. Spouse: Esther Mendel. Children: Nat, Carrie Hiebert, Crystal Kliever, Kimberley Thune, Jay; 15 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren.

Yoder, Kyle Nathan, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, May 21, 2001—Nov. 11, 2021. Parents: Nate and Grace (Kauffman) Yoder.

REACHING IN FELLOWSHIP

Women from **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, exchanged a pair of wrapped socks during a soup and salad luncheon Dec. 5 and brought 54 pairs of socks to donate to a local women’s shelter.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., hosted guest speakers Garry and Ruth Prieb on Mission Sunday, Oct. 31, with a meal following the service. That evening, the church hosted its fifth annual Trunk or Treat event.

WORSHIP

Lustre (Mont.) MB Church held its annual Thanksgiving Harvest Mission Festival Oct. 3-5 with guest speaker Jim Shuman of Hartville, Ohio, who challenged the congregation to strengthen relationships through purposeful intentionality while seeing challenges in rela-

tionships as an opportunity to grow deeper in commitment to each other.

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., held an evening of hymn-singing followed by eating ice cream Nov. 14.

REACHING OUT LOCALLY

The Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., congregation donated \$450 to purchase items for the BH20 Food Pantry’s holiday boxes.

The Hope Kingsburg (Calif.) congregation went Christmas caroling in its neighborhood as an outreach Dec. 19.

The Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., congregation went Christmas caroling to homes surrounding the church Dec. 18, bringing homemade cookies and an invitation to the church’s Christmas events.

Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., served supper at the Topeka Rescue Mission Dec. 6. The congregation also collected breakfast items for the mission.

Lustre (Mont.) MB Church is partnering with another area church to provide an AWANA youth program for the community and surrounding areas. More than 50 clubbers attend each Wednesday at the Lustre Christian High School.

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., collected 142 boxes of stuffing for the Eleos Ministries outreach dinner.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church hosted its fourth annual SMBC Invitational takedown tournament Nov. 20 with 67 competitors. Members of the congregation helped with drive-thru food distribution for “Thankful Thursday” sponsored by the Shafter Recreation Department Nov. 18.

New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif., delivered toys and boxes of food to children and families in need through three local schools.

Stony Brook, Omaha, Neb., donated gifts for children in foster care.

The Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., congregation prepared 75 food baskets that were distributed by Main Street Ministries to families in the community.

Around 800 people attended the Meet and Treat outreach event Oct. 31 at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., served the community Oct. 31 by doing various work projects such as yard work, painting and repair for the city, Hillsboro High School and Main Street Ministries.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., donated more than 13,000 pieces of candy to fill goodie bags for students at Houston School. The congregation raised \$28,075 for its community nonprofit partners during its Friendsgiving celebration.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church donated \$30,000 to Main Street Ministries for renovations.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted its annual Thanksgiving Feast Nov. 17. The congregation sponsored a free outdoor community event Nov. 13 with live music, art, food and drinks and local vendors.

For its 23rd annual fall men’s work retreat, members of the **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, community served at Camp Witness by installing metal siding and doing tree removal.

GLOBALLY

Lustre (Mont.) MB Church is partnering with El Roi Haiti to plant a church and strengthen

Post Oak MB Church celebrates 125th anniversary

Post Oak MB Church in Indianahoma, Okla., celebrated the 125th anniversary of the establishment of the Post Oak Mission with a celebration service and meal Oct. 10, 2021.

The celebration took place on the original site—now part of Fort Sill—where Mennonite Brethren established a mission to the Comanche tribe in 1896, on land given to the Mennonite Brethren by Comanche chief Quannah Parker.

The celebration included a welcome and opening prayer, hymns, a greeting from Southern District Conference minister Tim Sullivan, a message from pastor Dean Edwards, prayer, a fellowship dinner and a time of sharing. The congregation dedicated a memorial commemorating the mission—which became a self-administering congregation in 1959—on what is believed to be the steps of the original building.

Ron Parker, the great-grandson of Quannah, as well as individuals who had attended the elementary school operated by the mission from 1948 to 1958 participated in the unveiling.—*Janae Rempel*

El Roi Academy in Haiti which hosts more than 400 school children in grades K-11. This ministry includes an "Adopt a Student" outreach and two hot meals a day for students.

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., gave an offering helping to give a coat and shoes to 110 Syrian refugee children in Jordan.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., dedicated shoeboxes filled for Operation Christmas Child Nov. 21, then gathered for a soup lunch to raise funds for travel expenses for the 32 individuals who spent Thanksgiving weekend at the OCC processing center in Dallas.

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local Church

Staff positions: SMCC is hiring. South Mountain Community Church is a multisite church in Utah with five locations that exists to help as many people as possible take the next step towards being fully devoted and fully delighted followers of Jesus Christ. They do this by creating a culture where anyone can belong before they believe, where maturity is measured by love, where the process that God changes people from the inside out is honored, where the Bible is explained in helpful and hopeful ways, and where the members value the guest. If you would like to help create a culture like this by joining our staff you can check out smccutah.org/jobs.

USMB

Church Planting Mobilizer: The USMB Church Planting Mobilizer is responsible for establishing a national MB church multiplication vision through the strategy of church planting with some work in church renewal/revitalization. The purpose for USMB church planting in the U.S. is to produce multiple disciple-making, reproducing new MB churches. The USMB church planting mobilizer will report to the USMB national director. This is a fulltime position. Start date is early 2022. For more information, visit <https://usmb.org/job/usmb-church-planting-mobilizer/>

USMB's new national leadership program is hiring:

National Leadership Mobilizers

to develop and cultivate healthy partnerships with churches, organizations and youth to lead and grow the Leadership Pipeline

- Flexible, part-time, year-round position
- Self-starter who agrees with the U.S. Conference of MB Church's Confession of Faith
- Salary will be dependent on hours, experience and responsibility

Details and application information can be found online at:

<https://usmb.org/job/national-leadership-mobilizer/>



Agency

Planned Giving Advisor: MB Foundation is looking for a planned giving advisor in our Fresno, Calif., location. This is a relationship-building type of position. If you like talking to people and caring for them, this is a job worth considering. If you are looking for a career change, have a heart for people, stewardship and love the Lord, read on. This is a full-time position with a generous benefit package. Salary commensurate with experience. Training is available. If interested, go to www.mbfoundation.com/employment or email your resume to Ron Infinger at Ron@dba-search.com

University

Fresno Pacific University invites applications for the following positions. Complete job description and requirements at www.fresno.edu/visitors/careers.

Faculty and Program Director for Reading & Language Development in the School of Education

- Faculty in Music
- Faculty in Criminology
- Faculty in Nursing
- Faculty in Psychology – Undergraduate
- Faculty in Teacher Education – Division Chair

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

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How to encourage your pastor

Pastors say tough job is now even tougher

“I’ve probably thought more about retirement since this (pandemic) started than I had,” says one USMB pastor. “Before, I was really committed to going until mandatory retirement, but this has made me question whether I really want to do that. This is a much harder job than it normally has been.”

Thom Rainer, the former CEO of LifeWay, writes that up to 50 percent of pastors are planning on leaving their current ministries once a new normal is established after COVID-19. (EFCA: “Encouraging Pandemic Pastors: How a Tough Job Got Even Tougher,” October 2021). He cites six reasons pastors are leaving ministry:

Pastors are weary from the pandemic.

Pastors are dispirited by division among church members.

Pastors are discouraged about losing members and attendance.

Pastors are uncertain about the financial future of their ministry.

Pastors are receiving much more criticism as they implement changes, address cultural challenges, steward resources and shepherd their flock.

Pastors’ workloads have increased greatly: on top of increased pastoral care needs, most have had to adjust their ministries to provide a myriad of new things to meet their church’s needs.

Not only has COVID brought intense challenges, but so has our current cultural and political climate. Pastors must deal with stark disagreements and vastly different viewpoints even among their own church family. One pastor writes, “Working to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4) among the family of God in our miserably polarized culture is painfully, nauseatingly, exhaustively and devastatingly difficult. Please pray for your pastor!”

Praying for our pastors is certainly one thing we can do to encourage them during

this time. We can let them know we realize this has been a tremendously challenging time, and we are praying for them and their family. We can write them notes of encouragement. But there is much more that can be done.

Many pastors would benefit from having a counselor or ministry coach to help them process personal concerns and even deep wounds. USMB offers LEAD Coaching, an excellent, life-changing program that churches can easily provide for their pastor.

Being with other pastors has benefitted many, especially groups that provide confidential sharing. USMB offers several LEAD Cohorts that provide this kind of safe space.

Spouses need this kind of care as well. They also carry a heavy load as they’re integrally involved in the things that happen in the church and as they care for their own families. A date night might be a small thing to give to a pastoral couple. And it costs at least \$80 to \$100 for a nice meal out and to pay for babysitting. A \$25 gift card doesn’t cover much these days—maybe a pizza to bring home, but that’s about it.

Hebrews 13:17 says, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

“A joy, not a burden.” We all want our pastors to enjoy their work. Most do, and most find being a pastor to be a high calling, a privilege. There are many pastoral joys, especially as lives are transformed by Jesus. But there is a toll on our pastors in these trying days that we must recognize and do everything we can to give our support, love and care for those who care so much for us.

Learn more about the “Bless your pastor” initiative, LEAD Coaching and LEAD Cohorts on the USMB website, www.usmb.org.



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