

# CL

CHRISTIAN LEADER

May / June 2022

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*To love  
and   
to cherish*

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**REACHING THE LOST**  
LUKE 19:10

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[www.usmb.org/gathering2022](http://www.usmb.org/gathering2022)

#usmb2022

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# Saying “we do”

Supportive environments nurture marriage

My husband, David, and I knew each other for 10 months when we exchanged our vows on June 1, 1985. Given this short duration, research by Penn State University suggests our marriage should have failed in seven years. Penn State’s PAIR Project shows that the happiest couples in marriage are the ones that dated an average of 25 months.

Marrying someone you’ve dated—much less known—for less than 12 months is risky, and David and I are not risk-takers. Editing the articles for this issue, particularly the ones by Cheryl Dueck Smith and Matthew Gallagher, reminded me that having a healthy relationship with your spouse requires work. So, I asked David why he thought our marriage has lasted 37 years. A handful of family members and friends have experienced divorce. Why not us?

We couldn’t identify anything concrete that we have or haven’t done for the past four decades. But David noted that in general, our extended families and church community, our work colleagues and friends have created an environment that supports marriage, while recognizing that unhealthy and abusive relationships can and sometimes should lead to divorce. And, even when relationships dissolve, a strong commitment to marriage remains. For example, one conversation from about a dozen years ago that still inspires me was with a man whose first marriage ended in divorce. At the time, his second wife had made a series of bad decisions. When asked why he remained committed to his second wife despite her actions, the man’s answer was simple: he didn’t believe in divorce.

How can we foster an atmosphere that affirms and sustains marriages? This issue of *Christian Leader* focuses on marriage, and our BodyLife story, “Refreshing marriages,” highlights three churches that have recently hosted an event or class designed to strengthen marriages. These USMB congregations, and others that have done something similar, demonstrate how local churches foster atmospheres that support and encourage men and women to regard marriage as a lifelong commitment, a decision that Tom Friesen, in his online essay for this issue, calls a subversive act.

More often, I think it’s the little things we do that prove marriage is important to us. David and I communicate our subversive commitment every Sunday by simply sitting side-by-side at church. My husband and I are thankful to be part of a congregation that is committed to healthy marriages. I encourage us to be people and congregations that intentionally nurture healthy marriages. Despite what studies show, marriage is a risk, whether we knew our spouse for 10 months or 25. Let’s commit ourselves to being people and churches that do all we can to create an environment that says “we do” when it comes to marriage. ▀



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## USMB Gathering includes workshops

When USMB Gathering 2022 comes to the Kansas City metro area July 26-30, two workshop tracks will highlight the Friday afternoon schedule.

Convention speaker Hillary Morgan Ferrer, founder of Mama Bear Apologetics, will offer workshops in each track, the first on evangelism and the second on apologetics, while Ron Klassen, executive director of Rural Home Missionary Association, will speak about evangelism in rural churches during both sessions.



Other Track 1 topics include: church revitalization (Rick Eshbaugh), pastoral finances (Jon Wiebe), global partnerships (Bob Davis and Stephen Humber) and “Nothing” Lounge (Phil Wiebe and Tim Thiessen).

In Track 2, convention speaker Jeff Bell will share strategies for urban evangelism, while Henri Ngolo and Doug Hiebert will share about ethnic evangelism. Other Track 2 topics include: evangelizing the next generation (J.L. Martin) and developing new leaders (Kyle Goings and Russ Claassen).

For more information or to register, visit [www.usmb.org/gathering2022](http://www.usmb.org/gathering2022) or call 1-800-257-0515.—USMB

## USMB national director to take sabbatical

USMB national director Don Morris began a three-month sabbatical April 9 that will run through July 4. Morris’ objectives during the sabbatical include rest, Bible reading, prayer, family time and home projects, as well as time to disconnect, recharge, refocus and review.

“There are times where an extended break is necessary for the deep rest of the heart, mind and soul,” says USMB Leadership Board chair Luke Haidle. “The USMB board believes in rest, in proper work/life balance and taking care of people. Don’s role is unique and carries burdens that other roles do not. We are thrilled to offer Don a sabbatical. For now, the agenda is to simply rest and renew.”

Morris last took a sabbatical in 2011.—USMB

## PDC delegates approve bylaw change

Delegates to a Pacific District Conference special convention held March 24 voted to amend the district’s bylaws to provide for a member church to separate from the district.

The special convention was held at Hope Kingsburg, Kingsburg, Calif., in a hybrid format, with more than 130 people attending, including 30 who attended via Zoom.

Other than a devotional given by Tim Geddert, U.S. Board of Faith and Life member, the 90-minute session dealt with a single agenda item: amending Article IV, Section 3.D.1 Dismissal from Membership.

Under the current bylaws, the only way a church can separate from the district is by closing. Currently there are three churches that for various reasons would like to withdraw from the PDC.

The proposed amendment, brought by the Executive Board, was itself amended twice during discussion. The approved amendment states: “If and when a member church departs from the Scriptural fundamentals of the faith, causes an ill report on account of its actions or its conduct, declines to accept and to carry out the resolutions of the Conference or cannot agree in doctrinal matters with the decisions of the Conference or with the Confession of Faith, after first seeking to reconcile, the Conference shall have the right to take disciplinary action including probation, suspension or termination of membership. The Conference shall formulate policies and procedures for the imposition of such disciplinary action.”

The amendment as amended passed by a show of hands with one dissenting vote. PDC churches have until May 8, 45 days from the special convention, to respond.—CL

## CL Review Committee named

The three-member *Christian Leader* Review Committee has been named and includes Don Morris, USMB national director; Jordan Ringhofer, PDC district minister; and Brent Warkentin, lead pastor of Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan.

The Review Committee will review feature essays, the editorial and “other



content that contains theological perspectives” prior to publication.

The formation of the Review Committee fulfills one of six recommendations proposed by the CL Review Team and approved by the USMB Leadership Board at its October 2021 meeting.

In addition, an Editorial Committee has been named to “collaborate with the editor and associate editor in selecting themes and topics and isolating timely issues.” The Editorial Committee will also help to select writers.

The first issue that will reflect the work of both the Editorial Committee and Review Committee will be the Sept/Oct 2022 *Christian Leader*. —CL

## ASCENT returns to Glorieta

USMB Youth’s annual national high school summer camp, ASCENT, will return to Glorieta Adventure Camps in Glorieta, N.M., June 10-14, 2022. The theme will be “Resilient.”



“In the book of Daniel, we encounter the timeless display of individuals demonstrating resilient character, uncompromisable faith and boldness to remain true to a God who continues to provide faithfully for his people in the midst of extreme challenges,” says the USMB Youth website. “This year’s theme will help discover the balance of remaining loyal to King Jesus while navigating the unavoidable and in-

evitable difficult pathways that we find ourselves on.”

Jon Fiester, lead pastor of Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D., will serve as speaker, while Presence Worship will lead worship. The event will also feature special guest illusionist Bryan Drake.

Registration after May 1 is \$400 for students and \$225 for leaders.

Each church can receive one free ticket to ASCENT if their lead youth worker is part of the National Youth Worker network. For more information or to join the network, visit [www.usmb youth.com/members/register](http://www.usmb youth.com/members/register). To register for ASCENT, visit [www.usmb youth.com/ascent](http://www.usmb youth.com/ascent). —USMB Youth

## Ukraine relief efforts

Several Mennonite Brethren and inter-Mennonite agencies have established ways to give to Ukraine relief following the Feb. 24 Russian invasion of that country.



Relief supplies funded by donations to Multiply are transported by van from Germany to the Ukrainian border where they are then transported to the war zone.

*Photo by Multiply*

MB Foundation established the Ukraine MB Church Relief Fund to provide emergency relief and refugee assistance to the Association of MB Churches in Ukraine, which includes 24 churches and five church plants.

Multiply is accepting relief funds for Ukrainian MB churches as they organize relief ministry in the war zone to provide food, medicine and water.

Mennonite Central Committee’s response is focused on longer-term scale up of existing programs that support vulnerable people and extending those services to internally displaced populations.

For more information or to give, visit [www.usmb.org/ukraine-updates-and-ways-to-give/](http://www.usmb.org/ukraine-updates-and-ways-to-give/). —USMB

## MWC assembly limits on-site attendees

The Mennonite World Conference Assembly 17, hosted by the three Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonite synods in Central Java, Indonesia, July 5-10 2022, will welcome 700 on-site participants with the option of additional Indonesian guests for opening night and closing service.

Registration for on-site Assembly is open. For more information, visit: <https://event.mwc-cmm.org/> —MWC

## CL receives awards

*Christian Leader* received two awards in the 2022 Evangelical Press Association contest. Associate editor Janae Rempel received a fourth-place award in the Higher Goals Interview Article category for her article, “David Janzen enjoys his front row seat.” 2022 Higher Goals awards honor the best work done in specific categories during the 2021 calendar year. The judge wrote, “This is a seamless arti-

# 5 minutes with...

cle. The quotes and narrative blend together to create a strong overview piece.... It flows with professional cadence.”

The magazine also received an Award of Merit in the Denominational (print) category of the Awards of Excellence. 2022 Awards of Excellence honor the best work done in the EPA during the 2021 calendar year. “This magazine serves your denomination well,” wrote the judge. “It is well designed and well written. Compelling stories throughout.”

The awards were announced at the annual EPA Christian Media Convention held April 10-12 in Colorado Springs, Colo. Rempel and editor Connie Faber were present to receive the awards.—CL

## Leadership Board discusses issues

The USMB Leadership Board discussed issues that emerged in several reports and acted on recommended appointments when it met April 1-2 in San Diego, Calif.

The board approved the USMB representative to the Mennonite World Conference youth gathering and affirmed nominees to the Mennonite Central Committee board and USMB Leadership Board. The board discussed Congolese Task Force plans to integrate the 10 USMB Congolese churches into the U.S. Conference. The Leadership Board met with Elton DaSilva and Ron Penner of the Canadian Conference via Zoom as part of a process to build relationships between the two national conference boards.

The Leadership Board meeting was the last in a series of USMB gatherings held in San Diego. The week began with the National Pastors Orientation followed by the Board of Faith and Life and National Strategy Team meetings.



## John Little

John Little is not one to flaunt his doctorate. He humbly serves Greenhaven Neighborhood Church in Sacramento, Calif., on the board of trustees and as facilities manager and volunteers with Mennonite Disaster Service. His career as a botanist and environmental scientist, however, has earned him recognition in *Marquis Who's Who Top Scientists* and placed him at the podium at scientific conferences. Before he sold his environmental consulting business last year, one of his last projects was to make a count of Joshua trees in California's Mojave Desert.

### ***Why count Joshua trees?***

Scores of solar energy projects are currently in the planning stage or being constructed throughout the Mojave Desert. Thousands of Joshua trees have been lost from previous projects. The California Fish and Game Commission determined that Joshua trees needed legal protection. Solar companies are now required to document the number of trees affected so their loss can be fully compensated.

### ***How did you conduct the count?***

We surveyed over 4,400 acres for three projects and recorded a total of 7,996 Joshua trees. The team walked parallel transects 50 feet apart. When you come to a tree you GPS it, take photos from two different angles and record in your logbook its estimated height.

### ***What were some of the challenges of surveying the 4,400 acres?***

Our team of four worked six days a week for six weeks, averaging 10 hours a day. The project areas are located where there's lots of wind and wind-blown sand. Walkie-talkies are needed to maintain communication between team members. You have to be

careful not to step on a Mojave green rattlesnake.

### ***Did you make any interesting discoveries?***

Yes, a couple of things. There's a lizard that occurs only on Joshua trees. It hides under the bark and its color blends in with the trunk. They're very secretive, but I had read up on them and spotted one. There are also scores of bird species that use Joshua trees for nesting. The tips of their tough, fibrous leaves are needle-like. Where leaves overlap, a bird can make a nest inside and predators can't reach it.

### ***As a Christian scientist what do you bring to the scientific community?***

I bring the alternative viewpoint that life didn't evolve from a primordial blob of goo. Everything was created by God for a purpose. The closer scientists look at organisms or natural communities, the more we realize just how complex things are and how they interconnect in very complex ways. A tree has no brain, yet knows when and how to produce leaves, flowers, and fruits. If a branch breaks, the tree knows how to repair the wound.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

## God is going to use me

From homelessness to security in God's family

**F**ortunately, it doesn't get too cold in Fresno, Calif., because I lived on the streets.

I would say probably 75 percent of people who are homeless use drugs, and that was the case for me. When you're living on the streets, you have no place to shower. You're filthy dirty. People look at you like you're not human.

But I've learned that God uses people of all forms. No matter what I've done in life, there's forgiveness, and I can help advance the kingdom.

I grew up in an abusive situation. My parents used drugs, and both were alcoholics. Structure was foreign to me, and that carried on into adulthood as I, too, experimented with drugs.

I lived in Reno, Nev., for 30 years, and in 2007 I cleaned up a bit from my "colorful" past. I was actively involved at a mega church. I married, had a son and secured a great paying job. For a guy that was just a high school graduate, I was pretty blessed. I thought I was doing everything right.

But on Christmas Day in 2011, a divorce blindsided me, and my world came crashing down. Three years later, I wound up homeless on the streets of Fresno. I had followed a girl there, intending to get clean and sober but ended up falling back into old habits.

We camped in different spots with tents and blankets. Cardboard was our friend. We slept on asphalt and in alleyways, but we never froze. When you're chemically induced, it's different.

We camped in a part of Fresno that's known for violence and gangs. I faced guns and endured beatings. I got hit in the face with a rock in a sock. I saw people die.

For about six months we camped on the San Joaquin riverbank, hiking 3.5-miles just to go to the store, but nobody bothered us there.

We had food stamps, but I'm not going to lie. At times we ate from dumpsters. We knew where they were throwing out food, and it was warm.

I began to get comfortable. In the back of my mind, I knew it wasn't right, but it's hard to get out of that kind of situation once you're in it. Programs

exist, but you have to jump through so many hoops to get into treatment facilities.

Then I began having health problems. I had a heart attack in 2015. A year later, blood clots in my heart and lungs floored me. I couldn't breathe. Paralyzed in my lower extremities, I was coughing up blood. I conceded the fact that I was going to die on the streets. I thought I'd never see my son again, and he wouldn't know what happened to his dad. I spent 28 days in the hospital, but by the grace of God I survived.

I returned to my old ways, though. I was staying in a trailer on property owned by someone from Madera Avenue Bible Church, and he kept asking if I wanted to go to church with him. I eventually agreed but didn't clean up my act.

In 2018, I got sick again. Doctors thought I would die from sudden cardiac death, so they put a defibrillator in my chest. Right before I went to the hospital, I saw a bright flash of light in the middle of the night. I lived in the country where there were no lights. I saw it a second time, leaving no doubt in my mind that Jesus revealed himself to me. Did I see an actual figure? No. But I made up my mind to stop doing what I was doing, and I haven't looked back since.

I started going to church at Madera Avenue more. At first I felt unworthy. I was still coming off homelessness. I was dirty. I didn't have many clothes. Pastor Jim Kennemur gave me a Bible, and I started reading it. I started with Proverbs, then made my way through the New Testament and then the Old.

The more I read, the more I believed. It convicted me. I'd read some of the Bible before, but this time, I understood that God was real. I hit my knees in tears, wondering how God could forgive someone like me.

The people at Madera Avenue believed in me. They didn't care about anything I had done. They wanted me to know God and experience the love that Jesus tells us to show each other. I'd been in church before, but I'd never felt anything like that.



“

The more I read, the more I believed. It convicted me. I'd read some of the Bible before, but this time, I understood that God was real. I hit my knees in tears, wondering how God could forgive someone like me.

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After a short visit to see my son in Reno, doors opened for me to return to California. Pastor Jim offered me a place to stay in Madera. When he retired and relocated, I moved into an apartment in a house owned by another family from church.

I'm confident that prayer is part of the reason I'm here today. My health has improved. My heart function improved from less than 20 percent to 55 percent, which is in the normal range. Doctors removed the defibrillator. The only thing I can tell you is God healed me because I think he wanted me to be part of this church.

At the end of 2021, current pastor Mike Unger asked me to help lead our youth group. While I didn't think I was ready at first, I agreed because I want to give back what's been so freely given to me. God used people like

Moses, Rahab and Solomon, and that helps me understand God's going to use me. He uses the foolish to shame the wise, and I've been foolish, trust me. I share with the youth about my past and let them know I'm not a kid who grew up in the church. That helps them relax, I think. It's great to help a young person understand what it's like to be a child of God.

God has opened my eyes so that I can see the world as he sees it and have a heart that breaks for what breaks his. I can take the message to people no matter what my past looks like. My passion is talking to people on the streets and riverbanks and letting them know that if I can come through this, they can, too. I think that's one reason God provided the path he has for me.■



Scott Dixon is co-youth pastor at Madera Avenue Bible Church in Madera, Calif. He has a teenage son, Christopher. Scott continues to study the Bible and would like to attend seminary to become a pastor. In his spare time, he enjoys repurposing wood to make furniture. His favorite verse is Galatians 2:20.

# Marriage

By Gaylord Goertzen

# is like a scissors



Marriage requires the hard work of cooperation, submission and loving like Jesus

**M**y wife and I recently visited with a woman whose wedding ceremony I conducted some 20 years ago. As we talked, she said, “During our pre-marriage counseling, you said that marriage is hard work. I didn’t believe you then, but now I know it’s true.”

Marriage—Christian marriage, biblical marriage—is hard work. It’s the hard work of being a pair of scissors.

A scissors consists of a pair of metal blades pivoted so that the sharpened edges slide against each other when the handles opposite to the pivot are closed. The two blades differ, and that’s what gives them the ability to do what they are made to do—cut. Separately the two blades do not have the power to cut, yet when connected with a screw the two blades become one and have the potential to cut through all kinds of material. But the two blades must cooperate and work together to accomplish the purpose for which they were created. If the two blades refuse to move, the scissors won’t work at all.

**Cooperation is hard work**

Marriage is like a scissors. Like the two blades, women and men are different. That’s how God created us. But when a wife and husband are joined with Jesus in the center, they become one and have the potential to cut through anything that comes in life. But that is only possible if the wife and husband cooperate and do their part in the hard work of marriage.

Cooperation—that’s the hard work of marriage and that’s what God’s Word talks about in Ephesians 5:22-25. The hard work of marriage begins with the work the wife is called to do.

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord” (v. 22). The hard work the wife is called to do is submit. It is true that the command to submit has been used by some husbands to keep their wives in subjection and has even led to physical and emotional abuse.

However, that is a total misuse, abuse and misunderstanding of the command to submit.

In this verse, a wife’s submission to her husband is not compared to the way slaves submit to their master or the way oppressed people submit to a despot. It is not a command to cower in fear but to walk in love. A wife’s submission to her husband is compared to the way she submits to Jesus her Savior and Lord. Submission to Jesus is not slavery or oppression but freedom and liberation.

Submission to Jesus is obedience to someone who loves and walks with us through all of life, whether good or bad, happy or sad. Submission to Jesus is surrender to someone who will never leave or forsake us. Submission means to walk with, work together with and cooperate with just like the two blades of the scissors cooperate with each other. The command to

“

Cooperation—that’s the hard work of marriage...

”



the wife to submit to her husband is a call to walk together with her husband, to work together with him though all of life with its joys and sorrows.

### **Loving as Christ**

The command to husbands is also hard work. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (v. 25) Husbands are commanded to love their wives “as Christ loved the church.” Love is hard work, and we see this in how Christ loves us, his bride, the church.

Our relationship to Christ did not start out as a love relationship. At the beginning there was no relationship; we were separated from Jesus because of sin. We did not love him. But because he loves us, Jesus took the first step so we could be reconciled to him and become his bride.

When we were separated from him, Jesus did not angrily fold his arms across his chest, tap his foot and say, “When you’re ready to come crawling back to me, I might accept you if you change.” Instead, Jesus took the first step, and, with arms of love open wide, he went to us to draw us to himself. Jesus did not come to us as a conquering king but as a humble servant.

That’s the hard work the husband is called to do. When there is a broken relationship in marriage, when there is conflict, when couples “fight,” the husband is called to be like Jesus and take the first step to bring reconciliation and end the conflict.

The husband is not called to demand that his wife come crawling back to him in submission. Rather, he is commanded to go to her in love and take the first step, just like Jesus took the first step to reconcile us to him. The hard work a husband is called to do is to humble himself just like Jesus and take the first step to bring reconciliation.

### **Giving up yourself**

Jesus also loved us so much he took a second step. He went to the cross and gave himself for us. Jesus was without sin, yet Jesus took the blame for the broken relationship. He took our sins on himself and died for us so that we might be reconciled to him. Husbands are called to do the same hard work as Jesus. When there is conflict in marriage Jesus calls husbands to take the second step and

take the blame for the conflict.

In a conflict in marriage, neither the wife nor the husband is ever 100 percent right or wrong. Because marriage is made up of two less than perfect people, husbands and wives are both to blame for conflict. Although Jesus was 100 percent right and we were 100 percent wrong, Jesus took the blame so we could be reconciled. Husbands are called to humble themselves and take the blame for the conflict. The husband is called to take the blame, humbly go to his wife and say, “I was wrong for what I did. Will you please forgive me?” The husband is called to love like Jesus and die to his pride and desires so he and his wife can be reconciled.

The husband is called to love his wife and give himself for her in all of life, not just when there is conflict. Then he, like Jesus, can walk beside her to love, serve and care for her through all of life—the good, the bad and the in-between.

### **Who holds the scissors**

Marriage, Christian marriage, is like a scissors, with two different people—a woman and a man—working hard to cooperate so their marriage can become what God created it to be. But that’s not all. Someone has to hold the handles of the scissors, and that someone is Jesus.

Husbands and wives are called to give their lives and their marriage to Jesus to lead and guide them all through life. When husbands and wives submit themselves to Jesus, they can experience the abundant life and abundant love in marriage Jesus wants to give. With Jesus holding the handles of the scissors of their marriage, together they can cut through all that comes in life, the good and the bad, the joys and sorrows, the happiness and sadness.

My wife, Peggy, and I have been a scissors for almost 53 years. We have experienced the joy that comes from Jesus grasping the handles of our marriage and leading and guiding us during our 45 years of pastoral ministry. He has walked beside us to help and encourage us. It’s not been easy or perfect, but it has been worth it. Yes, marriage is hard work but with Jesus there is joy.

*Gaylord Goertzen is a retired Mennonite Brethren minister living in Hillsboro, Kan. He and his wife, Peggy, have served congregations in California, Oklahoma and Kansas.*

# Healing Raw Spots

By Cheryl Dueck Smith

Communication in a marriage improves  
when we soothe a crushed spirit

A high percentage of couples I counsel say they need to learn communication skills. However, they seem to communicate with me just fine!

Proverbs 18:14 says, “The human spirit can endure in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” The problem for many couples who are baffled by seemingly ordinary interactions in their marriage that suddenly go sideways isn’t their communication skills. Rather, it is their inability to recognize the sudden appearance of emotional pain masquerading in irritable and insensitive behavior that results in a crushed spirit.

Imagine the following scenario: Rebekah is distressed after getting into a big argument with their teenager, and she calls her husband, Matthew, for comfort. Matthew, driving home in heavy traffic, is distracted so he tells Rebekah they will talk when he gets home. When Matthew arrives home later than expected, he eats a quick dinner and leaves for his men’s Bible study. Rebekah is left alone with her distress and now feels the additional pain of Matthew not being available to comfort her.

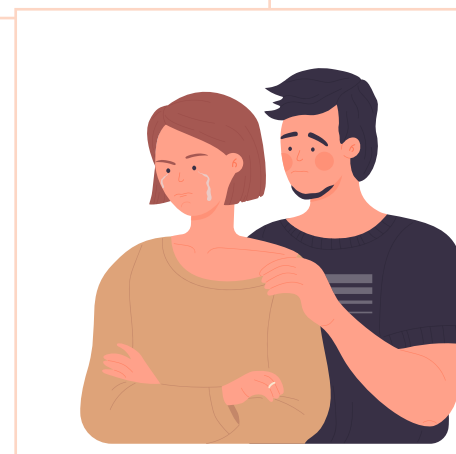
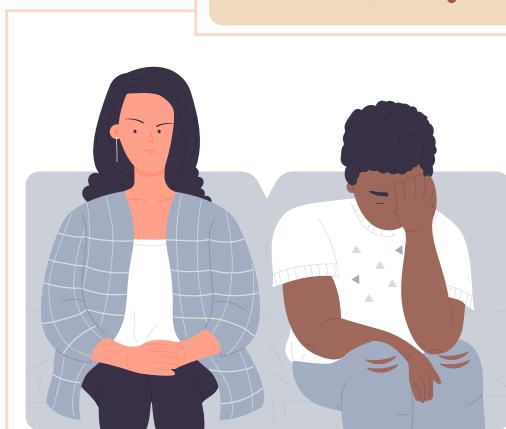
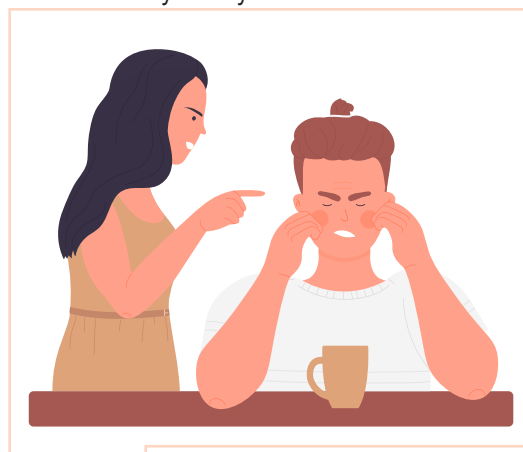
The following week, as Matthew kisses Rebekah goodbye and leaves for his men’s Bible study, Rebekah angrily criticizes him for never being home in the evenings. He feels attacked for no reason at all and harshly reminds her that going to the Bible study was her idea in the first place. He returns home later than usual that night, hoping Rebekah will already be asleep. So, what is going on here?

## Recognizing a raw spot

A crushed spirit, which could also be called an emotional raw spot, needs the healing balm of connection. Sue Johnson, founder of Emotionally Focused Therapy, defines a raw spot as a “hyper-sensitivity” that is painful when poked. Raw spots, or emotional bruises, are created when the need for closeness, belonging, safety or acceptance is repeatedly ignored or dismissed.

Sometimes the bruise forms because of marital fights that turn ugly, mean behavior or harsh words that appear when we haven’t been our best selves. At other times, partners bring these wounds from their childhood or past romantic relationships. Traumatic experiences contribute to this sensitivity, but these raw spots can be formed through everyday interactions where we are unresponsive to the emotional needs of a loved one.

Unbeknownst to Matthew, a raw spot formed when Rebekah reached for care and support, but he was not available. Even though Matthew may be generally loving and available, he missed this opportunity, and it was painful to Rebekah. It is not about his intention but about the impact.





## Reacting to a raw spot

When Rebekah criticized Matthew for never being home, Matthew felt blindsided. When a raw spot is activated, there is an emotional shift, often leaving the partner to wonder, “What just happened?” When the emotion feels disproportionate, that is a pretty good sign that a deeper hurt was poked. I tell my clients, “If it is hysterical, it is historical.” The past just invaded the present; the emotion from an earlier experience has popped up in a situation that feels familiar in some way. Too often, couples fixate on the current situation and all the big emotion that has blindsided them in this moment, and it doesn’t seem logical. But emotions make sense if we dig a little deeper to discover the crushed spirit that is asking to be soothed.

On the surface, there may be intense “fight” responses such as attacking, yelling, name-calling or criticizing as seen in Rebekah’s response. Or you may see “flight” reactions like ignoring, avoiding, becoming engrossed in one’s phone or, as Matthew did, coming home later than expected. These reactive behaviors can be painful (more raw spots in the making) and often fuel an argument. Unfortunately, the underlying hurt doesn’t get addressed and remains unhealed. Chances are high the residual pain will reappear in the future.

## Revealing the raw spot

Raw spots may seem mysterious, until you have an idea what to look for. We all have normal needs for acceptance and belonging. When we perceive rejection and abandonment, especially from the very people that are the most important to us, we get scared. More than anything, we want a significant other to see us and accept us for who we are, to want to be with us and regard us as special.

When we receive messages to the contrary, like criticism (perhaps camouflaged as “helpful feedback”) or not recognizing one’s contribution to the relationship (such as shutting down to avoid an ugly fight), a raw spot of rejection is formed. Likewise, a raw spot of abandonment develops when a partner ignores invitations for affection, declines time together or doesn’t share their thoughts and feelings.

Unfortunately, how someone with a crushed spirit behaves often activates a raw spot in the other. Rebekah felt abandoned, unsupported in her time of emotional pain, so she lashed out and criticized Matthew. Matthew, with a hidden raw spot of rejection, may fear that no matter how hard he tries to please Rebekah, like attending the Bible study, he will never receive acceptance. So, Matthew pulls away, confirming to Rebekah that he really doesn’t want to connect with her, and on and on it goes.

## Repairing the raw spot

Sue Johnson says raw spots are inevitable, even in loving marriages. As much as we desire to be present and available to those we love, sometimes we miss the opportunity due to our own raw spots, fatigue, lack of awareness or circumstances beyond our control.

The good news is that we can change the way we respond to raw spots, steering clear of the negative cycles

of reactivity. There are specific steps we can take to soothe and heal the pain of a raw spot. How can Matthew and Rebekah follow these steps to navigate this situation differently?

**Pause.** Don’t react when you see the disproportionate emotional response. “The wise person overlooks an insult” (Proverbs 12:16b). Both Rebekah and Matthew can choose to stop the reactivity and not respond hastily to Rebekah’s critical attack or Matthew’s harsh response and avoidance.

**Be aware.** Recognize that a raw spot has been poked. Matthew or Rebekah can be the first to name the raw spot. Either partner can notice that a deeper hurt just surfaced, but it takes wisdom and insight to see it. I echo Paul’s prayer found in Philippians 1:9, “that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.”

**Be curious.** Ask about your partner’s deeper feelings and experience. Proverbs 20:5 states, “The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.” Matthew might gently ask Rebekah what his leaving is triggering in her. With tenderness, he can allow Rebekah space to share the origins of her crushed spirit. He needs to be ready to listen without defensiveness, often easier said than done. Rebekah can soften and inquire about Matthew’s reaction to what was poked in him.

**Be vulnerable.** Risk sharing the hidden hurt with your partner. Vulnerability fosters intimacy. Rebekah might share how she reached out for support and felt abandoned in her distress. When Rebekah lets Matthew into her hurt, she allows him to share her pain, reflecting the encouragement in Galatians 6:2 to “carry one another’s burdens.”

**Offer compassion.** Connection is a healing balm for the raw spot. Matthew may hear how his inability to respond to Rebekah’s distress sent her the message that he wasn’t there for her, touching her deeper fear of being abandoned. He listens with compassion, giving her a new experience of support and love that he was unable to provide earlier. In this process, Matthew and Rebekah embody the exhortation of Ephesians 4:32: “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”

The adage “Time heals all wounds” often isn’t true. Couples need to actively repair their raw spots, or they will resurface time and time again. The content of the fight may vary but the core needs will remain unmet. A healing balm needs to be applied regularly to heal emotional bruises. It is not the presence of raw spots that determines the health of a marriage but the ability to recognize and repair raw spots when they appear, fostering greater connection.

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# Hand in hand



*Three married couples from our Mennonite Brethren family respond to questions about life together. Their candid answers offer a glimpse into the realities of marriage and the wisdom gained through a long journey traveled hand in hand.*

## **Lucila and Rolando Mireles** ***Rooted in the church***



*When Lucila Cantu was young, her pastor in La Grulla, Texas, would organize activities bringing together the youth from several local Spanish-speaking congregations. Among the young people he would pick up for these events was a high schooler named Rolando Mireles who lived about 10 miles up the highway in rural South Texas. Knowingly or not, this pastor was planting the seed of romance—a seed that took root and bloomed into marriage. For nearly 50 years Lucila and Rolando have lived in La Grulla raising their three children, teaching in the public school and serving their church and community.*

### **When did you first notice each other?**

The pastor took us young people skating. When Lucila, an eighth grader, fell on the skating rink, Rolando, 3 1/2 years older, was there to help her up. Our parents were strict and we took it slow, getting to know each other at our church youth meetings. Finally, at Lucila's high school graduation Rolando was invited to come to the house.

### **What drew the two of you together?**

Not everyone who came to these youth meetings loved the Lord, but we saw that we had a common desire to serve the Lord. We felt that each of us was given certain gifts from God that could complement each other to better serve him together.

### **What are some practices that strengthen your marriage?**

Together we enjoy going out to eat in those small hole-in-the-wall restaurants and tending to our small flock of chickens. We also like to travel, whether it is driving around country roads enjoying God's creation, short trips to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico or visiting our grandkids. Praying and reading God's Word together is very important to us.

### **What role has the church played in your marriage?**

A major role. It allowed for us to study and teach God's Word together while being strengthened in doing so. It was especially important when we became youth leaders and were able to see that God could use us to make a difference in the lives of our young people. It also became important when together we could serve in national youth organizing committees to better serve the youth.

### **What has been a challenging time in your marriage?**

Dealing with church conflicts. There are times as leaders when problems in the church can bring hard and stressful times. We decided as a couple not to answer back, even when people criticized and misunderstood us. There were things we couldn't say to others in the church and we didn't want our kids to be affected so we couldn't talk openly at home. We cried together and really had to rely on each other. We learned to deal with the conflict together and as a family with much prayer and remaining steadfast in the Lord and also receiving counsel with local and national conference leaders that God provided.

**How have you found balance between your marriage and many other commitments?**

Balancing our marriage while being church leaders, school teachers, members of various local and national conference boards and parenting three children came with its challenges. One way the Lord provided was the opportunity for our family to travel to the state of Washington for 14 summers where we worked teaching in a summer migrant program. It was a time to enjoy family as well as visit our conference churches where we enjoyed many relationships.

**Who has been a model for you in marriage?**

We admired many for how they served and the heart with which they served. One couple was Harold and Susan Schroeder from Ferndale, Wash., who we learned to know during our summers in Washington. We have learned to imitate their qualities of hospitality, generosity and service to the Lord.

**What advice would you have for a couple preparing for marriage?**

Go to church, read God's Word and always be ready to forgive each other when things don't go right. Honor God in your relationship.

*Clint and Evelyn Seibel*  
*Opposites attract*



*It took him three years to convince her that he was the one. They had their differences: Evelyn a soft-spoken Canadian who came to study at Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kan.; Clint an outgoing leader who grew up on a Kansas farm. But the combination has served them well for 50 years. Career changes took them and their three children to the West Coast for seminary, to Denver to pastor at Bellevue Acres Church, and back to Kansas to serve Tabor and the Hillsboro community. The couple is enjoying semi-retirement as the managers of Bluejay Lanes, a bowling and youth center.*

**What brought the two of you together?**

They say opposites attract, but when we were dating our emotions seemed to blind us to our differences. We just knew we were in love, and we didn't think anything in the world would change that. We both grew up in the church and loved music and had a sense that those interests would give meaning to our life together even if we had no idea of how that would play out.

**How has your spouse brought out the best in you?**

Evelyn: One thing that attracted me to Clint was how he seemed more comfortable than I did being in charge of things. I enjoyed staying at home raising our children while he worked in the real estate and auction business. I felt affirmed and supported by Clint in my work at home, and after our family had grown and I was working outside the home, his encouragement to look at my work as a place of ministry made it truly meaningful for me.

Clint: Early in our marriage we didn't recognize the value of what each of us brought to the relationship, but we have learned to appreciate each other's gifts, giving a better balance to both of us—especially me. Ev has definitely helped me to step back and look at things before charging ahead. God has called us into various directions in life for a specific season. These career changes would not have been possible without her strong love and support.

**Tell about a way the church has impacted your marriage.**

When we were planning to move our family to Fresno to attend seminary, we left a loving church in Hillsboro that sent us out with their blessings. North Fresno Church embraced us with a lot of love and acceptance, as did our congregation in Denver. The opportunity to serve the church brought us together as a couple to do what we had always hoped.

**What are some practices that have strengthened your relationship?**

We thought at first that nothing could ever change our thoughts about each other, but soon found out that work responsibilities, personal interests and other things caused a strain on our marriage. We had to intentionally look for things we could enjoy doing as a couple. When kids came along, music, sports, travel and being together with friends and family were all important to us. Now as we are retired, we have more time to go out and talk about life over a cup of coffee. That's a great thing to do—especially when your spouse's love language is meaningful conversation.

**What have been some challenges?**

We've jokingly said that we had 48 good years of marriage and that's not bad out of 50!

Probably our biggest challenge was to learn how to communicate when we had disagreements. It was tempting to attack each other instead of the issue. Figuring out how to do that has helped through any challenges we faced.



**What advice would you give a couple preparing for marriage?**

Someone once said marriage is like two rivers joining together creating some pretty turbulent waters for a while. In time, things begin to smooth out but there are always some rapids along the way. When God brings you together, he will also carry you through the rough waters.

*Christine and Sam Wall*  
*For richer, for poorer*



*Chris was still in high school in 1971 when she and Sam got to know each other as part of summer staff at Hartland Christian Camp in Central California. Three years later they married and moved to Sam's hometown of Madera where, for 48 years, they have lived and served actively at Madera Avenue Bible Church. Sam has a cabinet-making business. Chris worked 30 years in management at Sherwin Williams Paint Company and then as a planned giving advisor for MB Foundation.*

**How has your spouse brought out your best qualities?**

Sam: Chris has always encouraged me to get involved in areas that interested me. She was understanding as I pursued my cabinetmaking business and encouraged me in various ministries both within and outside of our church.

Chris: Sam recognized that I have leadership skills and always encouraged me in that regard in my work, in the church and in various boards on which I have served. He wants me to be who I am and not try to fit into a mold expected of other women.

**Where in your life together have your marriage vows been a challenge?**

When we were first married, we experienced "for richer or for poorer" as money was extremely tight. With Chris

finishing her education and Sam trying to start a business, we were broke for quite a while. This was not easy, but God blessed us with the ability to work hard and earn money to pull out of that situation. Being so poor early on has made us extremely grateful to God for what we have and makes it very easy to be generous with our finances.

**What other low points have you faced as a couple?**

Sam served as an army medic in Vietnam before we met. He suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which made our early years quite challenging. But we were both committed to the marriage and felt that God wanted us together, so we kept working at it. Sam has been able to come to terms with his past with Chris standing beside and helping him through it.

**How do the two of you work through your conflicts?**

Sometimes we don't. For three years Chris has wanted new patio furniture, but Sam thinks that the old furniture is just fine. So, the old furniture is on the patio rotting away and the standoff continues.

**How have you found balance between your marriage and other demands of life?**

During our working years, we both worked many hours to the point of neglecting each other. Work-life balance really didn't exist in our home. The main thing that has gotten us through and kept us together is to give each other a lot of grace, each understanding that the activities occupying the other's time were important and worthwhile.

**What new practices have enriched your marriage in your retirement years?**

We have grown to love travelling together both domestically and internationally. We've also found that entertaining in our home brings us close together.

**What role has the church played in your life as a couple?**

Our church has always been an integral part of our relationship. The fact that we attended church every Sunday (and other times during the week) helped keep us together. Our childlessness has not always been a positive thing in the church. In the early years we felt we were not considered to be a family since we were childless, and this was at times hurtful.

**What advice would you give a couple preparing for marriage?**

The practice we would most recommend is regular church attendance. It's hard to argue with someone when you have just sat next to them at a worship service. Also, allow your spouse to be who they are and don't try to fix them. View your marriage as a partnership for life and not a "happily ever after" fairy tale.



## Refreshing marriages

Churches fueling Great Commission one marriage at a time

In April of 2021, just after COVID-19 restrictions had lifted, allowing people to gather indoors, 92 couples flooded the campus of The Bridge Bible Church in Bakersfield, Calif., for the one-day Refresh Marriage Conference. With lights low and the smell of coffee filling the air, the sanctuary buzzed with anticipation and the excitement of being together. The celebratory atmosphere stood in stark contrast to the struggle many couples carried with them.

Following the lockdowns of 2020, the national number of divorces skyrocketed, up 34 percent compared to 2019. The combination of stress from financial strain, illness, death of loved ones, homeschooling children and increased depression and anxiety took a toll, putting a significant strain on relationships. Noticing these effects among its own church body, The Bridge felt the Refresh conference was essential.

“Our vision at The Bridge is to see our neighborhoods full of families centered on Jesus and actively living out the Gospel,” lead pastor Jeff Gowling says. “It is obvious to us that for that to happen, marriages need to be healthy and Christ-centered. In today’s culture, marriage isn’t easy.”

Phil and Diane Comer, founders of the Intentional Parents ministry (and parents of pastor and author John Mark Comer), served as key speakers. Gowling and his wife, Tracy, along with several other pastors and their wives, also presented. They offered biblical principles for strengthening marriage and practical tips for restoring marital closeness in the wake of a stressful season.

The Refresh conference, which featured live worship and included lunch, offered sessions on building friendship with your spouse, protecting marriage from affairs, working through conflict



Ridgepoint Church offers “Strengthen Your Marriage” classes to encourage young couples and to equip the next generation of leaders. *Photo by Ridgepoint Church*

and centering your relationship on Jesus, exercising the love and honor he commands. Three to four couples gathered at each table led by a more seasoned married couple.

The Gowlings taught a session on protecting and prioritizing friendship in marriage. In 2019, the couple walked through Jeff being diagnosed with a rare, life-threatening form of lymphoma and the subsequent treatment, including a stem cell transplant.

“As a couple, we have lived through some difficult months of chemo and recovery,” Tracy said. “Having a solid friendship has been an anchor for all we have endured. We’re so thankful for the foundation that existed before the trials hit.”

Couples who were navigating significant challenges in their marriages, such as infidelity or sexual addiction, were invited back in the evening for a “Restore” session, which provided an opportunity to discuss tough issues and plug into a

recovery support group.

Following the conference, the church led a 6-week class, where 25 couples walked through Ryan and Selena Fredrick’s “Gospel-Centered Marriage” teaching videos and curriculum. After the course, couples reported feeling greater confidence in making Christ the center of their marriages.

### A class for all marriages

Pastor Stuart Curry of Salem MB Church in Bridgewater, S.D., noticed a need for marriage enrichment for newlyweds at the church.

“We wanted to offer a marriage Sunday school class for young married couples,” he says, “but those who had been married longer expressed an interest.”

The class, offered during Salem’s Sunday school hour—where approximately 60 are in attendance—featured a DVD presentation of “Marriage on the Rock” curriculum by Jimmy Evans followed by group discussion. Participants follow

along with their own workbooks. Six newly married couples took the initial class and four more couples who have been married for longer joined the second wave.

Curry has been encouraged by the interest in the class.

"We have heard that it has helped couples better understand their spouses and discover some things they are doing personally that need to change," he says. "Marriage is ordained by God. The church needs to provide couples with the resources to make their marriages into great marriages."

### Pouring into next gen marriages

Last fall as county lockdowns began to lift and mask policies relaxed, Ridge-

point Church in Wichita, Kan., decided to take advantage of the opportunity and offer a weeknight marriage class for couples called "Strengthen Your Marriage."

Matt Gallagher, who volunteers with Twenty30, Ridgepoint's young adult ministry, leads the class with his wife, Lori. Matt and Lori have attended Ridgepoint for 22 years and have served in multiple roles. Matt is also a licensed clinical professional counselor who has been in private practice for 13 years. This gives him a unique understanding of what young couples are up against.

In 2018, the Twenty30 leadership team began developing a plan to deliberately engage young married couples

in the church. Matt was invited to help provide leadership for a "No Pressure Life Group," which met one evening during the week and a Sunday morning "Coffee and Jesus" class. Both were designed to facilitate community and help couples grow in faith.

"It was exciting to watch this ministry launch with new connections forming and steady growth in attendance," he says. "In the early days of the pandemic, it was frustrating to have to cancel events and lose that sense of connection."

Last fall, the team was excited to be able to pick up where they left off. As part of the "Strengthen Your Marriage" class, Matt and Lori lead discussions on everyday marriage challenges, such as communication, conflict resolution and the stages of development for couples and young families.

"The loose format leads to unplanned moments," he says, "but also facilitates some organic discussions about everyday life that hopefully normalizes each person's experience."

Six to 12 couples attend weekly.

"Some of the most rewarding moments are watching individuals realize how normal it is to grow weary in everyday challenges or argue over the mundane patterns of life like folding laundry, doing dishes and cooking food," Matt says. "But God can meet them there and bless their relationships."

The Twenty30 leadership team regularly reflects on ways to provide new opportunities for connection and personal development among young married couples.

"Ideally, we are looking for ways to encourage organic leadership and encourage the next generation that will guide our churches," Matt says.

### Maximizing marriages

Churches like The Bridge, Salem and Ridgepoint have discovered that

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strong marriages and families can be an engine for accomplishing the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20. Efforts to strengthen marriages and encourage couples to center their homes and families around Christ acts like fuel for that engine. As we move into a post-pandemic world, the timing could not be better for fortifying the marriages of God's people.

Angel Gabion and her husband, Jeff, who have been married for 18 years, attended the Refresh marriage conference at The Bridge. Angel says the messages that day revealed some specific "bad habits" she had been practicing throughout her marriage and some ways she and her husband weren't walking in unity. The speakers' words also gave her a lot of hope for change.

This change was cemented through attending the six-week "Gospel-Centered Marriage" class.

"The course provided Jeff and me guidance and tools to walk in our faith as husband and wife, not as separate individuals," Angel says. "Because of this, we are now growing together in our relationship with God, and he has blessed our marriage and family in ways only he can." —*Suzanne Hadley Gosselin*

Read Matt Gallagher's essay on marriage online at [www.christianleadermag.com](http://www.christianleadermag.com)

## Miles away, but close to home

### USMB churches in Spokane respond to crisis in Ukraine

When Russian forces invaded Ukraine Feb. 24, members of Pacific Keep Church, a USMB church plant in Spokane, Wash., experienced grief, anger and shock.

Pastor Boris Borisov describes the congregation as "not specifically



Members of Pacific Keep Church in Spokane, Wash., prepare to serve plov, a traditional rice pilaf dish, during a March 20 fundraiser for the Ukraine Relief Fund. The proceeds helped to cover the cost of surgery for a volunteer in Kharkiv injured during shelling, as well as humanitarian aid. *Photo by Pacific Keep*

Slavic" but a church that as a second-generation church plant of Pilgrim Slavic Baptist Church (PSBC) happens to have Slavic people.

"We have a lot of first-generation immigrants—mostly young adults who came here when they were really, really young," Borisov says. "(The war) hit home really hard because I would say 85 to 90 percent of our church members have somebody they know personally on the ground being bombarded, fleeing (or) fighting."

Borisov began receiving emails and phone calls offering help as a result of Pacific Keep's unique position in the city and his own connections made working in economic development for the city for 12 years.

"Somehow I became the bridge between the old Slavic generation here and the leadership in Spokane," Borisov says.

Recognizing an opportunity, Borisov organized a response and Spokane Loves Ukraine (SLU) was born, including the formation of a Ukraine Relief Coalition (URC). The response involves people from Pacific Keep, PSBC and other churches coordinat-

ing a three-fold response to the crisis involving prayer, humanitarian aid and refugee resettlement.

### Spokane Loves Ukraine

Soon after the start of the war, Pacific Keep and other churches organized a community prayer night. When the need emerged for a centralized place for updates, Borisov and associate pastor Jack Dunbar created a "Spokane Loves Ukraine" webpage where prayer night attendees could sign up to stay connected or donate to a Ukraine relief fund. Borisov began sending weekly email updates listing prayer and practical needs and opportunities for involvement.

As donations began coming in, members of Pacific Keep, PSBC and several other churches formed the Ukraine Relief Coalition (URC), to coordinate Spokane's response.

PSBC pastor Alexandr Kaprian, who faced government persecution for being a Christian before leaving his hometown of Mariupol as a religious refugee in 1989, says 70 to 80 percent of his congregation is from Ukraine.



“We work directly with people that we know there in Ukraine,” Kaprian says. “We are helping those people in the war zone who are suffering. They have no food, no water, no clothing.”

While the URC is not the only group responding to the crisis in Ukraine, it is unique in its focus on relief efforts that support churches directly connected to people in Spokane.

“Everybody’s raising money for Ukraine right now,” Borisov says. “But we have that local touch, if you will, of people in Spokane and their relatives and friends over there being impacted by the war.”

## Humanitarian needs

Borisov’s connections with the city and Pacific Keep’s trusted relationship with community partners have provided fundraising opportunities. The Innovia Foundation, which partners with people

wanting to improve their communities, sent a press release to donors about the Ukraine Relief Fund, and the city council issued a proclamation supporting Ukraine, lighting the skyline in blue and yellow in solidarity. Businesses, too, have supported SLU.

As donations come in, the URC discerns next steps based on needs on the ground in Ukraine, including coats, shoes, socks, undergarments, medical supplies such as bandages and ibuprofen, baby formula, dry goods and money to purchase gasoline.

“All your generic needs just to live are either severely cut off in Ukraine or hard to get,” Borisov says. “We’re trying to focus all of our giving on the humanitarian side and stay away from anything associated with (the) military.”

In early March, more than 60 volunteers sorted and packed hygiene supplies, medicine, clothing and nonperishable

food items for Ukrainian refugees.

Pacific Keep hosted a plov fundraiser March 20—plov is a traditional rice pilaf dish—with the \$3,225 in proceeds helping to cover the cost of surgery for a volunteer in Kharkiv injured during shelling, as well as humanitarian aid.

The team shipped the most urgently needed items via airplane to Poland to be sent by train to the Ukraine border for pickup by local church members. The URC organized a second container shipment to Poland via ship.

It is much easier to get supplies to the western half of Ukraine, Borisov says, as opposed to eastern Ukraine where bombardments are aggressive.

“We’ve got members in our church who have family members in Mariupol,” Borisov says. “It’s devastatingly difficult to get anything there because all of the convoys have been either hijacked or attacked or shelled.”

PSBC’s Kaprian says about 90 percent of Mariupol is destroyed.

“Some of my relatives are missing, and some of my friends, dead,” Kaprian says. “It’s heartbreaking.”

Some Ukrainian churches have sent bank account information for direct deposits, but in some cities, banking systems no longer work.

The team is also seeking to help refugees who have crossed the border into Poland, Kaprian says.

As of March 30, the Ukraine Relief Fund had received \$6,901 in donations. The team has packed more than 6,000 pounds of humanitarian aid, including 2,165 pounds of food, 1,848 pounds of diapers and wipes, 1,395 pounds of clothing and 645 pounds of medical supplies. The URC welcomes funds to cover the cost of shipping.

## Refugee resettlement

In addition to prayer and humanitarian aid, the URC’s response involves lobbying Congress to consider Spokane as a location for refugee resettlement.

The Biden administration announced plans in March for the U.S. to welcome up to 100,000 displaced Ukrainians, and



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Borisov says the case can be made for Spokane to receive some of them.

Spokane County is home to as many as 50,000 Slavs, about 10 percent of the county. This includes not only Ukrainians, but also refugees from Russia, Moldova and other former Soviet states resettled by the U.S. government in eastern Washington in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Many first-generation immigrants came to the U.S. as children and now have families and roots in Spokane. Borisov came with his family as a 5-year-old in 1992. His hometown of Mykolaiv is a strategic port city near the Black Sea in southern Ukraine. Mykolaiv is being besieged as the gateway to Odesa, Ukraine's third largest city where Borisov's wife Julia's family still lives.

The URC is collecting donations to assist Ukrainians coming to the U.S.

"They don't have anything," Kaprian says. "They run away with nothing.... They start from zero. We help them over here providing spiritual support, financial support, helping them with all of their needs."

Kaprian is concerned about the uncertain long-term future for refugees who can enter the U.S. with one-year visas and humanitarian parole status.

"The thing is, nobody really knows legally what will happen to all of these people after their visa expires after one year," Kaprian says, adding later: "Honestly, I'm happy that some people are able to escape the war because there is a danger, they need to run away, but at the same time, I don't see a clear way for them for their future they would like here. Maybe it will happen. We are praying for this every day."

The URC team is preparing the community to receive refugees. Violet Tsyukalo, content creator for the URC newsletter, says the team is working with churches to adopt refugee families.

"We are working on setting in place a network of local host churches who will

be able to 'adopt a family' when refugee families come and oversee all of their needs ranging from housing, purchasing a car, enrolling the kids in school, enrolling in English language classes, employment/job paperwork, as well as leading them through cultural experiences," Tsyukalo says. "We are asking churches to designate a representative who will oversee each family's needs and delegate their needs to volunteers from each respective church."

Spokane not only offers connections with language, customs and history but also has the capacity for housing and employment. Borisov has spoken with hotel owners offering hundreds of jobs in hospitality and businesses offering support in real estate and construction. He has also talked to housing providers.

"Not only do we have the church community lined up in support, we also have the political, the business, the non-profit and specifically the employers lined up saying that they are ready to offer employment opportunities," he says. "That's the comprehensive strategic goal here with Spokane Loves Ukraine." —*Janae Rempel*

*For more information or to donate, visit [www.spokane-loves-ukraine.mailchimp-sites.com](http://www.spokane-loves-ukraine.mailchimp-sites.com).*

## Inward look prompts outward shift

### Award recognizes church's commitment to Dinuba community

When Dinuba (Calif.) Chamber of Commerce CEO and president Heath Jones asked New Life Community pastor Mark Isaac to come to the Chamber, she assumed Isaac might think something was wrong.

To be fair, Jones had been crying. But they were happy tears after delivering balloons to Chamber award recipients.

"By the time we got to NLC, my face was all splotchy and swollen," Jones says. "(Mark) brought me a Sonic slushy to cheer me up because he thought something was wrong."

Instead, Isaac received a handful of balloons to recognize New Life Community as the Chamber's first Non-Profit of the Year award winner, a testament to a significant shift in NLC's vision toward community transformational ministries.

"I found it hard not to cry in the moment," Isaac says. "For me, it was just a huge affirmation of the hard work, the prayer, the challenges and the difficulties of trying to turn the church around to be a community focused congregation."

### Community transformation

NLC has shifted its focus toward meeting spiritual, financial, emotional and physical needs in the community.

"Our mission is to transform lives through Jesus," says NLC community strategist Cece Olea, a recipient of the Tulare County District 4 Women of the Year award for her leadership. "How do we do that? Through servant leadership and community partnership."

According to census data, 26.4 percent of Dinubians are living in poverty, more than double the national poverty rate. The average household income in Dinuba is \$44,000, Isaac says, and statistics show that a majority of families with incomes below \$50,000 experienced significant financial loss during the pandemic.

NLC's community ministries include a Bible study at the Open Gate Ministries homeless shelter across the street, life skills classes for women, a Faith and Finance class for low-income families, GriefShare, ACE Overcomers to help people with adverse childhood experiences and an anticipated summer Celebrate Recovery group to help people overcome "habits, hurts and hangups."



Mark Isaac (left) and Cece Olea accepted New Life Community's Non-Profit of the Year award at the Dinuba Chamber of Commerce award ceremony Feb. 18. "Our church vision is not just something we put on the wall," Isaac says. "It's something we do." *Photo by NLC.*

NLC is also seeking to pray over every house in Dinuba.

"COVID-19 helped us see our community with new eyes and respond with a new sense of urgency," Isaac says. "It 'popped our bubble' of isolated privilege and 'blessing' amongst a community of suffering and despair."

To address physical needs, NLC began serving 250 hot meals every last Sunday of the month and taking meals to homeless camps. NLC works in partnership with the Chamber, Dinuba High School student clubs and The Parenting Network-Dinuba Family Resource Center, which volunteers and promotes the meals as an opportunity for families to foster relationships. NLC served about 2,700 meals in 2021.

Through its partnership with Open Gate, NLC has developed a Home Resource Center (HRC) to meet the furniture needs of families leaving the homeless shelter.

The HRC also serves through CarePortal, which helps meet needs of vulnerable children and families. In Tulare County in 2020, CarePortal recorded 7,249 reports of abuse or neglect and 1,519 children in foster care.

The HRC provides a welcome basket with cleaning supplies, linens and Bible stories, and the Parenting Network provides bags of nonperishable groceries. As the family allows, NLC maintains contact. Through the end of February, the HRC had served 20 families since it began in 2021.

## Working together

With a surplus of furniture at the HRC, NLC began reaching out to community agencies such as the fire department, police department, other churches and The Parenting Network, asking for referrals and partnership.

A mid-February project illustrates this partnership. When the police department identified a family in need, NLC investigated and discovered a need for more than furniture with a house in disrepair.

The situation involved drugs and abuse, and the children had been taken from the home—including a pregnant eighth grader—and the mother was in jail, but the grandmother remained at the residence.

With the Chamber's support, representatives from NLC, the fire and police departments, City of Dinuba, Public

Works and other churches cleaned and repaired the house. The fire department tore down an unauthorized room and installed smoke detectors. Public Works addressed plumbing issues, while the city dealt with mold. Dinuba Lumber donated a toilet, which Isaac installed.

"To me, working alongside them, not in judgment, not in, 'You have to come to my church,' but us being the embodiment of Christ, that's what's going to bring them in," Olea says. "That's what's going to (cause) them to want more of this Jesus that we have."

Chamber CEO Jones views the project as a possible catalyst for the mobilization of the Dinuba Community Task Force. Jones first became acquainted with NLC through a task force meeting held at the church and has since started attending NLC.

"That was a realization when we were there working with the city, hand in hand," Jones says of the project. "Senior citizens (and) kids working hand in hand. Cece with a broom. Mark fixing a toilet. To me, that's a task force."

## Snowball is rolling

The process of moving the congregation toward community transformation spans a generation.

Chris Reimche, president of the NLC board of trustees, has observed the process unfold as a member of executive leadership for more than a decade. The executive team recognized a need for a system allowing for visionary activity, says Reimche, who served as church moderator prior to a change in government structure.

"We started by changing some of those basic structures that had been in place in order to facilitate a focus towards outward ministries," Reimche says. "In Scripture, let the simple things be the simple things. It's 'Love God and love people.'"

When Isaac arrived at NLC in 2018, the congregation was talking about transformation and asking what the community would miss if the church did not exist.

“The answers we had were troubling—they’d miss the Mennonite church,” Isaac says “Honestly, it wasn’t about the gospel, it wasn’t about Jesus, it wasn’t about helping anybody, it was just about being Mennonite.”

From fall 2018 to fall 2019, Isaac, Reimche and three others drafted a new vision plan. Phase 1 was “Imagine2024.” The congregation approved the plan in November 2019, launching “Implement2024” with five objectives to shift the church toward community transformational ministries.

Integral in this process was hiring Olea, who is pursuing master’s degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy and Ministry Leadership and Culture at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, in March 2020.

“The seminary is actually teaching this very same stuff that we’re doing,” Isaac says.

Now that NLC’s vision plan is in place, Isaac says a new team is refreshing the implementation for Phase 3, “IntoFocus2024.”

“That snowball we’ve been pushing has gotten bigger and now it’s rolling on its own,” Isaac says. “If we ever said as a church, ‘I don’t know if we think we can make it anymore, we may want to close up shop,’ we’d have the community arriving with pitchforks standing out there saying don’t you dare shut down.”

Asked what advice he would give to other churches interested in shifting vision outward, Isaac recommends first talking with Olea and then recognizing it is worth the risk.

#### A transformational vision

Isaac and Olea accepted the Non-Profit of the Year award at the Chamber award ceremony Feb. 18.

Armando Villarreal, program manager of The Parenting Network, was a member of the voting committee that selected NLC.

“Throughout the year, the community of Dinuba, along with myself, have observed NLC not only make a strong commitment to sharing the wonders of faith, spirituality, Christ and God, but

also show humble servitude to the community,” Villarreal says.

Jones, too, has witnessed NLC’s community focus.

“It’s funny because when people ask me, ‘What is the one thing that made (NLC) stand out,’ it’s like, ‘What didn’t make them stand out?’” Jones says. “They’re everywhere, so it’s hard for them not to stand out when they’re mobilized in such a community-focused way.”

The vision is affecting people at NLC, too.

“We’re seeing transformation in our members,” Olea says. “It’s not just our community. That inspires me. We were obedient to what God was calling us to do and we get these awards, not because we set out to do that, but because God is just good like that.” —*Janae Rempel*

## South Dakota youth find new friendships

Congolese church hosts two youth groups for worship service

On a Sunday afternoon in February, youth from three USMB churches in South Dakota gathered for the first time to share in worship and fellowship.

More than 50 youth and their sponsors from Bethesda Church in Huron and Bethel MB Church in Yale together traveled the 125 miles from Huron to Sioux Falls, where the congregation of New Jerusalem Temple meets for Sunday services.

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The idea for the gathering was largely conceived and planned by Helene Wedel, Sunday school coordinator at Bethesda Church.

Wedel is the secretary for the Central District Conference and says she has been inspired by hearing the conference's district minister, Rick Eshbaugh, speak often about the immigrant churches that have joined the conference.

"God has given (Eshbaugh) a deep passion for immigrants and ethnic groups, and he sees the hand of God in bringing these people to the United States," Wedel says. "He told us of his hope that our churches that have been around a while would create friendships with newer churches, whether that's church plants or ethnic churches. It's his dream that we would just be one and we would have a friendship and a care for each other."

When Wedel recently took on the role of Sunday school coordinator for children and youth at Bethesda, she was looking for ways to bring new life and energy to the church's Sunday morning classes.

"I could think of all these cool ideas for little kids, but what do you do that's fun and unique for junior high and high school that they're not already doing in their youth group?" says Wedel.

Her desire to give the youth a chance to experience something new and exciting outside of Huron collided with her desire to connect with immigrant churches, and she landed on the idea of taking the youth to visit one of the CDC's ethnic churches in Sioux Falls.

Wedel shared her idea with Anthony Lind, Bethesda's youth pastor, who said he had had the same idea a couple years ago before Covid derailed his plans.

"We have a really good group of high school kids right now; they're pretty engaged and serious about their faith," Lind says.



Youth and sponsors from Bethesda Church in Huron, S.D. joined with those from nearby Bethel MB Church in Yale to visit New Jerusalem Temple in Sioux Falls on a Sunday in February. The visiting youth were invited to join the youth of NJT, a church comprised primarily of immigrants from Africa, on stage during the worship time. *Photo by Helene Wedel*

## One denominational family

Eshbaugh suggested they visit New Jerusalem Temple, a church started in 2015 by Claude Tambatamba, who came to the U.S. as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The NJT congregation joined the Central District Conference in 2017, and currently holds services in the facilities of Christ Community Church, another CDC congregation.

Wedel and Lind decided to invite youth from nearby Bethel MB Church to join them for the visit.

Lud Hohm and his wife, Julie, teach the seventh and eighth grade Sunday school class at Bethel, and were familiar with New Jerusalem Temple and some of the people there. Hohm, who is chair of the Bethel Church elder board, serves on the CDC's church plant committee and the USMB Leadership Board.

"Being a teacher, and knowing the church well and having visited a few times, it worked out really well," says Hohm. "I was really excited for our kids to experience something different in our own conference, to get to know them better and to experience fellowship."

On the morning of their trip, the youth

and sponsors met at Bethesda for a short orientation to their fellow CDC church. They ate lunch in Sioux Falls before joining the congregation at NJT for their afternoon worship service.

"They are very generous in how they welcome you and make you feel like an honored guest," Lind says.

The Bethel and Bethesda youth were invited on stage at one point to join in with the music, a highlight for many of them. An interpreter translated the teaching into English, and following the service, everyone enjoyed a traditional Congolese meal.

Wedel hoped the visit would give students an appreciation for being part of the MB family and also show the value of celebrating the diversity of background, life experience and even worship style within that family.

"I thought this would be a super way to expand their understanding of the church," Wedel says. "We're all part of the kingdom of God. We are one in Jesus Christ, but we're even closer than that because we're in the same denominational family."

Tambatamba says that after spending time in prayer years ago about partnering



with that CDC family, he felt the conviction to join.

"I felt a kind of special connection, and that was the beginning of working together," Tambatamba says. "The Mennonite Brethren family is praying for us, giving good advice, showing us the love of God."

Wedel says, "They need us, but we need them. It's such a beneficial relationship."

### Brothers and sisters

The feedback from the youth of all three churches involved is overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic.

"I had hoped that it would be well received, but I was blown away," says Wedel.

After putting in hours of planning, Wedel was unable to go herself due to developing COVID-19 symptoms.

"On their way home, I had several kids from different carloads call me because they knew how sad I was that I had to stay home," Wedel says. "They told me what they had learned and how excited they were."

Abby Kate Hamilton is a high school senior who attends Bethel with her family and is part of the church's Wednesday night youth group, and she also attends youth group at Bethesda on Sunday nights. She had heard of New Jerusalem Temple from Hohm in Sunday school and immediately expressed interest in going to visit.

"I have always really loved learning about different cultures," Hamilton says. "I have also wanted to be a missionary or serve in Africa in some way for a while now, so I was very excited to be able to experience a little bit of their culture and to see the passion that they have for worshipping Jesus."

She says she especially enjoyed talking with students from NJT after the service.

"I think that my favorite part was either the passionate worship or just meeting and talking to the people after-

ward," Hamilton says. "It was really fun to get to know them and just hear a little bit about their stories."

She still communicates occasionally via texting with a couple of the girls she met and says she would love to have another opportunity to visit the church.

A senior from Bethesda Church, Joselyn Wipf also enjoyed the music at NJT, but hesitates to refer to only the songs as the worship time "because at this place, it all felt like worship."

Wipf says, "The singing was in a different language that I could not understand, yet it still made me cry because Jesus is real and raw and present across all barriers."

When it came time for the visiting group of students and leaders to leave, several of the youth expressed reluctance to end their time together.

"It was even very difficult to separate

them when it was time to leave," Tambatamba says. "It was not easy; they were really like brothers and sisters."

The leaders and students from all three churches hope to continue finding opportunities to gather and strengthen their new friendships. Tambatamba specifically emphasizes the importance of these youth getting to know one another and working together to spread the gospel.

"We learn from each other; there is what we have to learn from the American churches, and there is what Americans have to learn from migrant churches," Tambatamba says. "This contact opens the door for the future and for other generations. All of them together can help each other to achieve great things to preach the gospel of God."—*Jessica Vix Allen*



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### NPO equips new pastors

Orientation provides information, time to connect

The National Pastors Orientation (NPO) held March 28-30 in San Diego, Calif., on Shelter Island, provided a great time for relationship building, information sharing and learning about MB history and current USMB vision. Twenty-six pastors new to USMB, including lead pastors, church planters, associate pastors, as well as 11 spouses, plus 18 presenters and five of their spouses attended the three-day event.

Along with considerable free time provided for relationship building, including afternoon and evening excursions on Monday, a good—oftentimes fun—atmosphere permeated, even during the learning sessions. A special, unexpected treat came from pastor Andrew Wuerffel who roused the crowd with superb yodeling.

About the free time for creating relationships, one pastor wrote following the event, “I think it was a wise choice to give us the open evening, as it allowed pastors to develop a bit more organic relationships with one another.”

On hand from MB agencies and schools were representatives from Fresno Pacific University, Tabor College, FaithFront, MB Foundation, Multiply, ICOMB and USMB Youth. Each presented briefly, introducing and informing the attendees about their ministries.

U.S. Board of Faith and Life produces the NPO, along with USMB, and most BFL members were present and provided sessions focusing on our Anabaptist/Evangelical roots, the USMB Confession of Faith, MB history and some information pertaining to current issues



Clementine Musinga, Indianapolis, Ind., Jamie Mack, Fresno, Calif., Emmanuel Musinga and Randy Mack attended the 2022 National Pastors Orientation.

*Photo by Stephen Humber*

USMB considerably subsidizes the NPO in order to reduce costs for attending pastors. In reviewing the event, one pastor wrote, “I think some sort of regular ‘MB overview’ like this could be a really valuable resource for all pastors, not just for new pastors.”

Don Morris encouraged pastors to make sure their church’s members and regular attendees are receiving the bi-monthly *Christian Leader* magazine.

Brandon Pasion led meaningful and inspiring worship each morning and for the closing communion service.

“It’s always special when you have a room full of pastors who are free to just enjoy worshipping without having responsibility for the service, they let it out,” says Morris, USMB national director. “It’s wonderful, heartfelt connection with Jesus.”

The NPO is typically held every two years on odd-numbered years. With COVID-19, the schedule was delayed one year, resulting in a

three-year gap between NPO gatherings. To get back on track, BFL determined to hold another event next year, then resume an every-other year format.

Any recently licensed pastor who missed this year is strongly encouraged to attend the NPO in 2023, likely in April after Easter. Most USMB districts require newly licensed pastors to attend the NPO in order to better grasp how the conference functions, what agencies are available for resources, what USMB offers through the LEAD initiatives, the Church Planting Council (CPC) and the new Leadership Pipeline. Attendees can meet and get to know conference leaders, build relationships with other pastors and learn how their church fits within the USMB family.

One of the attendees at this year’s NPO wrote, “I would think that most pastors would value something like this. I would come again with great anticipation.” —USMB

## Go and share

The early church fulfilled Jesus' mission

There are a lot of people to be reached yet.

After COVID-19 and waiting for people to “come back” to church, we realize that many people are not coming back. This is the “new normal” not only in our church but in many other churches. Many churches are asking: how can we get more people in the church?

I think the answer is clear and simple in the Word of God. We need to go and share the good news of Jesus. A lot of churches are stuck in the routine of just maintaining people in the church but not really going and sharing the gospel of Jesus. I believe this is a serious problem.

We see in the book of Acts how the priority of the church is sharing the gospel. In Acts 2:42-47, we see how the priority of this community of faith is sharing and learning about the gospel of Jesus. This causes more people to come to know Jesus and be part of the community of faith, later called the church.

This is all good news. But for a moment the early church forgets about the mission that God gave to them before Jesus ascends to heaven. In Acts 1:8 we see that Jesus entrusts them to be his witness not only in Jerusalem but all around and to the ends of the earth. At this time the church is just in Jerusalem and is really comfortable and excited about all the things that are happening. But there is something missing: the church is not fulfilling the mission of Jesus. Something needs to happen.

Acts 8 is what happens. Persecution forces the church to go out of Jerusalem and go to different places and share the gospel of Jesus. I wonder, is COVID-19 the way that Jesus is reminding us that there are people that need to be reached yet? Did we forget that God wants us to take the message of Jesus to all people? We see in the rest of Acts how the church is obedient to the guidance of the

Holy Spirit, and they start sending people out to different places to share the gospel of Jesus. They send missionaries and they plant churches, and many people come to know Jesus. Can we learn something from the early church?

It is not time to be comfortable and just wait. If the early church had decided to wait until the persecution died off, we may never have known about the great missionaries like Paul and company. If the early church had decided to wait until things got better, I wonder how many people would never know about Jesus. We cannot get comfortable, and we cannot wait any longer until people come back or until things get better.

Now is the time to go and share the message of Jesus to all the people around us. Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected from the tomb, and he is the only way to the Father. Jesus is the message of hope that people need to hear, and you and I have a responsibility to share this message of good news. There are a lot of people that need to be reached yet, and we have the opportunity to do that. Are we ready to do it?

Church history teaches us that the church grows faster during times of persecution and epidemics. We have seen an attack on the faith, and yes, right now we have a pandemic in our world. This seems the perfect time to be intentional about spreading the gospel of Jesus. We can grow our churches and we can plant more churches, but we need to be obedient to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and be courageous. The early church did evangelism on a personal level. They shared the gospel with a lot of personal conversations with people about Jesus. I think we can replicate this in our communities. Do not wait any longer. There are a lot of people to be reached yet. ▀



Daniel Rodriguez  
is pastor of Iglesia  
Agua Viva, a USMB  
congregation in  
Omaha, Neb. He is  
chair of the Central  
District Conference  
Church Planting and  
Renewal Committee.  
He hosts a LEAD  
Cohort to help pastors  
and leaders with  
training in Spanish.

*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. They provide insight into ministry and the USMB three core commitments: church multiplication and evangelism, leadership development and discipleship.*



## MILESTONES

### BAPTISM/MEMBERSHIP

Roger Heinrichs, Ina Heinrichs, Ed Greene and Sandra Greene were received March 27 as members at **Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)**

Jeffrey Carstens and Jessica Carstens were baptized March 27 at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus**.

Orilia "Lily" Alvarado and Veronica Silva Stalis were received as members at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, April 3. Brian Willems, Monica Garcia, Thannia Chavana and Erick Parra were baptized and received as members March 27. James Velandria was also received as a member. Mary Fenske, Grace Castillo, Beth Applegate, Steve Sandoval and Natalia Sandoval were received as members March 20.

Jasmine Alfonso was baptized March 13 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus**.

Ethan Buchanan was baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, March 6.

Nicki Terry and Addalyn Henderson were baptized Feb. 20 at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**.

Mike Genereux, Bruce Jones and Paula Jones were baptized and received Feb. 13 as members at **Lake Region Mennonite Church, Detroit Lakes, Minn.** Joe Stiyyer, Bradley Swiers and Brock Swiers were baptized. William Landis and Michelle Landis were received as members.

**Renewal MB Church, Rapid City, S.D.**, baptized six individuals in 2021.

Donovan Beiler, Pam Mowles, Lincoln Williams and Lyric Manney were baptized Feb. 13 at **Pine Acres Church**, Weatherford, Okla.

Nick Reiswig was baptized Jan. 2 at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**.

### WORKERS

Alan Lewis is serving as interim pastor at **Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**

Loretta Acosta is serving as nursery coordinator at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Steve Sandoval is serving as youth ministry leader at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**

Ryan Loewen was installed Feb. 27 as pastor of worship and adult ministries at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church**. Daniel Moss began serving as adult ministries coordinator. Sara Rempel began serving as worship assistant.

Abby Hoehne is serving as NextGen pastor at **Renewal MB Church, Rapid City, S.D.**

James Friesen from **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, began serving as youth director and assistant worship director at Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park, Utah, as the church's first one-year resident.

## DEATHS

**Bartel, Erwin Joe**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Oct. 10, 1937—Feb. 19, 2022. Parents: Pete and Bienna (Kliwer) Bartel. Spouse: Winnie Enns. Children: Cindy Patzkowsky, Lori Martens; four grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

**Cook, Shirley Ann**, Kingsburg, Calif., member of Hope Kingsburg, Nov. 10, 1936—Jan. 14, 2022. Parents: Wilmer and Margarite Nordahl. Spouse: Albert Cook. Children: Holly Lehrman, Stuart; two grandchildren.

**Cooper, Robert Dean**, Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Feb. 21, 1928—Jan. 31, 2022. Spouse: Betty (deceased). Children: Lynette Lofland, Wendy Saleem, Jo Anna Jones, Elizabeth Penner, Sarah Eilerts, Robert; 18 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren.

**Dick, Annette Carolyn**, Mountain Lake, Minn., member of Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Dec. 24, 1923—Feb. 21, 2022. Parents: Henry S. and Karolina "Carrie" (Nickel) Ewert. Spouse: Emil W. Dick (deceased). Children: Ronald, Marlene Harder; five grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

**Franz, Aldina May**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Dec. 17, 1930—Jan. 17, 2022. Parents: George and Sara (Krause) Flaming. Spouse: Raymond Franz (deceased). Children: Larry, Dale, Don (deceased); five grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

**Funk, Erma N.**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Sept. 14, 1924—Dec. 13, 2021. Parents: Nicolai and Justina Neufeld. Spouse: Wesley Paul Funk (deceased). Children: Janet Selvidge, Paul, Carol Hamilton; five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

**Goertzen, Adena**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 7, 1920—Jan. 26, 2022. Parents: David C. and Lydia (Hodel) Seibel. Spouse: Johnnie Goertzen (deceased). Children: Ray, Janis Haines, Debbie; six grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Hagen, Dorothy**, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, April 27, 1928—Jan. 23, 2022. Parents: Edwin and Alma (Karber) Neufeld. Spouse: Allen (deceased). Children: Gary, Roger, Randy, Terry; nine grandchildren, many great-grandchildren.

**Hubbart, Clifford William "Bill,"** Salem, Ore., member of Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, June 28, 1940—Feb. 17, 2022. Spouse: Jeanette. Children: Alicia Meyer, Cecille, Mark; two grandchildren.

**Janzen, Genevieve**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Feb. 10, 1930—Jan. 23, 2022. Parents: Herman H. and Lydia (Patzkowski) Reimer. Spouse: Vernon Janzen. Children: Rod, Weyland, Loyd, Dwayne; five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

**Janzen, Waneta**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, June 2, 1936—Feb. 22, 2022. Parents: William and Fannie (Regger) Jantz. Spouse: Fran Janzen (deceased). Children: Pam, Todd; three grandchildren.

**Lautt, Barbara Anne**, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, June 4, 1942—Feb. 2, 2022. Parents: Herbert and Mary (Butler) Thiessen. Spouse: Les. Children: Darlynn Wold, Darren; five grandchildren.

**March, Norene**, Selma, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Aug. 31, 1935—Feb. 7, 2022. Spouse: Lester March (deceased). Children: Janet Wann, Jeff, Steve; eight grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

**Moore, Frances Arlene**, Topeka, Kan., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, March 12, 1938—March 1, 2022. Parents: Frank and Helen Classen. Spouse: James Moore. Children: Kimberly, Brian.

**Pankratz, Franklin**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Feb. 11, 1924—Feb. 11, 2022. Parents: John and Eva (Ediger) Pankratz. Spouse: Kathryn A. Regehr (deceased). Children: Jim, Gene, Keith, Lee, Bob; 16 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

**Pauls, Bertha**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, July 29, 1931—Jan. 19, 2022. Parents: Aron and Anna (Penner) Ratzlaff. Spouse: Vernon Pauls (deceased). Chil-



dren: Jack, Philip; five grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

**Pauls, Linda Marie**, Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Feb. 12, 1929—Feb. 17, 2022. Parents: Jacob L. and Ida (Ratzlaff) Regier. Spouse: Ike Pauls (deceased). Children: Lonnie (deceased), Diane Elder, Kenneth; five grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

**Penner, Donna Lee**, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Oct. 11, 1928—Jan. 15, 2022. Parents: Abraham and Anna (Burkhard) Boese. Spouse: Arthur Penner (deceased). Children: Stephen, Susanne Franz, Randall, Sharon Wiebe; 10 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren.

**Prentice, Micah Daniel**, Wessington, S.D., attendee of Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D., Nov. 18, 1982—Feb. 24, 2022. Parents: Robert and Vicki Prentice. Children: Danielle, Hunter, Evan.

**Regehr, Sharon Kaye**, Hesston, Kan., attendee of Hesston MB Church, Sept. 5, 1953—Feb. 28, 2022. Parents: Wilbert and Erma (Gaeddert) Goering. Spouse: Duane Lee Regehr. Children: Tamara Issel, Corey.

**Reimer, Lois Jean**, Hesston, Kan., member of Ridgpoint Church, Wichita, Kan., April 26, 1933—Feb. 23, 2022. Parents: Otto and Emma (Seibel) Grauman. Spouse: Roland Reimer (deceased). Children: Karen, David; five grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

**Schultz, Viola R.**, "Vi," Buhler, Kan., member of Buhler MB Church, Dec. 8, 1931—Jan. 25, 2022. Parents: Adolph and Anna Funk. Spouse: John Schultz (deceased). Children: Donna Hensley, Darrell, Debbie Maberry (deceased); five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

**Suderman, Inez A.**, Enid, Okla., member of Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla., July 10, 1938—Aug. 30, 2021. Parents: Adolph and Lea (Wedel) Javorsky. Spouse: Emery L. Suderman (deceased). Children: James, Carol Garrison, Timothy; eight grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

**Thiessen, Ben L.**, Inman, Kan., member of Zoar MB Church, Inman, Jan. 31, 1925—Sept. 19, 2021. Parents: H.D. and Tina (Klaassen) Thiessen. Spouse: Stella Martens (deceased). Children: Lois Wiens, Lyle; four grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Wichert, Arlie J.**, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, July 4, 1937—Feb. 13, 2022. Parents: Elon and Erma (Duerksen) Wichert. Spouse: Betty LaVonne Epp (deceased). Children: Greg, John, Jerome,

Charles; nine grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren.

## REACHING IN FELLOWSHIP

**The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, invited women to a retreat in San Bernardino April 22-24 with a speaker, worship, breakout sessions, workshops and activities.

Women from **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, will hold a "Hats off to Spring" tea April 23 with proceeds from a raffle supporting missionaries in India.

**Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.**, hosted a Passover Seder April 14.

**Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a sports camp April 11 at its Sunnyside Campus and a spring spectacular April 12 at its main campus.

**Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, held a soccer skills camp April 11-13. The church held a pasta lunch and dessert auction fundraiser March 20.

Women from **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, made an Easter craft April 12. The "Gen2Gen" intergenerational women's group at the church met March 1 for "Everything Irish" to learn about Saint Patrick; eat Irish stew and bread, green crackers and pistachio dessert; and play a game.

**Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** hosted "The signal is scrambled" marriage enrichment event March 25. The church also hosted a "Grieving COVID" workshop April 9.

Youth from **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a taco salad fundraiser meal April 6.

Women from **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, gathered for a picnic April 3.

The **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, high school youth hosted a Missions Fest April 3 with stations and food related to missions around the world. The youth hosted a fundraiser breakfast March 20. The men's fellowship and high school youth group from the church attended a hockey game and show by Christian comedian Michael Jr., Feb. 6.

**Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, offered a reenactment of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, including the elements of the Seder meal.... The congregation hosts food trucks every two weeks in partnership with the West-Wing HOA.... Men from the church gathered to watch basketball April 2. The "Snackdown"

event included a cornhole tournament, games and Mexican food.... A father-son campout was held April 8-9.... A women's ministry event March 5 featured Women Kind Ministries presenting "The Supreme Makeover and 'Fashion Show'" and included original music... The congregation's student ministry hosted its annual gala March 6 including a fundraising dinner and auctions.... The church held a Family Date Night Feb. 18 with photos, dancing, food and a conversation about relationships.

Women from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, were invited to attend a cooking demonstration March 26.

**Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, women held a tacos and movie night March 25.

**Bible Fellowship Church, Rapid City, S.D.**, hosted a kings and princesses ball March 12.

Women from **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, hosted a ladies Bunko night March 11 with prizes and food.

**The Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, youth group held a fundraiser "egging" yards with candy-filled eggs the night before Easter.

**Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** held a trivia and dessert auction March 6. Teams of five played trivia during a silent auction raising funds for students to attend camp.

Men from **Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)** played a round of disc golf and ate lunch together March 5.

**Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a prayer gathering March 3 to recognize the beginning of Lent.

**Shafter (Calif.) MB Church** planned a mini golf date night as a marriage enrichment event Feb. 26.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted a 24-hour prayer challenge April 15.... The youth held a spaghetti fundraiser March 31... The congregation hosted a Fat Tuesday BBQ community celebration March 1.... The congregation hosted a "Created to Create" art and dance camp for children.

**Madera (Calif.) Avenue Bible Church** hosted an Easter "Son-rise" service April 17, a men's breakfast March 26, a women's crafting party March 13 and a family Bingo night Feb. 25.

Women from **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, were invited to attend an art class Feb. 13.

Students from **Ridgpoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, participated in World Vision's 30 Hour

Famine to learn about world hunger and raise funds for World Vision.

Youth from **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, hosted a potato bake fundraiser Feb. 13.

**Hesston (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a "Soup or Roll Sunday" meal Feb. 13 as a fundraiser for its mission trip to Axiom Church in Peoria, Ariz.

**Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, hosted a chili cook-off and game night Feb. 20.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, celebrated Easter April 17 with a family photo booth, create your own Easter basket station, free parfaits, bounce house and kids' game area with prizes.... The congregation launched a new Springfest party April 10 with live music, food trucks, an Easter egg hunt, inflatables and photo booth.... The congregation hosted a Super Bowl parking lot party Feb. 13 with tailgating, a family photo booth, soda bar and activities for kids.

Men from **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, went on a day hike in the foothills Feb. 12.

Men from **The Greenhouse, Saratoga Springs, Utah**, went on a ski trip in January.

## WORSHIP

**Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.**, hosted a Good Friday service with worship and prayer April 15.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, held a night of worship, communion and prayer April 15.

**The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, held a family worship and Passover night April 1.... The church hosted Jana Alayra in concert March 31 and a night of worship and prayer March 4.

**Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted a night of worship March 27.

**Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a classic praise and worship night March 20 including a devotional and prayer time as a send-off for the congregation's Israel study tour group.

**Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, hosted a hymn night Feb. 27.

## CELEBRATIONS

Eric Hinton, Mozelle H. Dula, Ruby McClean and Larry Smith were honored as graduates of The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI) of Lenoir in an April 3 ceremony at **The Life Center in Lenoir, N.C.** Marty Saunders served as keynote speaker.

## REACHING OUT LOCALLY

Volunteers from **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, did work projects at Hume Lake Christian Camps May 13-15.

People from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, made resurrection buns to take home or share with neighbors and friends April 12. The congregation was invited to write encouraging notes to people that evening.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, volunteers filled Easter baskets for foster care families in the community.

**North Fresno (Calif.) Church** encouraged Robinson Elementary teachers and staff by providing cinnamon rolls and other items for a morning coffee break.

**Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, partnered with a school district to do

landscaping and other beautification projects on April 30.

**Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, partnered with Summer Park Apartments to host an Easter picnic and egg hunt April 16.

**Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, collected \$1,710 for Union Gospel Mission to help people break free from homelessness through the transforming grace of Jesus.

**New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, went on a "Pray & Go" prayer walk Feb. 20 to continue its mission to pray over the entire city. The congregation gathered for pizza afterwards.

The Mission & Outreach committee at **Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, gave treat bags to employees at Freeman Regional Health Services Feb. 7.... The women's ministry collected an offering for Good Neighbor Ministries in Omaha, Neb., in February.

**Renewal MB Church, Rapid City, S.D.**, started a food bank to assist its community, providing opportunities to teach a course on finances and continue developing its small group ministry.... In collaboration with another church, nonprofit organizations and community leaders, the church hosted its first trunk or treat event at its new building, attended by more than 400 people.

## GLOBALLY

**Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, collected \$208.28 for MCC's My Coins Count offering.

**Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, collected 157 shoebox gifts for Operation Christmas Child in 2021.

## CLEARINGHOUSE

### Local Church

**Associate Pastor:** North Oak Community Church in Hays, Kan., is seeking a full-time associate pastor of administration and discipleship. The position is part of a collaborative ministry team and will fill the important role of providing leadership for the ministry teams, discipleship and pastoral care for the congregation and administrative guidance for the church. For more information on the position visit <https://northoak.net/>. To apply, please submit a cover letter and resume to [pastorsearch@northoak.net](mailto:pastorsearch@northoak.net).

**Senior Pastor:** Bethesda Church MB, Huron, S.D., is seeking a man who has a proven record of being a theologically sound Bible-based teacher to serve as senior pastor. He must be a proven effective communicator who is relational and relatable. He must have a proven record of casting

a unifying vision Church. He must demonstrate a proven record at empowering members to serve in varying roles in the body of Christ. He must hold strongly to the power of prayer in our personal and corporate lives. Job description and church/community information: [bethesdamb.org](http://bethesdamb.org). Inquiries/resume: [bethesdapst@gmail.com](mailto:bethesdapst@gmail.com)

### Agency

**Planned Giving Advisor:** MB Foundation is looking for a planned giving advisor in our Fresno, Calif., location. This is a relationship-building position for someone who has a heart for people and stewardship and also loves the Lord. This is a full-time position with a generous benefit package. Salary commensurate with experience. Learn more at [www.mbfoundation.com/employment](http://www.mbfoundation.com/employment)

## Now is the time

Ukrainian church teaches us about taking action

I have some chronic health conditions that, to be honest, I wish weren't there. They niggle at me all the time and can cause discomfort and aggravation. But, when I read of all the horrific things my Christian brothers and sisters in Ukraine are enduring, these ailments pale in comparison. I mean, they *really* pale in comparison.

In fact, I don't think I can even begin to imagine what these precious people are going through. My heart breaks for them. Yes, we pray and pray, and we give funds so that they might have some physical relief, but I think many of us are burdened with wanting to do more.

I want to be able to hold a hungry child and give her food. I want to grip the hands of a brother who has lost a family member or his home and pray with him or, more than that, help ease the pain. The immense pain and suffering brought on by this war is way too real for way too many. I have no doubt that this is a war perpetrated by Satan through the minds of maniac leaders. This is the enemy of our souls firing dark arrow after dark arrow. Perhaps Satan is desperate as he knows his time is short. Regardless, millions of innocent people are in the crossfire.

Recently, I was sick for several days. My wife said I slept 31 hours in a 48-hour period. After I got through that 48-hour period I was still more or less in bed, and I had time to pray and listen. I had time to reflect on the things happening in our world—in America. The list included the refugee crisis, homelessness, inflation, blatant stealing in broad daylight and increasing hate toward Christians. Did you see the video of the Yale law student who was shouted down for her Christian principles—in a setting intended and crafted for the purpose of

open sharing of ideals? Amazing and sad. America is grotesquely divided politically. North Korea is firing shiny new missiles. China is taunting Taiwan, and Hollywood is glorifying sin. This is a long ugly list, and it could be much longer. It almost takes your breath away.

Are we living in the final years or decades prior to Jesus' return? Only God knows. Many generations prior to ours believed they were living in the end times. But if we are living in the years close to his return, what must we be about?

Do we begin to draw back into a "church shell" because it's hard being a Christian in an atmosphere of animosity? Do we go about things as if nothing is changing around the world and here in America, our heads in the proverbial sand? Do we ask our pastors to start preaching from Revelation almost every Sunday? What? What do we do? What does all the turmoil of a compromised world mean for us as Bible-believing Christians?

Lying in bed, asking God these questions, I'm not sure I heard any definitive answers. Except that now is the time to be the church in action. The time is now to reach more people with the gospel. Now is the time to stop squabbling about little things and in unity attack the gates of hell.

I am inspired by stories from Ukraine about how Christians are rallying mightily to bring hope to their neighbors and people are coming to Jesus, and miracle after miracle is happening every day. This is the church. This is the followers of Jesus being his hands and feet. Yes, we have our own turmoil. Let's allow the Ukrainian church to teach us how to respond to it.■



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



MAKE A PLAN TO PROTECT  
AND PROVIDE FOR YOUR FAMILY

# CREATE A WILL

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

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