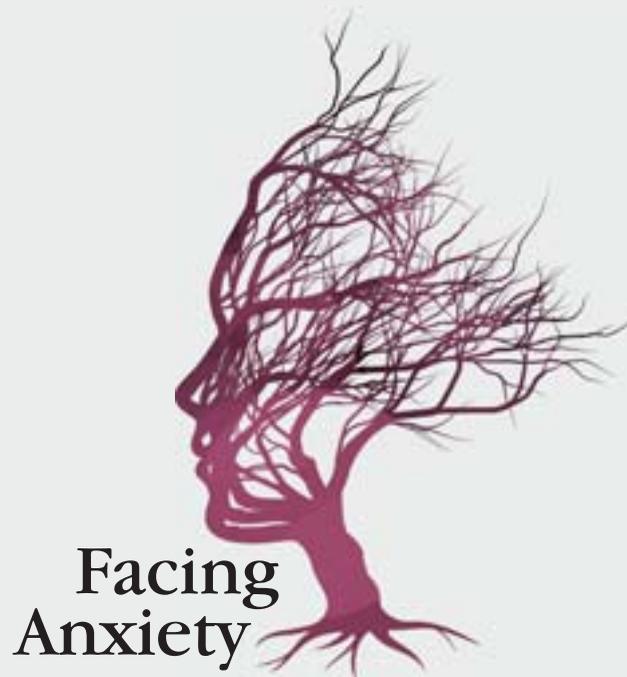


CHRISTIAN LEADER

THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

MARCH/APRIL 2023



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Anxious about anxiety

One-third of us experience an anxiety disorder

Fear is our reaction to an immediate actual threat, while anxiety is usually characterized by the fear of what *could* happen in the future, not what is actually happening at the moment.

I've been a mom for more than 30 years, and I can say with certainty that parents never stop worrying about their children, even when those kids are successfully navigating life as adults and becoming parents themselves. So, I was curious to learn what the most recent Pew Research Center survey, released in January 2023, on parenting in the United States reveals about current parental worries. It turns out the biggest concern of parents with children younger than age 18 is mental health.

Around 40 percent of parents say they are extremely worried or very worried that their children might struggle with anxiety or depression. The next most common worry, at 35 percent of parents, is that their children are being bullied. These two worries trump parents' concerns about certain physical threats to their children, the dangers of drugs and alcohol, teen pregnancy and getting into trouble with the police.

It turns out that anxiety is currently the most common mental health concern in the United States. An estimated 31.1 percent of U.S. adults experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their lives, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. And so do children. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 9.4 percent of children ages 3 to 17—about 5.8 million—had diagnosed anxiety between 2016 and 2019.

In their essays in this issue, counselors Cheryl Dueck Smith and Brock L. McCay each note that there is a difference between anxiety and fear. Fear is our reaction to an immediate actual threat, while anxiety is usually characterized by the fear of what *could* happen in the future, not what is actually happening at the moment. Some degree of anxiety is natural and can be helpful, but when anxieties are so overwhelming that we aren't ourselves or we stop doing things we would normally do, we may have an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety affects many of us directly or indirectly. Some of us live with an anxiety disorder and others of us know someone who does. I hope that the collection of essays on anxiety in this issue will be helpful and encouraging. We know God desires us to be healthy in our minds, bodies and spirits, and we struggle when our health is poor. As we pray for the well-being of one another, we can do so with confidence, holding to the promise that "the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Rom. 8:26-27).

Connie Faber,
Editor



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**The room
in the center
is Jesus; he is
the center of
our faith and
the center of
this family.
He is why
we're here
together.**

Coming home

Let's recommit to being people of God's Book

In my Jan/Feb column I wrote about the influence of secularism in the American church today and how it can skew our focus and even lead us away from living in God's truth. I wrote that only a small percentage of Christians in America today hold a true biblical worldview.

With this in mind, what if we, as a Mennonite Brethren family, sought to go "home." Let me explain. Most of us know the good feeling of returning to our home. Home is where we can be ourselves, relax and find rest. Home is safe; it's what we know. Home is comfort-

ing; our closest loved ones are there with us, and we talk and share meals, joys and even pain.

For most of us, returning to our childhood home is typically a warm experience too. It's revisiting the security we once knew, the adults who raised us and maybe siblings who we sometimes fought with or teased. And if everyone in the family returns home at the same time it's a reunion and often a time of celebration. (I realize this happy scenario is not true for everyone.)

Currently our USMB family feels disjointed as we don't see eye to eye on some things. At times, we fuss with one another and perhaps don't even trust those we disagree with. So, when it comes to our USMB family, what if we focused on coming "home"?

What if coming home together meant that we all recommitted to the Bible as our source of authority for how we act and believe and do church? God's truth, his revelation, expressed through the pages of Scripture being the sound structure of this home, the strong girders and walls that allow it to stand strong among the stress of time and current cultural pressure. We have been known as "people of the Book." Let's get back to that—back home.

We enter the front door of this home and go to various rooms, rooms we Mennonite Brethren know well. These rooms reveal who we are and what we strive for, our identity. The room in the center is Jesus; he is the center of our faith and the center of this family. He is why we're here together.

Then there is the room where we like to gather, the room of community where we live out our faith in Jesus and enjoy fellowship with one another. There is the room of reconciliation, where we work out tensions and differences and seek healing. The room of evangelism is where we gather to strategize for how we might work with Jesus to help add more people to this home.

This home also contains a wall that is covered with words. They are wise words that we have crafted together to guide us in living out and understanding the home's structure, the Word of God. It's our Confession of Faith that describes who we are before God and how we join to live that out. It's our family covenant. It's not Scripture, but it's our definitive understanding of what Scripture says to us. We agree together with what's written on that wall and it bonds us.

Our home is not "out there" where secularism and culture infect and sway. No, we know where our home is. C'mon, let's go home.

Don Morris
don@usmb.org





Neighborhood Church

Visalia, Calif. • Established: 1948
Pacific District Conference • Attendance: 1,700
Lead Pastor: Forrest Jenan



Our congregation in three words:

Jesus, Community, FOR

How can you pray for us?

Pray as we step out into new territory to grow our capacity to add value to our city.

Connect with us! Instagram & Facebook: [ncvisalia](#)

Top left: For too long, the church has been known for what it's against. Neighborhood Church wants to be known for what they are for. They are FOR Visalia.

Top right: Kids are a huge part of the Neighborhood Church family.

Left top: Jesus is the center of our faith. Neighborhood Church loves gathering each Sunday to worship across their three services.

Left bottom: Neighborhood Church wants to inspire people wherever they are to live like Jesus wherever they go. Every Sunday is an opportunity to make new friends and create space for others.

News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel

Morris announces retirement, effective after Gathering 2024



Don Morris, USMB national director, has submitted a proposed timeline for his retirement. The decision was made in collaboration with the National Leadership Council. The target date for Morris to conclude his service is August 2024, following Gathering 2024, which

will be July 23-27, 2024, in Omaha. "Don, with the faithful and constant support of his wife, Janna, has led in an exemplary way as national director, first in an interim and then in a full-time capacity since 2014, and we look forward to his continued leadership during this period of transition," says an email announcing Morris' retirement. "The national board has been regularly connecting to pray and encourages the MB family to be praying, as new leadership

considerations begin."

A new national director has not been chosen, and the board will begin the search in Spring 2023. The desire is for Morris and the new national director to work together for three months to ensure a smooth handoff of responsibilities.

"We remain so thankful for Don's work and look forward to how Christ will continue guiding his church in what is to come," says the announcement. —USMB Leadership Board

USMB Youth is now USMB NextGen

USMB Youth has announced a name change to USMB NextGen, beginning in January 2023. The name change, which affects branding only, better reflects the mission of USMB Youth, as two of its three ministry areas involve leaders instead of youth.

Current and future leaders are served through the new Leadership Pipeline, developed in 2022 to find, nurture and equip the next generation of leaders, and the National Youth Worker Network. ASCENT, the annual summer camp, serves high school students.

"Our focus has shifted slightly to more intentionally come alongside our USMB churches to provide opportunities to further equip and invest in the leaders who are and will be impacting the teenagers and the entire local church body," says USMB NextGen chair Kyle Goings.

For information about USMB NextGen opportunities, visit www.usmbnextgen.com—USMB NextGen

Editorial committee shifts to advisory role

The Christian Leader Editorial Committee held its first in-person meeting Jan. 16-18, 2023, in Wichita, Kan., with two goals on the agenda. The first was to review the committee's involvement in the process of selecting themes and writers and the second to plan feature themes for the second half of 2023. When the meeting concluded, the committee had achieved these goals and more.

Editorial Committee members were quick to note that current expectations are not sustainable over the long term given their limitations as volunteers. Committee members and editors agreed that there has been some confusion as to which decisions the editors would make and which the committee should be part of.

The Editorial Committee affirmed their trust in the editors and emphasized their desire to help the editorial process. Moving forward, the Editorial Committee wants to



serve in an advisory rather than "directive" capacity.

With their role clarified to be advisory, the Editorial Committee moved to the second goal of the meeting—selecting themes and writers. They identified themes and potential writers for the remainder of 2023 as well as themes for 2024. They generated a list of more than 60 possible writers, including pastors and qualified experts/professionals in specific areas.

The Editorial Committee assumes that shifting its role should limit the need for numerous Zoom meetings in 2023 and allow the Editorial Committee to accomplish much of its work in an annual in-person meeting. —CL

Fresno Pacific University addresses shortfalls

Fresno Pacific University is developing new strategies for attracting and retaining students and eliminating faculty and staff positions to balance the budget following a 14 percent enrollment drop from fall 2021 to fall 2022. In a statement released Feb. 7, the university outlined its progress in addressing a \$7.4 million deficit.

Spring 2023 enrollment numbers are encouraging. Preliminary headcount for traditional bachelor's degree, bachelor's degree completion and graduate programs show only a 3 percent decline between the fall and spring semesters, well below that of the last two years, with graduate programs in particular remaining strong. Looking ahead to fall 2023, traditional undergraduate applications are up 36 percent, a significant increase.

Since retaining students through to graduation is as important as attracting new students, FPU has created the position of chief retention officer. Kerry Sue Brown, director of student

success services, is taking the role.

The university is working with outside professionals in enrollment, financial aid and advancement and anticipates positive changes in these areas. Additionally, end-of-year giving was up 32 percent over last year.

The process of eliminating positions announced last fall has been completed.

Eight faculty chose to participate in FPU's voluntary retirement incentive program and will end their employment June 30, 2023.

Decisions to eliminate additional positions were guided by data on national, state and regional trends in education and job growth projections; enrollment by course, discipline, program and school; student credit hours; program costs in relation to revenues; the ongoing need for general education faculty; and positions critical to recent and future investments, core to the university's religious mission or which have a high potential for future growth.

Several areas were exempted from faculty layoffs: Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, the undergraduate biblical studies department, the School of Natural Sciences and visual and performing arts.

Eight vacant faculty positions will not be filled at this time. Recruitment will continue for open faculty positions in biology, business-accounting, chemistry, computer science, physics, nursing, mathematics, media studies and criminology.

Five other faculty positions were discontinued. No majors were eliminated. A total of 16 staff positions were eliminated through attrition and reorganization.

President André Stephens acknowledges this is a stressful time but says these changes put the university on a good track. He says, "Amidst all that is happening around us or to us, we serve a God who is bigger, better and stronger than our circumstances—may we live in the confidence of that truth!"—FPU

Southern District Junior High Youth Conference held in Edmond

Approximately 250 students and sponsors gathered for the Southern District Junior High Youth Conference at Cross Timbers Church in Edmond, Okla., Jan. 28. The theme was "Be."

Grant Shewey, youth pastor at Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church served as speaker, helping students understand what it means to be Christ-like. Shewey discussed the kind of life Jesus lived and what kind of life Jesus calls his followers to live and offered ways to practically show others what it looks like to reflect Christ.

The event also included workshops. "Overall, the students were incredibly engaged," says Shewey, who led a panel during one of the workshops. "I was very encouraged by the depth



Photo by Debra Austin

of questions students asked about topics such as the accuracy of the Bible, salvation and repentance and Jesus being fully God and fully human."

Joe Weaver, Cross Timbers worship pastor, led worship. Free-time options included bingo, inflatables, dodgeball, 9-square, noodle hockey and board games.—CL

College reestablishes Tabor Day

Sunday, April 30, 2023, Tabor College will reestablish Tabor Day and celebrate the spirit of Tabor with a variety of activities on campus. Friends and supporters are invited to participate.

"It's a day to commemorate and celebrate what God has done through Tabor," says Tabor President David Janzen. "It's an opportunity to recognize the resilience and faithfulness of those who have gone before and to carry on that legacy as we move into a promising future. The Spirit of Tabor is the evidence of God's Spirit at work transforming lives through this beautiful college and community."

On April 30, 1918, a fire destroyed the college's first building, placing the school's future in jeopardy. Within hours, pledges were committed to rebuild as the Tabor community declared that Tabor was neither dead nor destroyed. Two years later, on April 30, 1920, the Tabor community celebrated the opening of two buildings: the H.W. Lohrenz Building and the Mary J. Regier Building.

Not only a day of commitment and faith, this inaugural "Tabor Day" was also Arbor Day. So, trees were planted to symbolize growth, presence and hope. The 2023 event will reestablish this tradition and will include planting a tree in remembrance of the inaugural Tabor Day. —*Tabor College*

FPU celebrates fall commencement

Around 400 students were eligible to participate in Fresno Pacific University's fall commencement at Selland Arena Dec. 17, including 214 from the bachelor's degree completion program, 122 from master's programs, 59 from traditional undergraduate programs and two from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.



Fresno Deputy Mayor Matthew Grundy gave the commencement address. Other speakers included Joshua Wilson, chair of the FPU Board of Trustees, and Gayle Copeland, provost/vice president for academic affairs and chief academic officer. Students and faculty provided music.

Fall 2022 Commencement was the first for FPU President André Stephens, who joined the university in July after 30 years of experience in Christian higher education in California, most recently as vice president for student development at Biola University.—*FPU*

5 minutes with...

MIKE KLAASSEN



In Mike Klaassen's childhood memories, the Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale was like an annual family holiday. The Hillsboro native from Parkview MB Church would wander the grounds of the Kansas State Fairgrounds in Hutchinson with his mom and grandma, taking in the sound of the quilt auction and filling his belly with favorite foods from his German-Ukrainian Mennonite heritage. Since those days, Klaassen has grown to appreciate the event's global mission as well. He was thrilled to see his artistic talent contribute to that mission as his design recently was chosen in a competition for a new logo for the event.

Why did you enter the competition?

I love designing with a purpose and helping fulfill the mission of a non-profit, partnering with organizations that are changing people's lives around the world. I see my friends up front preaching and leading worship and going on mission trips. It's been encouraging to learn that God can also use my contribution in photography and design, which is more from the shadows.

How do these images connect with you personally?

I have family who left Ukraine and Russia to come to America as farmers. The wheat reflects the big risk they took and the hard work they endured for a better future. The quilts make me think of my grandmas who redeemed scraps of cloth and gave us quilts to show how much they loved us.

What are the design elements of your logo?

The wheat represents the turkey red wheat that the Mennonites brought when they came to America. The artistry of quilts has served and decorated Mennonite homes. More importantly, both wheat and the quilts have been used to raise support for Mennonite Central Committee's relief work around the world.

What does it mean to you to put these images in a logo?

The wheat and the quilts are like the stones that Joshua had the Israelites carry from the river Jordan. They are built into an altar—a visual reminder of God's faithfulness in the lives of our ancestors and even today.

How do you see your role as an artist in connection with your faith?

We have a creative God who created creative people to do creative things. When God instructed the Israelites to build the ark, robes and to craft other items for worship, the items were not only functional but also beautiful. It's exciting to be able to create things as an act of worship and see our work point people to our Creator.



Kansas Mennonite Relief Sale
A benefit for Mennonite Central Committee

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

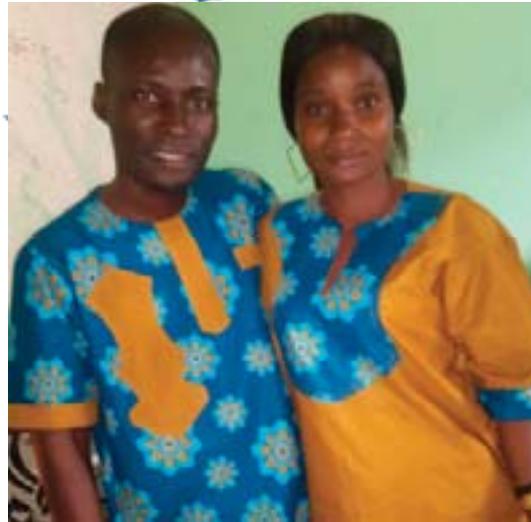
Igreja Evangelica dos Irmaos Menonitas em Angola

Evangelical Church of the Mennonite Brethren in Angola

The Mennonite Brethren conference in Angola is a Portuguese-speaking national church with about 15,000 members in 118 churches. Pastor Daniel Nelson Canganguela, IEIMA general secretary, shares his testimony and prayer requests.

I have seen God operating in my life and transforming many people's lives during 17 years of work with IEIMA. People who were in difficulties, who lived in delinquency, robbery and fights, have become true disciples of Christ. Many are now pastors leading others to Christ. This encourages me to continue serving this sovereign and wonderful God, for whom nothing is impossible.

Before knowing Christ, I was involved in drugs, prostitution and other sins. Jesus appeared to me in a dream, showing me that I was like a beautiful tree with many leaves that did not produce any fruit. I didn't know how to interpret my dream, so I looked for help from the pastor of the church I attended. He gave me John 15:1-5. I spent much time in prayer and asked God to manifest himself in my life. After three months I was moved by the Holy Spirit, and I no longer felt pleasure in continuing in alcoholism and prostitution. My friends



Pastor Daniel Nelson Canganguela, pictured with his wife, is the IEIMA general secretary.

left me, and I began to regret my decision. But the presence of Jesus Christ comforted and spiritually strengthened me.

Since 2006, God has totally changed the direction of my life. I was baptized March 17, 2007, at Siloé Luremo church, and I felt a clear call to go on mission with God. I have planted two churches. Today I am taking a master's degree course in Ministerial Theology, with the focus on working on fulfilling God's holistic mission.

Read more online at christianleadermag.com

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- **Pray for discipleship, mission and theological training** for the workers to maintain continuity and expansion of IEIMA with a clear focus on the Great Commission.
- **Pray for the least** and unreached people of Angola.
- **Pray for IEIMA's commitment and contribution** to the fight against hunger, poverty and illiteracy.

Did You Know?

- Angola's Kalandula Falls, at 344 feet high and 1,300 feet wide, is Africa's second largest.

- The giant sable antelope, with massive 5 ½ feet horns, is a national icon.

- Nearly 70 percent of Angolans are below age 24, due to a 27-year civil war that ended in 2002.

When anxiety takes root

Philippians 4 suggests four responses when anxiety begins to grow

In the fall of 2019, my church offered a five-week home group study on the topic of anxiety. Little did we know just how vital these small groups would prove as 2020 rolled around the corner. To this day, I keep a handwritten note identifying three areas that stirred a sense of anxiety within me. The note serves as a reminder of God's faithfulness.

Although I wouldn't define myself as an anxious person, as I walk through life I realize the opportunity for anxiety to grow within me. Webster's dictionary defines anxiety as, "an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating and increased pulse rate)." The reality of anxiety exists; I have experienced its impact. I have also walked with friends, family and church members who feel its negative impact on their lives.

The Scripture passage our home groups examined was Philippians 4:4-7: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

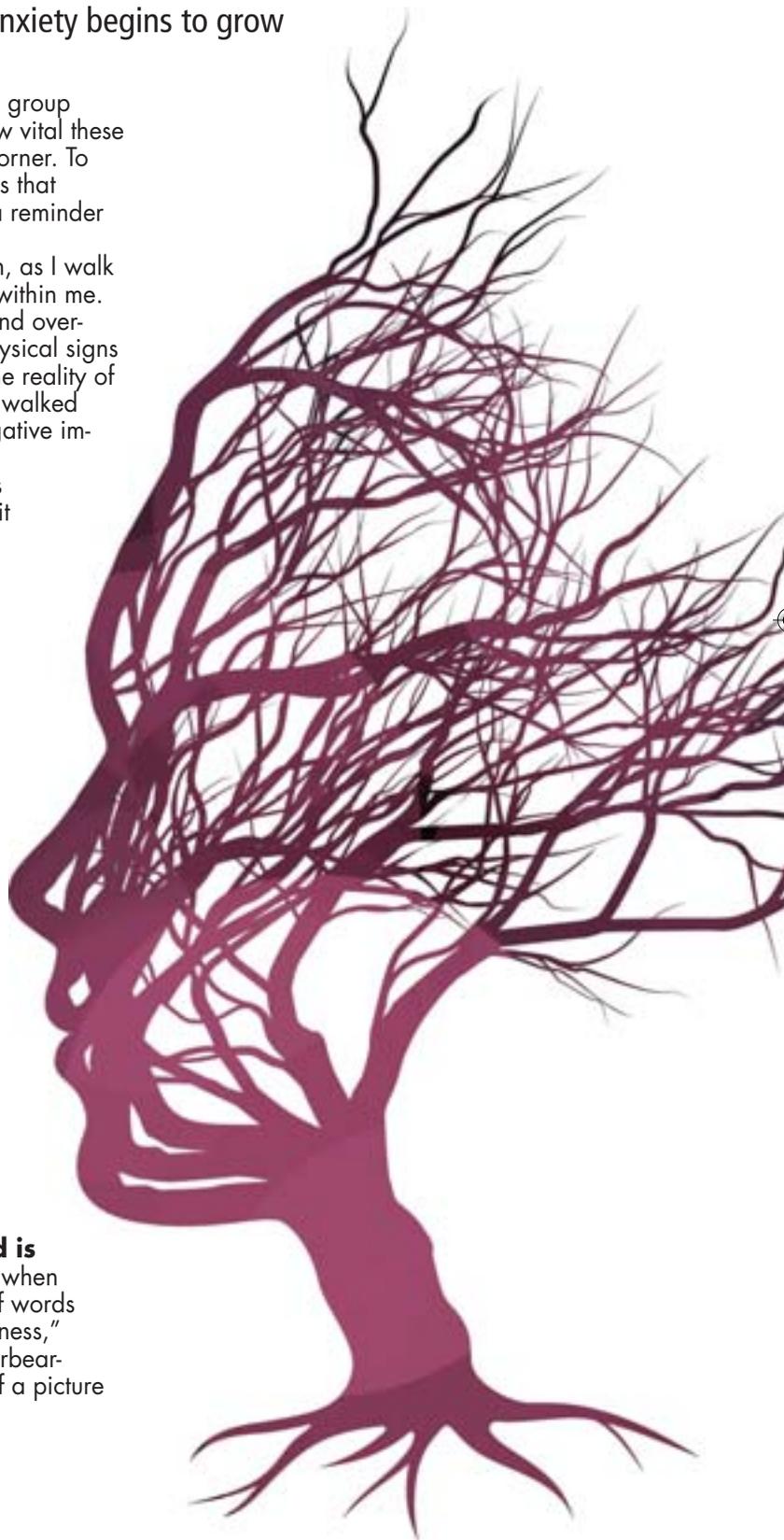
Together we gleaned these four helpful observations.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Rejoicing doesn't come easily when anxiety takes root. As a matter of fact, rejoicing often disappears when anxiety grows.

One needs to ask why the apostle Paul places this directive just prior to addressing anxiety. No matter how unnatural it feels to rejoice in the midst of anxiety, remembering to put into practice what is best helps in the battle, even when emotions tell us otherwise. Feelings need not guide a person flooded by anxious thoughts. If guided by emotion, rejoicing would seldom occur.

Since Scripture calls for rejoicing, one must heed this piece of instruction. Understanding the apostle Paul wrote these words from a prison cell cements the idea that even when life remains uncertain, rejoicing is an option worth taking. God lessens anxiety when adhering to this command. Could it actually work?

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. The Greek word *epieikes* provides some difficulty when being translated into English. For this reason, a variety of words occur. NIV uses the word "gentleness," ESV "reasonableness," NASB "gentle spirit," HCSB "graciousness" and ASV "forbearance." The nuances of each of these words paint parts of a picture conveying a gracious and gentle spirit.



By Nathan Ensz

As rejoicing in difficulty seems out of place, gentleness may also seem odd. Yet, what if this is precisely the intent of the passage? Doesn't it make sense that God sees deep into our greatest need? Should it come as any surprise that we often cannot comprehend what God reveals?

In this verse, a gracious spirit points a person's focus outward on others; anxiety moves it inward on self. Remember the rest of this verse: a gracious gentle spirit keeps in mind the nearness of the Lord. A twofold implication follows. First, the Lord's *return* is near. Soon that which breeds anxiety will no longer reign. Second, the Lord's *very presence* is near. Even though life circumstances seem to produce anxiousness, the presence of the Lord never ceases.

Which implication is correct? How about both! Both are backed by Scripture and provide direction and comfort. Perhaps the apostle Paul intended to leave a sense of vagueness around the Lord's nearness to allow the reader to realize both assurances.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

As the heart of these verses emerges, perhaps it doesn't settle easily. "Do not be anxious about anything." How can this happen? Can the apostle Paul just command anxiety obsolete? Does this passage imply that people flooded with anxiety can turn it off and on, like a light switch?

While Paul's admonition may seem oversimplified, I believe his straightforwardness is needed. Notice he says not to be anxious about *anything*. This communicates that *all* anxiety points to something within us that needs adjustment. Certain anxieties should not be deemed as sensible while other anxieties thought of as shameful. Paul lays it out saying that all anxiety needs addressing.

When plagued by anxiety, this passage teaches prayer, petition and thanksgiving. Elsewhere, Paul tells believers in Thessalonica to "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17). Keeping these words in mind, what often brings anxiety becomes an item of prayer. If a relationship spawns anxiety, pray about it. If concern over the future generates anxious thoughts, pray. If financial obligations set off anxiety, take it to God in prayer. Praying does not negate appropriately acting to combat that which stirs anxiety, but it does set a tone for how to move forward.

Petition and thanksgiving ought to mark the prayer of an anxious person. As seen in Jesus' example of the

No matter how unnatural it feels to rejoice in the midst of anxiety, remembering to put into practice what is best helps in the battle, even when emotions tell us otherwise.

persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), petitions and requests make their way to God. His teaching serves as a reminder that petitions don't stop with one prayer. Even when it seems God isn't answering, continue on. The parable affirms a loving heavenly Father who sees that justice eventually occurs (v. 8).

Thankfulness gets lumped in with prayers and petitions. This unnatural response draws attention back to the apostle Paul's directive to rejoice always. While thankfulness and rejoicing are difficult disciplines to practice when anxious thoughts flood our souls, does it not stand to reason that God knows it is part of the remedy? Intentionally choosing thankfulness redirects focus.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Those flooded with anxiety long for God's peace. How does this come? The apostle Paul makes it clear that one cannot explain or comprehend God's divine work. It "transcends all understanding." Although difficult to explain, God's peace is able to meet and overtake a flood of anxious thoughts. It comes through rejoicing, practicing a gentle and gracious spirit, remembering the nearness of the Lord and choosing to bathe problems with prayer, petition and thankfulness.

What an unusual, yet intentional way to overcome anxiety!

Hear my heart and know I understand and believe the role medicine, counseling and other interventions play for those struggling with severe and crippling anxiety. I desire to emphasize the words of God. Scripture's way of addressing anxiety may make us scratch our heads, but can we trust God that his method is part of the remedy?

I should point out one further thing regarding the note I wrote to myself in 2019. The list I developed has become irrelevant. The stressors in my life have become obsolete as resolution has come to each point of anxiety. Issues come and go. My response can remain steadfast, grounded in rejoicing, a gracious spirit and prayer.

Nathan Ensz is lead pastor of Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore.

Parenting an anxious child

Lessons from Mark 6 on storms of anxiety

By Sybil Kolbert

As we pulled into the school parking lot, my 5-year-old said, “I’m scared of kindergarten.” My heart sank.

I wanted to say, “Don’t be scared” or “You’ll be fine.” But I knew that he was scared, and he didn’t feel fine. In fact, my own heart was pounding.

Then my husband prayed. His back-to-school prayer was mostly for his and my racing hearts. But it was for each of our kids as well, especially for the one who was feeling anxious. Although my own anxiety prevented me from speaking to God myself that day, I was listening for his voice. As I heeded the silence, I felt God whisper, “I will be with him. I will be with him.”

As I have parented young children—and now young adults—who experience anxiety, I have come to expect feelings of nervousness, tension and fear as part of our daily life. And we can’t ignore these feelings because they can interfere with our ability to make sense of our experiences, to make decisions, to move forward—to go to school. We must acknowledge and address them.

Fear, anxiety and uneasiness have become a normal part of the human experience in a world full of uncertainty and regular exposure to the effects of sin. These emotions are not bad or wrong. They, and all the other emotions, are cues; they tell us something and provide us with an opportunity to respond.

As Christians, how are we supposed to respond to anxiety? In ourselves? In our children?

In Mark 6:45-52, Jesus watches as his disciples struggle to row their boat across a lake. Less than 12 hours before, the disciples partnered with Jesus in a miracle that fed more

than 5,000 people. Yet, when they find themselves facing waves and winds that push against them, they ended up miles from the shore feeling weary and afraid.

Anxiety is based on past, present or future uncertainty. It is wondering if we will be ready for college or how to respond when someone puts food in front of us that we don’t like. Anxiety was in the wind and waves that pressed against the disciples when they were trying to get to the other side of the lake.

I think we can learn a lot about how to parent children with anxiety by looking at how Jesus equips and responds to his disciples in this story.



Prepare and plan ahead. The miracle that precedes the storm is one way that Jesus prepares his disciples for their fear. The disciples have just witnessed a miracle; they know what is possible. Yet, they are still afraid.

As a parent of children who experience anxiety, I have done my fair share of preparing and planning. I've shown my children photos of x-ray machines before heading to the hospital and talked them through procedures step by step. I've taught them social scripts for birthday parties and tough conversations. It didn't take the anxiety away, but it gave them the tools they needed to fight their uncertainty.

Be patient. Jesus watches his disciples fight against the storm for 12 hours as he prays on a hilltop. I don't have to go too far into my imagination to see that he was praying for them. He lets them try to fight it alone; he gives them space to use the tools he has provided. Then, he intervenes.

One of the worst things I have done for my anxious-minded children is to implement a quick fix. Although my hope is always that they will not experience anxiety, the reality is that they may. And if they do, I want them to be able to use the tools they've acquired along the way. Their storm may last longer than I'm comfortable with, but ultimately it is their storm not mine.

Meet them in the place of their anxiety. Jesus doesn't stay far from his disciples forever. At their point of desperation, he walks toward them. He meets them in their fear. And they invite him into their story by crying out.

Patience is necessary, but it doesn't mean that our kids are on their own. Meeting my kids in their place of anxiety looks like staying up late to let them talk about all the things on their mind, holding their hand while the blood is drawn and guiding them step by step through a difficult school project once they ask for help.

Provide validation and comfort. Once the disciples see Jesus, he speaks to them, "Have courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." Jesus confirms their fear and comforts them with his presence. I don't think Jesus is rebuking the disciples for their fear. Instead, he is recognizing it and reminding them of his perfect love, which can ease their fear.

Validation is not agreeing with someone's feeling; it is acknowledging it and comforting them in

it. So, what does this look like in our lives and homes? I think it depends on the child. I have three children who are each comforted in different ways. For one it is a favorite item, for another a hug or simply the words, "I'm here." Avoiding the wrong kind of comfort comes from knowing our children well and asking them what they want. Seeking our children's input and allowing them to use their voice is always a good idea, especially when anxiety is involved.

Help them get to the other side. Mark 6:51 says, "Then [Jesus] got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased." There's something about the image of Jesus getting in the boat that is so comforting to me. In John's account, it says that when Jesus gets on board the boat "at once [it] was at the shore where they were heading" (John 6:21).

We may not be able to stop the wind and miraculously bring a boat to shore as Jesus does for his disciples, but we can be part of how our children get to the "other side" of their anxious mind. Here are a few suggestions:

- Find a therapist who can meet the specific needs of your child and who they feel comfortable with. Whether the therapist is a Christian is up to you and your child.

- Pray together, submitting your concerns and anxious thoughts to God. This models prayer as a response to anxiety and helps parents know what their kids are thinking about.

- Establish open communication so that your children know they can talk to you about anything, ask any questions and bring forward any concerns. It is also important that they have other trusted adults in their lives with whom they can talk.

Watching my children struggle with anxiety has not been easy and there has been no quick fix. It is not unlike the disciples' arduous journey over the water, through the winds and waves. As I've held my children's uncertainty in one hand and a vision for their future in the other, I have found that because Jesus is with us in the journey, I can be a catalyst for change by preparing, meeting and comforting my children to the other side.

Sybil Kolbert is a member of Bethany Church in Fresno, Calif. She is a licensed coach, writer and trauma-informed Bible teacher.

"Fear, anxiety and uneasiness have become a normal part of the human experience in a world full of uncertainty and regular exposure to the effects of sin."

My guest, Anxiety

An introduction to Anxiety, Fear and other feelings

By Cheryl Dueck Smith

Hello! Pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is Anxiety. You may know me by my nicknames: Worry, Concern or Dread. Recently, we have been spending more time together, which you may dislike. But that might be because you don't understand me.

My job is to help you anticipate threats. I protect you by keeping you on alert for possible danger. I am not your enemy. I am an emotion created by God for a purpose. Get to know me, like a houseguest, and perhaps I won't overstay my welcome.

I am most often confused with Fear, my close relative. Fear's job is to help you survive direct threats. When you are in danger, Fear comes on duty to move you to safety. Your body is ready to fight or flee, to help you survive. Physically, you may notice a racing heart, shallow breathing, trembling and sweating.

It can be difficult to tell me apart from Fear because you often feel the same bodily sensations. When I show up, you experience those physical symptoms I just mentioned, plus more! I, Anxiety, bring a sense of doom, racing thoughts, trouble sleeping, difficulty concentrating and tummy trouble. You may feel insecure, irritable, tense and restless. Unfortunately, my presence can leave you in a constant state of uneasiness.

Here is a secret for how to distinguish me from Fear: the presence of an actual threat to your survival means it is Fear. If there is no clear crisis, but you feel a vague, uncertain kind of danger, then it is me, Anxiety.

These vague threats are connected to what you value. It is like a relational price tag where I reveal what you deem important. My heightened presence when hearing about war, disease or accidents may show you value security, health or control. I may also warn you of relational dan-

gers like loss, rejection or shame because you desire acceptance and connection. The greater the value, the greater my intensity.

Understanding feelings

Some churches and families teach that feelings can't be trusted; that emotions are unreliable. It is true that what you do with your feelings can be problematic. But emotions are part of what makes you human, made in the image of God. If you believe emotions are "bad," feeling them becomes dangerous, and I come to the rescue.

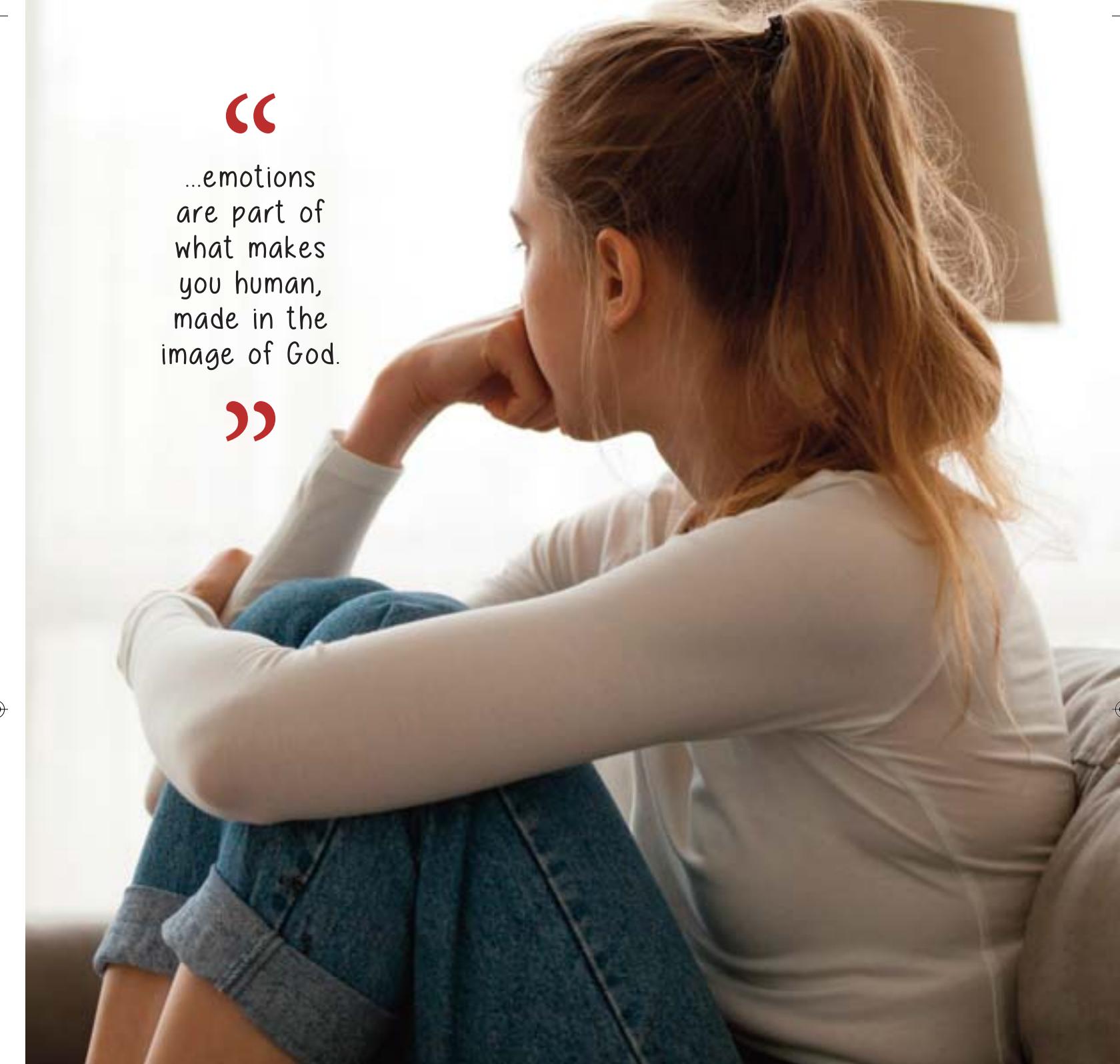
I protect you from this threat of deeper feelings, even if unnecessary, because that is my job. Perhaps you were taught that Anger is not acceptable. To help you not feel Anger, I appear so you feel me, Anxiety, instead. Or maybe you learned you have to be Happy. When Sad shows up, I help you ignore this "bad" feeling. You may not even know Anger or Sad are there because I excel at my job.

I get blamed for being a nuisance when I protect you from "unacceptable" feelings. All you feel is me, Anxiety, and not Hurt, Shame, Grief, Guilt or Despair. I am simply doing my job. If you could believe God created all your feelings, they wouldn't be considered a threat, and I would get a vacation.

No one likes being ignored, not even me. When you listen and embrace the deeper feeling, my job is done. But if you don't listen, I must work overtime! The feelings under the surface get bigger and louder, so I expand to drown out the noise. View my presence as an invitation to turn to God with your deeper feelings.

Balancing anxiety

I understand having me around is exhausting. Sleep becomes difficult and you lose motivation to exercise and eat healthy. You try anything to



“

...emotions
are part of
what makes
you human,
made in the
image of God.

”

escape the tension, hoping to turn me, Anxiety, off. You numb yourself with things like Netflix, gaming, social media, shopping, eating, drugs, alcohol and pornography. Self-medicating only provides temporary relief, because I bounce back stronger, and the cycle continues.

If you successfully avoid all feelings, Depression can appear and you become hopeless and empty. You may cling to others and depend on them for excessive reas-

urance. Or you withdraw and isolate to avoid rejection. These reactions to my presence are understandable but not helpful.

You may wonder how to develop a healthier relationship with me, Anxiety. God made your body, mind and spirit to be interconnected. When all three are addressed, you are able to live out Paul's exhortation to be anxious for nothing.

First, support your body. Your body automatically responds to danger cues, so you need to assess the threat. Most people overestimate the likelihood of danger, but if there is an actual, physical danger, find safety. When safe, you need to help your body let go of the accumulated stress. You can help your body calm down through deep breathing, exercise or being comforted by a loved one. These tips will make Fear go away. If I am still lingering, then there is more work needed.

Second, engage your mind. Here are a few tips:

- Identify: Hi Anxiety! (Greet me like a guest.)
- Listen: Ask what deeper feeling I am protecting you from. What does this say about your values? How do you tend to cope with me in unhealthy ways?
- Discern: See if your reaction is the best or only solution. What choices could you make that are good and godly, rather than destructive?
- Act: Allow yourself to feel your forbidden feelings. You may find it helpful to journal or talk with a trusted friend.

Third, connect to God. I love when you invite Jesus to carry me. The apostle Peter invites you to “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:17). You can fling me onto his shoulders, the meaning of “cast.” Allow him to carry me, rather than holding the weight yourself. I can rest when held by God, which helps you feel better.

These tips may sound too simple. It is easier when I haven’t been around very long. When we share an extended history, it is difficult to stop my attempts to protect you. I, Anxiety, get stuck in an extreme state. Your body gets worn down and you have difficulty functioning.

This is a sign you may benefit from talking with a counselor. A counselor can help you identify triggers and help you distinguish between me and Fear. Having someone listen to Sad, Anger or Hurt frees me from the unpleasant job of running interference. Your guest can leave!

Additionally, prescription medication may help lower my intensity when I, Anxiety, get locked into high alert. Often the medication jumpstarts my ability to calm down and sometimes it helps regulate me long-term. Medication alone is not usually enough to change our relationship, so be sure to also work with a counselor to lessen my workload.

Your relationship with me can sometimes get complicated. After this chat, you now know my job is to protect you, help you be safe and thrive. Engaging your mind, body and spirit helps us stay in balance. Let’s keep working toward a healthy relationship so I won’t overstay my welcome!

Cheryl Dueck Smith is an assistant professor of Marriage and Family Therapy at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and a licensed marriage and family therapist at Link Care in Fresno, Calif.

For more about understanding and responding to anxiety, read these two online articles.



“My troubled heart: Understanding the anatomy of anxiety and its rules of engagement” by psychologist Brock L. McCay



“Take your pulse: A trauma chaplain’s view of anxiety” by Steve Cuss, pastor and author of *Managing Leadership Anxiety: Yours and Theirs*.

Desert seasons

It's okay to not be okay

I have been faithfully following Christ since 2018. Prior to this, I knew of Jesus but not what it meant to live for him. I spent most of my adult life in rebellion to God doing everything in my power to create my own joy. This strategy failed and only led to despair. But God met me in this place and began to change my life drastically from an insecure, anxious, depressed and prideful addict to a man that by God's grace is able to walk with others in the midst of their struggles as I share my own.

Initially my fire for the Lord brought tremendous excitement and joy. However, over time, the ministry I love so much became more of my identity than Christ. The success and/or failure of the people I walked with became more a source of my joy than Christ. The happiness of my wife had a greater impact on my happiness than my relationship with Jesus. Without realizing it, I slowly made idols of good, godly things as I pointed people to Jesus but failed to allow others to point me to him.

God, in his grace, began to teach me a beautiful thing: that as a believer, and especially as a leader, it is good to ask for help. I was so caught up in ministering to others that I had forgotten how to be ministered to, leading to a spiritual desert.

Last October, I wrote a letter to my church about this desert season. Even though I did not understand it, I felt grateful that despite feeling spiritually empty I knew God loved me where I was, as he loves them where they are. This desert was not a reflection of my love for God. I wasn't turning to old habits to escape or feel. I knew God wanted to teach me something.

I encouraged others not to despise their desert, to be encouraged and to reach out, but I still had no idea what God wanted to teach me. A few months later, I finally realized I wasn't letting people into what was actually going on in my heart.

My wife and I had been devastated by a miscarriage in July 2022. Although I supported my wife, talked to others, asked for prayer and did all the things that looked right, I did not share the depths of my hurt and anger. I did not share how I wrestled with God's goodness or about my inability to experience the peace of Christ. I wanted to sit in joy with a smile instead of with tears. But God, in his grace and mercy, let me sit for what felt like forever, until I was ready to see what he had for me.

I learned it is okay to admit I am not okay when I am hurt and struggling. I tend to share just enough so others won't ask what is really going on. But I learned my community is meant to hear the deepest groanings of my soul.

Wherever this may find you, I pray you know it is okay to not be okay. God is bigger than our feel-

ings and questions. In all things, have a community where you actively and vulnerably share what is really going on, in the desert or the springs.

Often in ministry the greatest impact we have on others comes not from our greatest gifts but from our shortcomings. As we are honest, we give others permission to do the same. It's in this place that the gospel speaks to us all.

I was so caught up in ministering to others that I had forgotten how to be ministered to, leading to a spiritual desert.



Matthew Fabrizio is a recovery pastor/director of men's spiritual formation at Neighborhood Church in Fresno, Calif. He and his wife, Megan, are resource (foster) parents to two teenagers.

Sing to make disciples

The Bible instructs us to sing for God and to teach one another

Singing is a great tradition in the church. But it is more than a tradition. Churches sing because the Bible tells us to sing. The Bible also tells us why we sing. The only two New Testament scriptures that clearly call us to sing also teach us that singing is for the benefit of one another.

Colossians 3:16 tells us to sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We could focus on the meaning of each of these three song categories. That discussion is important. But let's not miss the command in verse 16 to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." Paul says how to do that: "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

We are called to sing these various types of songs to let the word of Christ dwell richly within us and it is directly linked to our effort to teach and admonish one another.

We see similar instructions in Ephesians 5: "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making

melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (vv 18-21, ESV).

These verses tell us how to live a Spirit-filled life. Part of the answer is that we sing. But look at what it says about the direction of our singing. The aim of our singing is both horizontal, "addressing one another," and vertical, "making melody to the Lord."

The implications for gathered worship are numerous. The content of our lyrics is no longer a matter of preference. Our songs must proclaim to one another the rich truth of the gospel, the glories of Christ and an encouragement to live faithfully.

We see in these Scriptures that we should not only sing directly to God. We also need songs that declare biblical truth to one another.

We see in the passages mentioned above that efforts to provide an individual, isolated experience are in direct contrast with the biblical purpose of gathered worship. If we are called to address one another in song, then we know there is a biblical reason to keep the house lights up so we can see each other and the band's volume down so we can hear each other.

Instead of relegating our children to another room so adults can have a better "worship experience," we should keep them with us because singing helps us make disciples. And we want

our children to be disciples.

So, gather with your church to sing. Sing to Lord with all your heart. But remember to sing to one another. Teach, encourage and correct one another with singing. Sing the gospel to unbelievers. Sing words of hope to the hopeless. Sing words of comfort to the weary. Sing words of assurance to the doubtful. Sing words of instruction to the immature. Sing to make disciples.

So, gather with your church to sing. Sing to the Lord with all your heart. But remember to sing to one another. Teach, encourage and correct one another with singing.



Tom Byford is lead pastor at Parkview MB Church in Hillsboro, Kan.

Integrated Immigrant Ministries is growing

IIM announces first CORD recipient

In what is becoming a monumental ministry for the USMB family, Integrated Immigrant Ministries continues to grow. A total of at least 12 Congolese congregations from Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Missouri, South Dakota and Tennessee have become USMB member churches or are well on the path to becoming members. Other Congolese churches are also tracking with USMB and have shown membership interest.

Part of the attraction from both the USMB and Congolese perspectives is that the USMB Confession of Faith and Anabaptist/evangelical roots and the Congolese churches' beliefs and theological background are harmonious. Many of the Congolese immigrants encountered intense conflict, war and bloodshed in their native country of DR Congo. They have purposefully fled that turmoil, looking for peace and a place to belong.

The Central District MB Conference (CDC) and Eastern District MB Conference (EDC) and their respective district ministers Rick Eshbaugh and Terry Hunt initially directed this ministry to Congolese churches. (Eshbaugh is no longer serving the CDC.) This immigrant connection now includes a national USMB element with the formation of the Integrated Immigrant Council (IIC).

The IIC, chaired by Hunt, consists of representatives from those two districts, USMB and Multiply. The IIC is a sub-council of the larger USMB National Strategy



Team (NST) and reflects the NST's strategy to incorporate and serve the many immigrant churches that have come to our USMB family for relationship.

To help resource this burgeoning ministry, USMB has hired Henri Ngolo as part-time integrated immigrant coordinator, beginning in November 2022. In this role, Ngolo will connect with USMB Congolese pastors and leaders and those interested in pursuing USMB affiliation and collaborate with districts and district ministers for integration opportunities. Ngolo and his wife, Bienvenue, have three children and attend Christian Center the Hand of God in Hamilton, Ohio. Ngolo is also a part of the Integrated Immigrant Council.

Ngolo is excited about this new position, although he has previously been serving in this way for the past several years in a voluntary capacity. Ngolo says, "God is doing something new. It is why today he is opening doors for im-

migrant churches to enter into our Mennonite Brethren family. God is asking us to embrace them, work alongside them, encourage them, mentor them, educate them and settle them so they can assimilate into the culture and do his mission work" (Missio Dei—Acts 1:8).

In addition to hiring Ngolo, the IIC has created the CORD program, based on Ecclesiastes 4:12. CORD provides for partnering with immigrant churches to create a movement of self-sustaining churches and leaders—providing resources for church facilities, pastor training and pastor stipends to help alleviate a portion of the pastor's multi-vocational workload.

"The Integrated Immigrant Council is excited about the opportunity to come alongside existing and emerging immigrant churches that aspire to join our MB family," Hunt writes. "Therefore, we have developed a program that will allow MB churches to partner with like-minded immigrant churches and leaders to connect through building relationships."

The IIC is pleased to announce that the first recipient of the CORD program is Hermann Mputu, pastor of Christian Center the Hand of God in Hamilton, Ohio. The church is growing to the point that they are out of room in the sanctuary and need to remodel to provide for more growth!—USMB

To give to the CORD program visit <https://usmb.org/cord-program/>

Experiencing Easter

Mystery Tour brings Easter narrative to life for Greenhouse youth

Whether reclining on bean bag chairs and taking communion, nailing struggles to a cross or roasting hot dogs by the lake, Utah teens from the Greenhouse Community Church (GCC) youth group experienced the Easter narrative in a new way last spring.

GCC youth and associate pastor Drew Pankratz and three youth leaders planned an interactive experience to demonstrate the importance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The full-day event was planned with GCC's context in Utah County in mind. Utah County has the highest concentration of Latter-Day Saints in the United States, with around 70 percent of the population adhering to the LDS religion.

"While the LDS Church does recognize Easter for the resurrection, the events of the Last Supper and crucifixion are not focused on," Pankratz says. "Being able to show our students the necessity of Jesus' work on the cross was powerful."

As a teenager attending church, Pankratz says the experiences, more than the preaching, stuck with him. So he brainstormed ways to make the Easter story come alive for GCC youth.

"I believe the story of Easter, more specifically Christ's death and resurrection, is the greatest news one can ever hear," Pankratz says. "It is this good news of Jesus that rescues us from sin and gives us hope beyond the grave. While reading and studying this story in the Gospels is great, many of us experience things better visually or hands-on. Seeing, touching, and interacting with the story can bring it to life in a whole new



Drew Pankratz (to the right of the cross) watches as students nail their notecards to the cross. The second stop on the 2022 Easter Mystery Tour focused on confession and surrender. Students were invited to write their sins and struggles on notecards and then nailed the notes to the cross. *Photo by GCC*

way."

GCC's resulting "Easter Mystery Tour" included four stops around Saratoga Springs, providing an interactive way for students to experience, reflect on and engage with the Easter story in what Pankratz hopes becomes an annual event.

An element of mystery

Students gathered April 10, 2022, for the experiential tour in Saratoga Springs, which is nestled on the shores of Utah Lake surrounded by

two mountain ranges and just 30 miles south of Salt Lake City.

"Although most of our youth have a general knowledge of the Easter narrative, incorporating the 'mystery' element kept students on their toes," Pankratz says. "They knew where and when to meet but had no idea what we would be doing or where we would be going on the 'tour,' which included four stops/events."

Seated around a table on the floor of a dance studio Greenhouse rents for Sunday worship gatherings, stu-

dents listened to the story of the Last Supper in Luke 22:7-22, wrote their sins and struggles on notecards and participated in communion.

Next, the group climbed a hill overlooking the city as one student shouldered a cross. Leaders told the story of Jesus' crucifixion in Luke 23:32-49, then students nailed their notecards to the cross.

After a time of confession and surrender, students climbed to a hidden cave on the outskirts of the city to hear the story of the Resurrection.

"It made the perfect spot for students to climb up and see the vacated white linens lying in the 'tomb,'" Pankratz says.

The tour concluded at the Utah Lake marina where leaders shared the story from John 21:1-19 of the resurrected Jesus appearing to the disciples, serving them breakfast and commanding Peter to follow him.

"At that point we didn't have time to go fishing, so we enjoyed hot dogs over the fire instead," Pankratz says.

At the close of the event, lead pastor Jason Quiring invited students to respond to Jesus' invitation to "follow me."

"I remember watching the group walk out to meet me on the jetty," Quiring says. "I could tell many of the students were experiencing the story of Jesus' arrest, crucifixion, resurrection and calling in a whole new way."

Quiring notes Pankratz's creativity and genuine heart for people in planning the event.

"Experience is a great teacher, so Drew and the GYG leaders taking the time and energy to provide this opportunity for the students was really powerful," Quiring says.

A positive impact

Although hard to measure impact, Pankratz says initial feedback was positive.

"While measuring tangible impact can be difficult, our youth ministry team was greatly encouraged by the student feedback we received," Pankratz says. "For some, they participated in communion and confessed their sins to Jesus for the first time."

Sophomore Joy Schmutz was one of 13 students who participated.

"I loved writing our current hardships and burdens on the paper and nailing it to the cross," Schmutz says. "It felt so good to not only put my thoughts on paper, but also to give it to God and nail it on the cross."

"Ultimately, getting to experience the story of Easter through the activities—like walking up the hill to the cave and nailing our burdens to the cross—made the whole story more intriguing."

The Greenhouse youth leadership team would like to make this an annual Easter event, Pankratz says, and a similar tour is planned for April 2023.

"Being the second year, we may lose some of the 'mystery,' but we are praying the experience and impact continues to grow," Pankratz says.

"We have considered inviting other area youth groups or adults from Greenhouse to participate with us as well." —*Janae Rempel*



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A “holy annoyance”

Harris developing networks to encourage church planting

Brian Harris remembers asking about faith in third grade, but no one had answers for life’s biggest questions.

“I wish I had met somebody who could have explained the gospel to me,” says Harris, who grew up in a nominal Christian household in Ohio. “For at least six years, I was asking anybody who would listen to me, ‘How do you get to heaven?’ And no one knew.”

Harris eventually came to faith as a high school freshman after his parents trusted Jesus for salvation and his family began attending a Bible-teaching church.

“I remember going back to school thinking, ‘I’m the only person who knows Jesus in this school,’” he says as evidence of the separate social circles people gravitate toward. “That’s how clueless I was about faith.”

Providing an opportunity for connection with nonbelievers has driven Harris as his calling has shifted from witness to pastor to serving as USMB’s new church planting mobilizer.

Change in trajectory

Four months after Harris became a Christian, two tragedies changed his faith trajectory. A classmate was hit by a train and killed and a wrestling teammate took his own life.

“Looking at an empty chair (remembering) the last words that he ever said to me—‘I wonder who will be the next to go’—that was game-changing,” Harris says. “I (decided to) be a witness for Jesus.”

Harris’s fervor led him to preach during his high school shop class.

“One of my friends said, ‘I know you see people making fun of you,’”

Harris says. “He wasn’t even a Christian kid, but he said, ‘At least you have something you believe in.’”

Set on being a pastor, Harris transferred to a Christian school his junior year and later graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Bible/theology from Moody Bible Institute. He earned a master’s degree in ministry and Doctor of Ministry degree in pastoral studies, both from Grace Theological Seminary.

In 1988, Harris accepted his first full-time job as youth pastor at Westport MB Church—now Discovery Church—in Owasso, Okla. Harris and his wife, Stephanie, currently attend Discovery, bookending a 34-year career in pastoral ministry

during which Harris filled several pastoral roles and planted a church in suburban Cleveland, Ohio. He most recently served as lead pastor of Pine Acres Church in Weatherford, Okla., for 18 years.

A holy annoyance

Harris began as church planting mobilizer Aug. 1, 2022, to establish a national MB church multiplication vision and chair the Church Planting Council (CPC).

“(I and the Church Planting Council) determined that first we needed someone who already knew how MB church planting works and secondly someone who has the necessary relational skills to help create



Brian Harris (right) and Henri Ngolo, Integrated Immigrant coordinator, preach at Christian Center the Hand of God in Hamilton, Ohio. Photo by Don Morris.

networks among churches," says USMB national director Don Morris. "We were looking for someone steady, yet passionate about the work—someone with great ideas and the willingness to stick with it to see it to fruition. Brian has those qualities."

Recognizing pastors as the gatekeepers of churches, Harris is developing networks of pastors meeting on Zoom to catch a "sending church" vision and receive encouragement to stay the course.

"My job is to be a holy annoyance because we all want to do (church planting)," Harris says, recalling his experience as chair of the Southern District Conference Church Extension and Evangelism Commission (CEEC).

"We didn't get a whole lot accomplished because we would have a CEEC meeting, and I'd go right back to Weatherford and get caught up in the day-to-day busyness of church life," he says. "(Pastors are) smart. They just need somebody to keep pushing the ball forward."

Harris sees generosity among Mennonite Brethren willing to give to the work but recognizes a need for leadership development.

"It's almost like having a college football team that didn't recruit anybody for 10 years and then hoping that they're going to have a national champion next year," Harris says. "My job has shifted a little bit."

That shift represents a need to develop leaders for the work and training pastors to identify potential planters.

"We have possibilities, but we're not going anywhere fast until our churches start producing leaders who want to be pastors and planters," he says.

Harris's work combines the relational networks with traveling and planning. He will work with a coach through Axelerate, a ministry fostering coaching partnerships with church planting directors.

Careful not to over promise and under deliver, Harris says his goal is to develop 10 strong networks linking pastors and churches and releasing them to dream Ephesians 3:20 prayers.

"One of my biggest desires is to be the super, super encourager to beat-up, broken-down pastors," Harris says. "If they can get their wind

back in their sails and see the vision of what could happen, we can do something grand."

Harris's story has impacted his view of church planting as an intentional effort to resist the human tendency to gather in "echo chambers" with like-minded people. Getting non-Christians to church will require believers breaking from their church bubbles.

"Church planting is a pushback on that to say, 'No, we're going to launch a church with intentional building relationships with lost people,'" he says.—*Janae Rempel*



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A labor for love and outreach

Annual Valentine's Extravaganza serves as area-wide outreach event

Whether transporting their guests to the canals of Venice or inviting them to explore the countryside, Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church's Men's Ministry annually hosts an evening of good food and entertainment known as the Valentine's Extravaganza.

Props have included a Venetian bridge, a rusted car with a tumbleweed in the grill and straw bales draped with a cow hide in front of a barn door.

But the Extravaganza is more than displays of creativity and a catered meal. What began as a way for Men's Ministry members to show appreciation for their wives has turned into an area-wide outreach event each February.

Setting the stage

Planning begins at least six to eight months in advance for the Valentine's Extravaganza team, a subcommittee of Men's Ministry.

In February, the team brings that year's theme to life, transforming the church fellowship hall with a decorated event stage, lights, roses, themed décor, party favors and a backdrop for photos in the lobby. It takes as many as 60 people to pull off the event, including greeters, childcare workers and servers.

The evening begins with a catered meal followed by that year's entertainment—usually a musician or comedian—and ends with a short message.

Lead pastor Jeremy Matlock says he ensures the Gospel message is presented.

"I wait (and) listen to what the artist is doing and how much they



Guests had photos taken behind the wheel of a rusty car for 2020's "Everywhere I Go" Extravaganza featuring Tim Timmons. Photo by Janae Rempel

explain it," Matlock says. "Sometimes they share their story, but there's not the clear invitation or Gospel message. Sometimes they do. So, I play off of whatever they do and then wrap it up with either the Gospel message or an affirmation."

An annual outreach

Men's Ministry held its inaugural Valentine's Extravaganza—then called a banquet—in 2008.

Team member Ron Duerksen says the Extravaganza began as a way for men to show appreciation for their wives, but as the event has grown, the focus has shifted to outreach.

"We continue seeking entertainment that will touch hearts, change hearts," Duerksen says, recalling how one woman came to know Jesus at a Valentine's Extravaganza and passed away not long after. "The main goal is to reach people and spread the good news of Jesus Christ."

Entertainment has included well-known comedian Ken Davis, musician Mitch McVicker and Christian recording artist Mark Schultz who headlined the 10th annual event in 2017. Other entertainment has included musicians Citizen Way, I Am They, Tim Timmons and Rhett Walker and comedians Kenn Kington and Dennis Swanberg.

HMBC has hosted an event every year since 2008 despite a few hiccups. Before the 2019 “Just Breathe” event, the team had a chance to practice that technique when artist Jonny Diaz got stuck in the Dallas airport and local talent stepped in to provide classical piano music. Planners moved the 2021 event featuring comedian Nazareth to the fall because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A guest no longer

The Extravaganza not only allows the HMBC congregation to join friends for an enjoyable evening but also creates space to invite those who might not attend church. That’s the case for one HMBC staff member who started attending HMBC after coming to a Valentine’s Extravaganza.

Daniel Moss and his wife, Candace, had been talking about finding a church home for their young family. When a golfing buddy invited the couple to the 2015 Extravaganza featuring Ken Davis, the Mosses accepted the invitation.

“We came and it felt very welcoming, so we started coming (to church) the following Sunday,” Moss says. “We’ve never stopped since.”

Now Moss serves on staff as HMBC ministry coordinator and facilities manager, as well as on the Valentine’s Extravaganza team.

“Our biggest goal is to make sure people in this community and the surrounding communities have that opportunity to hear (the Gospel) outside of a Sunday morning church service,” Moss says. “A goal for me personally with this event would be to make sure that I’m reaching out to somebody that doesn’t walk into these doors on a regular basis.”

Hope in the fire (and flood)

Organizers selected 2023’s entertainment, singer/songwriter and author Ginny Owens, long before a

frozen water pipe on Christmas Eve flooded the HMBC building.

The flood necessitated a change in venue from HMBC to Tabor College for the Feb. 18 event, where the theme, “Hope in the Fire,” may have resonated with members of the congregation recalling another natural disaster: the 2004 fire that destroyed the church building.

The photo backdrop included a fire pit and flames spelling “hope.”

With Tabor’s auditorium holding more than twice the 360-seat capacity of HMBC’s fellowship hall, the team marketed the concert more widely, including in Tabor students’ mailboxes and on local radio sta-

tions. For the first time, the team offered the entertainment free to the public following a ticketed catered meal.

For Matlock, the Valentine’s Extravaganza helps accomplish HMBC’s mission.

“I see the church as family on mission, and so I think this event accomplishes both—the twofold purpose of us being family, but also reaching unchurched people,” Matlock says. “My hope is that people who wouldn’t normally come through the door of the church would come and hear the Gospel and meet our people and feel like they could come on Sunday.” —*Janae Rempel*



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An evening of holy merriment

Axiom Church hosts community Fat Tuesday BBQ to prepare for Lent

For some, Fat Tuesday brings to mind Mardi Gras beads and king cake, celebration and indulgence, but for one USMB congregation it includes BBQ, fellowship and intentional focus in preparation for Lent.

Axiom Church of Peoria, Ariz. hosted its second annual Fat Tuesday BBQ Feb. 21 at the Peoria City Park for its congregation and community.

Traditionally, Fat Tuesday—“Mardi Gras” in French—is a day of enjoyment before Lent. Lent is a season of self-discipline beginning Ash Wednesday and ending the Saturday before Easter, excluding Sundays. Lent symbolizes Jesus’ 40 days in the wilderness through prayer and fasting as people reflect on the impact of Easter.

Axiom’s Fat Tuesday BBQ offers a way for people to celebrate and fellowship before the Lenten season and lead into the Easter celebration with eyes and hearts wide open.

Lead Pastor Gavin Linderman says the Fat Tuesday BBQ is a special time of holy merriment for the congregation to grow as a sacred-knit church body in fellowship and to encourage each other in fasting during Lent.

During the celebration, Linderman offers a toast, encouraging the congregation to enter the Lenten season focused on God’s sacrifice and presence.

“There is a massive misconception that Fat Tuesday is a day to get drunk and purge,” Linderman says. “That is not the reason for us, though, but a reason to be together and to articulate the gospel. It’s evident in the Gospels that Jesus attended parties, and he brought people together and loved on others because he’s so relational and wants



Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted its second Fat Tuesday BBQ Feb. 21 in preparation for Lent. *Photo by Axiom Church*

you to know him, and we want to mimic that in our Fat Tuesday celebration.”

In 2022, the congregation celebrated with a BBQ meal, family games of tug-of-war and areas for kids to play and adults to visit—all elements Axiom brought to this year’s celebration along with a hog roast and toast.

Lent may not be a popular practice among USMB churches, Linderman says, but Axiom observes the traditional Lenten practice of fasting while also offering an Ash Wednesday service, a midweek guided prayer hour and intentional accountability.

In 2023, the Axiom congregation is using the space created by fasting to meet regularly to pray for events

and each other. Ultimately, the congregation seeks to use Lent as a time to remove distractions and regain focus on Jesus’ gift of salvation believers have because of his sacrifice.

“When it comes to tradition, there is a lot of suspicion that it’s (Fat Tuesday) embedded in old religion, but I think we live in a world deeply in need of rooted practices that have proven to bear fruit to make more fruit,” Linderman says. “Our emphasis is the people, not the practice, but I think just like crops have ‘in’ and ‘out’ seasons, we need seasons of growth and also of denial of self that make you rely on God, show you things that you are embedded in and all the things that may be keeping you from the most important thing.”—Caitlyn Decker

A worthwhile adventure

Couple concluding year-long day(care) dream journey

A year ago, Alyssa and Bryant Swiers of Strawberry Lake Church in Ogema, Minn., left their jobs, packed their camper and embarked on a year-long trip to learn about daycare ministry.

Before leaving home, the couple prayed doors would open for them to serve individually in ways they feel called by God. As they conclude their adventure, they have seen God answer that prayer.

"God has opened doors for us throughout this journey," the Swiers write in a letter to their supporters. "Too many things have fallen into place for us to call it a coincidence. We truly believe that is because of your prayers."

The couple's journey began in Omaha, Neb., where they connected with USMB congregations Stony Brook Church and Faith Bible Church, and Alyssa served at Love the Child Early Learning Center at Southwest Church of the Nazarene.

After about four months, the Swiers transitioned to Spearfish, S.D., where Alyssa shadowed the daycare director at Hillsview Church of the Nazarene and Bryant shadowed the pastor, did construction projects for the church and daycare and worked at a mechanic shop, helping to fund the couple's travels.

In mid-September, the Swiers returned to Omaha so Alyssa could fill a temporary paid position at Love the Child. Bryant, meanwhile, served at Faith Bible Church. The couple helped with Wednesday night activities at FBC and with a Trunk or Treat event attended by more than 1,000 people.

In December, the couple relocated to Jennings, La., for Bryant to volunteer with Mennonite Disaster



While Bryan Swiers leads MDS volunteer crews, Alyssa is job-shadowing at a church-run day school. The couple is concluding a yearlong journey to learn about daycare ministry. The MDS camp in Jennings, La., is near the Alligator Chateau, and weekly crews enjoy holding the baby alligators. *Photo by Bryan Swiers*

Service (MDS).

"In both Omaha and Spearfish, we made our first connections with Alyssa's mission goal in mind," the couple writes. "After we arrived at these locations, doors always opened for Bryant to serve. Our transition to Louisiana was the opposite. (MDS was) excited for Bryant to serve as a crew leader and accommodated Alyssa's mission."

Bryant leads crews of five volunteers rebuilding and repairing homes damaged by two hurricanes that hit the area three years ago.

MDS has a site at University United Methodist Church in Lake Charles, La., and this church runs a day school where Alyssa can job-shadow in classrooms and continue online classes for her Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential.

"Each daycare is a little bit different," Alyssa says, adding sizes

have ranged from 15 children to 120. "It's been really good to see all of them, just to see what works for the smaller ones (and) what works once you get a little bigger."

In April, the Swiers intend to return to Minnesota. Alyssa will continue to work toward her CDA Credential and hopes to open a daycare at Lake Region Mennonite Church.

"I've learned a lot about running a daycare as a nonprofit and having it as a ministry of the church rather than a business," Alyssa says.

Looking back, Bryant says the adventure has been worth it.

"I'm very glad that we did it," he says. "It turned out the way I probably would've planned it, but there was obviously a lot more that went into it than what I would have ever imagined. Leaving home with no plan went about as well as I thought it would."—*Janae Rempel*

Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel

MILESTONES

Baptism/Memberships

Brian Shannon, Amanda Shannon and Kenneth Ault were baptized and received as members at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, Jan. 29. Galin Karlin, June Karlin, Brent Millikan, Eva Millikan, Greg Atkins, Jessica Atkins, Rich Schmidtberger and Erna Schmidtberger were also received as members.

Bowen Kvenold, Genesis Aquino, Erica Brown, Ryan Brown, Lindsey Monroy, Allison Gam, Divina Mauchley and Asher Mauchley were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**, Jan. 29. Cheryl Athmann and Brittany Fotheringham were baptized Sept. 18, 2022.

Jordyn Oswald, Lauren LeMoine, Sarah Judd and Princess Kaiulani Taberero Moreland were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**.

Terry McCoskey and Rebecca McCoskey were received as members at **Hesston (Kan.) MB Church**, Jan. 22.

Morgan Brown and Ryan Oliver were baptized at **Lakeview Church, Grantsville (Utah) Campus**, Jan. 22.

Ethan Cooke, Nathan Cooke, Travis Cooke and Carter Everts were baptized and received as members at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church**, Jan. 8.

Paul Rudolph and Surya Rudolph were received as members at **Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D.**, Dec. 11.

Newt Miller, Carrie Miller, Cliff Craighead, Deena Craighead and Carol Short were received as members at **Pine Acres Church**,

Weatherford, Okla., Dec. 11. Hannah Aquino, Samuel Aquino, Lydia Aquino, Naomi Aquino, Alyza Dover and Aydien Becerra were baptized and received as members at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, Nov. 13. Maria Gonzalez, Dulce Gonzalez and Victor Gonzalez, Jr., were also received as members.

Workers

Dan Krause concluded his service as senior pastor at **Rosedale Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.** John Dube began serving in that role.

Josh and Brianne Shaw concluded their service as pastoral couple at **Lighthouse Church, Denver, Colo.** Miguel Warren is serving as lead pastor.

Jeff and Leslee Bell concluded their service as pastoral couple at **Mosaic, Littleton, Colo.**

Rosemberg and Diana Polania were installed Jan. 22 as pastoral couple at **Iglesia Agua Viva, Omaha, Neb.**

Deaths

Barkman, Ruby, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, March 12, 1945—Jan. 5, 2023. Parents: William and Gladys (Jones) Carpenter. Spouse: James Barkman (deceased). Children: David (deceased), Kerri Crandell; two grandchildren.

Berg, Jody Lynn, Yale, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, Jan. 9, 1973—Feb. 5, 2023. Parents: Michael and Patricia Maunu. Spouse: David Berg. Children: MaKiah Schweigert. Step-children: Noelle, Amanda Swan, Dawson, Parker; two grandchildren.

Danley, Joel, Willows, Calif., member of Country Bible Church, Orland, Calif., Oct. 1, 1952—Dec. 9, 2022. Parents: Newland "Carmon" and Ellen (Newhouse) Danley. Spouse: Jenyce Hiebert. Children: Micah, Seth, Anneka.

Ediger, Esther, Topeka, Kan., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Oct. 3, 1929—Jan. 9, 2023. Parents: Jacob and Marie Regier Braun. Spouse: Jacob Ediger. Children: Elaine Fast, Judy Faul, Sharon Overton, Lynn, Ron, Ken; seven grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Friesen, Ann Heinrichs, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Sept. 21, 1926—Nov. 4, 2022. Parents: Joseph and Myrtle (Fox) Queen. Spouse: Wesley Dean Heinrichs (deceased), Elmer R. Friesen. Children: Linda Engelman, Sonja Heinrichs, Dianna Agee, Marcia Sorini, Pakisa Tshimika, Meso Beta; 17 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren.

Friesen, David Wayne, Charlotte, N.C., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Jan. 13, 1953—Oct. 13, 2022. Parents: Alfred W. and Dolores (Ewert) Friesen. Spouse: Deborah. Children: David, Matthew, Emilie Spillman.

Friesen, Mildred "Millie" Jean, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, June 15, 1925—Jan. 26, 2023. Parents: William and Lillian Tiemann Brenner. Spouse: Harry Friesen (deceased). Children: Marilyn Fast, Stephen, Billy (deceased), Grace Steele, Joyce Herrington, Philip, Deborah Phillips; 16 grandchildren, 27 great-grandchildren.

Hrabovsky, Arlene, Omaha, Neb., of Faith Bible Church, Omaha, March 29, 1933—Dec. 29, 2022. Parents: Floyd and Martha Maguire. Spouse: Robert Hrabovsky (deceased). Children:

John, Debbie, Susan, Larry, Ginger. Step-children: Sharon, Jane; 17 grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Jessup, LaVerne, Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Jan. 17, 1927—Jan. 7, 2023. Parents: Henry Harrison and Gertrude Whittecar Wheeler. Spouse: Duane Jessup (deceased). Children: Michael (deceased), Rodney, Timothy, David, Romi Lies Slaughter, Kelley Barker; 25 grandchildren, 38 great-grandchildren, six great-great-grandchildren.

Kliwer, Bill R., North Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., April 15, 1943—March 31, 2022. Parents: Edward and Wilma Kliwer. Spouse: Susan. Children: Richard (deceased), John; three grandchildren.

Kliwer, Richard Douglas, North Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., July 15, 1968—Aug. 10, 2022. Parents: Bill R. and Susan K. Kliwer.

Knaak, Nancy, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 15, 1947—Nov. 8, 2022. Parents: Dale and Eula (Swick) Douglass. Spouse: Don Knaak. Children: Sam, Neil, Lindsay Hughes; 10 grandchildren.

Kroeker, Gordon Dale, Fort Wayne, Ind., former pastor of Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D., Aug. 31, 1955—Dec. 9, 2022. Parents: Robert and Wanda Kroeker. Spouse: Luise Kroeker. Children: Ruth Stuber, Heather; two grandchildren.

Lomsdale, Jeremiah Anthony, Topeka, Kan., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, June 10, 1980—Jan. 23, 2023. Parents: Tony and Linda (Smith) Lomsdale. Spouse: Lura (Rice) Lomsdale. Children: Chanse, Ayla.

Mefford, Allen L., Omaha, Neb., of Faith Bible Church, Omaha, July 14, 1953—Jan. 9, 2023. Parents: Donald and Joyce (Fraser) Mefford.

Nightengale, Floyd K., of New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla., Jan. 18, 1934—Jan. 10, 2023. Parents: John J. and Eva Smith Nightengale. Spouse: Carolyn Schmidt. Children: Doug, Kimberly DeFeo, Meloni Barkley, Jason; five grandchildren.

Olfert, Joanne E., Fresno, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, May 3, 1933—Nov. 22, 2022. Parents: AA and Martha (Reimche) Smith. Spouse: Wally Olfert (deceased). Children: Steven, Jonelle Hanning, Christine Johns; five grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Peak, Roy E., Reedley Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Nov. 16, 1942—Jan. 9, 2023. Parents: Elwin and Helen (Winslow) Peak. Spouse: Eldoris Peak. Children: Michael, Robin Wall; three grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Rempel, John F., North Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., Dec. 31, 1931—Dec. 16, 2022. Parents: George J. and Marie L. (Friesen) Rempel. Spouse: Phyllis Grunau. Children: Mike, Ron, Darren, Brian; seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Seibel, Karen Ruth, Palm Coast, Fla., former pastor's wife at Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb., June 2, 1941—Nov. 26, 2022. Parents: Ed and Ruth Gesswin. Spouse: H. James Seibel. Children: David, Michael, Sonia Stotsky.

Siebert, Ruby, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Aug. 23, 1934—Dec. 22, 2022. Parents: Henry and Emma Friesen Ens. Spouse: John "Johnny" G. Siebert (deceased). Children: Charles, Jean Hernandez, Bruce,

Lynn Bartel; 16 grandchildren, 32 great-grandchildren.

Suderman, Glenn, Garden City, Kan., member of Garden Valley Church, Garden City, Sept. 16, 1935—Sept. 26, 2021. Parents: Albert and Pauline Heinrichs Suderman. Spouse: Carol Pauls. Children: Greg, Debbie (deceased); two grandchildren.

Tindall, George, Texas, member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Sept. 27, 1934—Nov. 14, 2022. Spouse: Patsy (deceased), Pat Moore Klassen (deceased). Children: Andy, Elaine Riley, Timothy, David; five grandchildren. Step-Children: Vickie Klassen, Nancy Klassen, Sue Klassen; eight step-grandchildren.

Unruh, Frances, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, July 5, 1937—Oct. 31, 2022. Parents: Abe and Irma Dahl. Spouse: Neal Unruh (deceased). Children: Kevin, Beverly Schnitzler, David; eight grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN

Discipleship

The Missions Ministry Team from **Corn (Okla.) MB Church** hosted a meal Feb. 12 to share about The Missionary Pathway, which equips and empowers people to make disciples within their existing relationships.

On Feb. 4, **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted a one-day "Men's Marriage Huddle" where pastors and leaders guided men through ways to honor the Lord and center their marriages on God. Women were invited to a retreat March 17-19 with a speaker, worship, breakout sessions and workshops.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted its annual Restore Women's Conference March 4.

Buhler (Kan.) MB Church and Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a livestream IF:2023 women's conference March 3-4.

Fifth graders from **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, learned about heaven and built "heavenly houses" by decorating wrapped gold boxes with fake gems and jewelry for their HFL Heaven Project, Feb. 9.

Fellowship

Men from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, and **Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb.**, gathered for a retreat at Camp Rivercrest March 3-5.

Deacons and their wives from **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, hosted a Valentine's Banquet for www.uncommon members and single moms Feb. 19.

The women's ministry at **Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, held "Brush of Color" sign-painting events Feb. 17 and Feb. 18. The PrimeTimers group met for its annual Valentine's Dinner Feb. 9.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted its first Daddy Daughter Dance Feb. 17. Women gathered for Axiom's annual Galentines event Feb. 7, which included a gift exchange.

Women from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, met for a soup and salad supper with special speaker Feb. 13. The Sisters women's ministry held a freezer meals workshop Jan. 14. People gathered Dec. 25 for "Snack-Luck" with everyone bringing a favorite Christmas snack to share. The congregation held its annual family Christmas night with a variety show Dec. 18.

Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., hosted a "Soup in a Bowl" meal Feb. 12. People gathered for donuts, hot drinks

and a Christmas celebration Dec. 25.

Hesston (Kan.) MB Church held its annual "Soup or Roll Sunday" potluck meal Feb. 12.

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a women's game night Jan. 27.

Women from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, made prayer coverings and lap blankets for a care center Jan. 21. People went caroling and gave out blankets Dec. 18.

Women from **Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, gathered for a weekend getaway Feb. 3-5. The church hosted a parent date night Feb. 24 with childcare provided.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., hosted a Valentine's Banquet Feb. 18. Women from the congregation were invited to a movie and dinner night Jan. 26.

The WOW group at **Buhler (Kan.) MB Church** hosted a "Soup Swap" Jan. 21 with soup tasting and fellowship.

Women from **The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, gathered for a night of worship and fellowship Jan. 6.

Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., hosted a New Year's Brunch Jan. 1 with a devotional.

Women from **Hesston (Kan.) MB Church** gathered for a white elephant gift exchange and salad supper Dec. 15.

Women from **Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla.**, held a Christmas dinner Dec. 13.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., held its annual ugly Christmas sweater party with a Christmas makers market with crafts from local vendors, Dec. 11.

Church Life continued

The women's ministry at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** held a Christmas tea Dec. 3.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a couples night Feb. 14 with charcuterie and dessert. Men were invited to Man Camp March 17-19.

People from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, and **Stony Brook Church, Omaha**, gathered to watch the Super Bowl Feb. 12.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., hosted a Super Bowl party Feb. 12. **Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted a tailgate on Super Bowl Sunday, Feb. 12, with family photos and a soda bar.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church hosted a ladies painting night, Feb. 10.

Worship

Corn (Oka.) MB Church hosted an evening of singing and fellowship Feb. 19.

Celebrations

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., celebrated its 75th birthday.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church hosted "Tidings of Joy: A Celtic Christmas Celebration" with orchestra Dec. 18.

Iglesia Manantial de Agua Viva, Omaha, Neb., celebrated its 13th anniversary, Feb. 4-5.

REACHING OUT

Locally

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., supported 21 children and eight families through the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree program.

New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla., made approximately 3,000 bierocks for the Oklahoma Mennonite Relief Sale, with a net sale of \$15,916 for Mennonite relief.

Women from **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted a community baby shower and brunch for local moms Jan. 28.

Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif., partnered with other local nonprofit organizations to give away food and toys on Christmas Eve morning. **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, went caroling Christmas morning.

North Fresno (Calif.) Church assembled food boxes for 40 families and delivered Christmas gifts to 53 people Dec. 17-18. The congregation funded 22 full or partial scholarships for winter camp and delivered furniture.

Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., went caroling and delivered gifts to neighbors Dec. 17.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., went caroling Dec. 11.

Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., went caroling Dec. 11.

Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D., gave \$1,097.50 each to two local charities: Men's Winter Refuge and the Minot Area Homeless Coalition. Funds were given through the "Twice Blessed" campaign, and the amount will be doubled.

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., assembled 48 health kits for MCC.

Hesston (Kan.) MB Church hosted a family game night with a special speaker, Feb. 22.

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., donated 2,585 diapers and training pants, 3,992 wipes, other items and \$30 cash to Heartland Pregnancy Care Center.

Globally

Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., gave \$10,633.25 to be divided evenly between MCC Meat Canning, MDS, Hope House and Samaritan's Purse.

Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb., gave \$578.41 for a special Christmas offering for Gospel For Asia.

New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla., boxed 180 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child.

Classifieds

Lead Pastor: Koerner Heights Church in Newton, Kan., is searching for a Lead Pastor. Please find more information at koernerheights.org/employment or email frontdesk@koernerheights.org

Youth Pastor: Koerner Heights Church in Newton, Kan., is searching for a Youth Pastor. Please find more information at koernerheights.org/employment or email frontdesk@koernerheights.org

Plant Pastor: Community Bible Church (CBC) in Olathe, Kan., is seeking a plant pastor, a servant leader called to make disciples through church planting. The plant pastor will begin his role at CBC, spending up to two years in training with other CBC pastors, developing and organizing a team that will plant a new church and working to develop and implement a church planting strategy. He will lead individuals and the church to develop a heart for and engage in the work of building the kingdom and will have all the responsibilities of preaching, pastoring, leading and shepherding the planted church. If interested or to see a complete job description, contact Kirk Carlson at kscarlson64@gmail.com

Lead Pastor: Bethany MB Church, Fresno, Calif., is seeking a man who has a dynamic relationship with Jesus and a proven pattern of Spirit-led, theologically sound, Bible-based teaching and preaching. The lead pastor

will champion the mission, vision and values of Bethany Church and must be an effective communicator who is both relational and relatable, skilled at empowering members to serve in roles of leadership within the body of Christ and committed to the power of prayer. To learn more, visit <https://www.bethanychurchfresno.com/Pastoral-Search>

Pastor of Student Ministries: Shafter (Calif.) MB Church is searching for a full-time pastor of student ministries to oversee junior high, high school and college ministries. Shafter is a community of approximately 20,000 located in the southern San Joaquin Valley of California, 10 miles northwest of Bakersfield. A full job description and additional information is available at <https://www.shaftermb.org/psm/>

Worship Director: Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash., is seeking a part-time worship director to lead the church body in musically celebrating God. The worship director provides leadership by creating an inviting, worshipful atmosphere, a space in which people can meet with God; leading the congregation and the members of the worship ministry in growing their relationship with the Lord through worship; and developing a rotating team of worship leaders. More information: <https://www.goodnewsfellowship.org/worshipdirector>. Interested applicants: send cover letter, résumé to office@goodnewsfellowship.org

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