

CHRISTIAN LEADER

THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

JULY/AUGUST 2023



Broken but faithful

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Follow the leader

Faithfulness can include fixing our eyes on others

When associate editor Janae Rempel talked with USMB pastor Boris Borisov about serving displaced Ukrainians that have come to Spokane (see page 26), Boris referred to faithfulness as “long obedience in the same direction.” This phrase sounded familiar, and a Google search revealed that Boris was quoting the title of Eugene Peterson’s classic, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

What a great definition of faithfulness. The theme for the feature articles in this issue was inspired by the words of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3:17-18, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

It can be challenging to be faithful when we struggle with loss due to war, economic hardship, debilitating health issues and the sudden death of someone we love. How is it possible to say we are willing to be faithful even if God does not intervene as we want him to and know he can. The essays in this issue address this and other questions that we wrestle with during times of disappointment, difficulty and despair. Not every chapter in our faith stories are neatly wrapped and topped with a cheerful bow.

There is also the reminder in this issue to look to one another when we are struggling to be faithful, hopeful and obedient. The important and supportive role the faith community plays in our long journeys of obedient faithfulness is illustrated in one of my favorite scenes in C.S. Lewis’ *Prince Caspian*. The Pevensie siblings and Trumpkin the dwarf are searching for Prince Caspian, and at this point in the story, Lucy is the only one of five who can see the great lion Aslan. Aslan has told Lucy that he will guide them through the forest. It takes some convincing, but Lucy finally persuades the others to follow her as she follows Aslan through the trees and down one side of a treacherous gorge and up the other. This is how Lewis describes the procession: “Aslan turned and walked at a slow pace about 30 yards ahead of them. The others had only Lucy’s direction to guide them, for Aslan was not only invisible to them but silent as well.... Lucy had her eyes on the Lion and the rest had their eyes on Lucy.”

When we feel like all we can do is desperately hang on, when circumstances keep us from clearly seeing Jesus and feeling his presence, sometimes all we can do is keep our eyes on the disciples around us—our families, friends and congregation—who are faithfully following our King and Savior. And for a time, their faith can strengthen our faltering steps in our journey of long obedience in the same direction.

Connie Faber,
Editor



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CHRISTIANLEADER

- Don Morris, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
- Connie Faber, EDITOR
- Janae Rempel, ASSOCIATE EDITOR
- Shelley Plett, GRAPHIC DESIGNER

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Chatbots have brought the dilemma of an easy out for pastors who have had a long week, with perhaps an unexpected funeral or intense counseling.

Let's talk about ChatGPT

Sermons generated with AI lack heart

The church, specifically pastors and others preparing sermons or resources, faces a new dilemma. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now capable of quickly creating these materials and in just about any format or style that a person would want.

Let me give an example. While eating dinner recently with a few USMB pastors, we started talking about ChatGPT, a general-purpose chatbot that uses artificial intelligence to generate text after a user enters a prompt. We decided to ask ChatGPT to create a sermon from an evangelical perspective on a passage of Scripture. We entered these prompts, and Chat GPT immediately produced a sermon that would probably require about 30 minutes to present orally. Input criteria—boom, product! Pretty cool. Well, maybe. But also, a little troubling.

Chatbots have brought the dilemma of an easy out for pastors who have had a long week, with perhaps an unexpected funeral or intense counseling. It's Friday and the sermon isn't written. Why not, just this once, put in the criteria needed and, voila, an instant sermon. The problem with this is that it isn't from a pastor's heart. The sermon that ChatGPT spit out to those of us at that table was okay, but in my view, it lacked depth and emotion.

"It lacks a soul – I don't know how else to say it," says Hershael York, dean of the school of theology and a professor of Christian preaching at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, in an Associated Press interview about AI-generated sermons. I've not ever thought about a sermon having "soul," but I get what York is saying. When I was pastor at Pine Acres Church in Weatherford, Okla., I enjoyed preparing messages, and in particular a series of sermons that I felt the church family needed at that time. I believe those messages had a purpose even if perhaps they weren't on par with great preachers of the day.

Don't worry, I'm not saying your pastor is using ChatGPT to create messages. But how AI will ultimately affect the church is yet to be seen. What does this mean for the church? How can AI be used in a way that benefits the church? Should it even be used at all? How do we know when it is being used?

Thinking about this subject, I did a sneaky test with *Christian Leader* editor Connie Faber. I sent her a draft of this essay with intentional misquotes and text from a published article presented as my own words. Connie quickly picked up on it. She's a great editor, and that's what great editors do. But not everyone is going to check on a column's veracity or whether a sermon came from the pastor and not a chatbot. Most often it's up to us to be honorable.

So, a caution to our USMB pastors. Your people want to hear from God through you, not a machine. It might be tempting to skip sermon prep, especially if you're having a tough week. But a machine can't capture your heart for your congregation. Your people need your words—inspired by time that you've spent with God and the Bible.

Listen to LEAD Pod episode 71 about ChatGPT at <https://www.buzzsprout.com/972541/12217707>.

Don Morris
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Bethel MB Church

Yale, S.D. • Established: 1904
Central District Conference • Attendance: 116
Lead Pastor: Coalt Robinson

Our congregation in three words:
Rural, Generous, Redeemer-centered

How can you pray for us?

Pray for wisdom and boldness as we proclaim the good news of Jesus

Connect with us!

Facebook: [bethelmbchurch](#)

Instagram: [bethelmbchurch_yale/](#)



Top: Although BMBC has a baptistry, baptisms, like this one in 2022, often take place at Byron Lake, located two miles from the church.

Second from top: During VBS in 2022, kids learned about God's monumental love and greatness.

Third from top: The Bethel congregation enjoys church-wide events, including fellowship meals and activities such as a table game night. This group is playing Hedbanz, a picture guessing game. "People seem to genuinely care for each other," says one person in a recent church survey.

News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel

ICOMB delegates affirm leadership changes at 2023 summit

The 2023 International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) held its 2023 summit May 10-14 in Abbotsford, BC.

Rudi Plett announced he will not serve a third term as ICOMB's global director, concluding his work with ICOMB in May 2024. Delegates affirmed Elton DaSilva, currently national director for the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, as the next ICOMB director.

Ed Boschman, who has been the USMB representative since 2008 and served on the Executive Committee as treasurer, announced his retirement from his ICOMB roles. As the 2023 Summit was his final global gathering, delegates had a time of prayer for Boschman. Bob Davis will serve as the USMB representative to ICOMB.

Delegates elected Paul Dück, Brazil, as chair; Andreas Isaak, Germany, as vice chair; Bob Davis as treasurer; and Vic Wiens, Canada, as secretary. Marques Mente, Portugal, and DaSilva were elected as members at large. When DaSilva assumes the role of global director, his position on the Executive Committee will be filled by a representative of another conference, preferably from Africa or Asia.—*ICOMB/CL*



Paul Dück prays for retiring USMB representative Ed Boschman.

BFL, Leadership Council and Board hold spring meetings

The USMB Board of Faith and Life, Leadership Council and Leadership Board met April 19-22 in San Diego, Calif.

In addition to discussions regarding ongoing and new agenda, the Board of Faith and Life selected Dave Loewen, Hillsboro, Kan., as the new BFL chair and Connie Nicholson, Fresno, Calif., as vice-chair.

The board continued discussing the Resource for Churches Dealing with Sexual Misconduct document and identified areas that will be revised and updated. Churches will receive the updated document after the U.S. BFL and district BFLs have viewed the final draft.

The board resumed discussions regarding current drafts of documents related to homosexuality and transgender/same sex attraction and discussed credentialing undocumented individuals for ministry.

The Leadership Council agenda was dominated by updates and reports. The search for the next national director was also a topic of discussion and was the sole agenda item when the Leadership Board met April 22. The search is prompted by the decision of current national director Don Morris to retire in the summer of 2024.

The Nominating Committee, comprised of the district ministers and national director, will be securing candidates for two vacancies on the Leadership Board in preparation for the search for a new national director.

The Leadership Council includes elected Leadership Board members plus the five district ministers, Multiply general director, MB Foundation president/CEO, PDC Hispanic Council representative, NextGen chair and the USMB national director.—*USMB*

FPU celebrates commencement

Fresno Pacific University 2023 graduates were advised to “read between the lines” of their diploma.

“My hope for you, and my faith in you, is that you will accomplish your dreams,” said Lynne Ashbeck, FPU graduate and mayor of Clovis, “and in those times when you may not, that you will rely on your faith to help you see new dreams emerge and new doors open, using all of the gifts of FPU, both those on your diploma and those that are found between the lines.”

Ashbeck noted several enduring gifts of FPU, including humility, the need to act out one’s faith, a commitment to the common good and the lesson of peace.

Of the 732 students slated to participate in the May 6 ceremony, 329 were from bachelor’s degree completion programs, 251 were graduate students, 126 were from traditional undergraduate programs and 26 were from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary. Traditional and seminary graduates attended class on the main campus. Degree completion and graduate students attended regional campuses in North Fresno, Visalia, Bakersfield and Merced.—FPU

Tabor holds 113th commencement

The Tabor College class of 2023 gathered for the institution’s 113th Commencement, May 6, in Hillsboro, Kan., where 77 on-campus and online undergraduates and 29 students from graduate and online programs were honored in a joint ceremony.

Nineteen students earned the highest Summa Cum Laude honors, while seven earned the Magna Cum Laude distinction.

Professor Emerita Aleen Ratzlaff gave the commencement address, “Embracing the Vitamin Cs of Life.” Ratzlaff shared three “C words” for students to reflect on as they graduate: connection, communication and change to the heart.—TC

Sullivan to retire as district minister in 2024



The Southern District Conference (SDC) Executive Committee announced in a May 8 email Tim Sullivan’s intent to retire from his role as SDC minister, effective Jan. 15, 2024. Sullivan has served as SDC minister since July 2004 and at the time of his retirement will have completed 19 years of service.

“The Lord has impacted Tim and worked through him greatly in the Southern District Conference,” says Brad Burkholder, SDC executive committee chair. “Tim’s love for Jesus and the expansion of his kingdom is his priority. In recent years, Tim’s open arms to the immigrant churches in our district is an encouragement and an example of a servant’s heart to meet the growing ministry needs and opportunities in our communities.”

Sullivan says, “I am grateful to God, to district leadership and to the pastors and churches of our district for the blessing of serving in this role. I am thankful that my predecessor, Rev. Roland Reimer, paved the way for whatever success and accomplishment I’ve enjoyed over these years.”

In addition to his SDC role, Sullivan has served since 2016 as chair of the U.S. Board of Faith and Life.—SDC



Stephens inaugurated at FPU

“I am called to the promise and renewal of this university,” said André Stephens during his inauguration March 31 as the 14th president of Fresno Pacific University. The investiture pronouncement and prayer were led by Joshua Wilson, FPU Board of Trustees chair, and Jordan Ringhofer, FPU trustee and Pacific District Conference minister. Following the inauguration, the FPU community and invited guests celebrated with a picnic on the Campus Green, and President Stephens threw out the first pitch at FPU’s home baseball game that afternoon.—FPU

NPO draws 17 pastors

Seventeen USMB pastors and nine spouses attended the 2023 New Pastors' Orientation April 17-19, in San Diego, Calif. The USMB Board of Faith and Life hosted the gathering, attended by 49 people, including BFL members and resource speakers.

Presenters included USMB national director Don Morris, district ministers and BFL members who covered the USMB leadership structure, Confession of Faith MB distinctives and engaging current issues. Wendell Loewen, Tabor College, gave a brief Anabaptist and Mennonite Brethren history lesson, and Tim Geddert, Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, spoke about MB theology and how Mennonite Brethren read the Bible. Kyle Goings, USMB NextGen chair, discussed generational differences.

Participants heard briefly from Bruce Enns, Multiply general director, Tabor College president David Janzen and Fresno Pacific University president André Stephens.

Morning devotions were given by Multiply's Enns, USMB staff member J.L. Martin and BFL member Connie Nicholson. Micah Bentley, worship pastor at Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., led worship.—USMB

MB Foundation releases report

MB Foundation reports exceeded expectations in its 2022 Annual Report released April 21.

Highlights include a record-breaking \$14 million designated by clients to ministries and charities; more than \$300,000 in relief aid facilitated by MB Foundation to Mennonite Brethren churches in Ukraine; growth of the Loan Portfolio by 27 percent to a total of \$130 million; a gift of \$180,000 from MB Foundation to USMB, along with more than \$67,000 in grants and scholarships within the MB family; and beginning construction on MB Foundation's building expansion in Hillsboro.

"In a challenging year of high inflation, a volatile market and concerns of global conflict, we saw God at work, exceeding our expectations in a number of ways," says Jon C. Wiebe, MB Foundation president and CEO.—MBF

Survey for MB women

Mennonite Brethren women are invited to participate in a study, "Women's Clothing in Mennonite Brethren Faith," conducted by Denisse Aguilar, a Goshen College student working on her senior thesis. She has received funding from the MB Historical Commission for this study.

Aguilar says she is interested in learning about the attitudes and beliefs of MB women regarding dress and will conduct the study via a survey. Questions will consist of modesty and religious interpretations on how a woman should dress.

For more information, or to take the survey, visit www.usmb.org/womens-clothing-in-mennonite-brethren-faith/.—USMB.

5 minutes with...

DAWN KLEINSASSER

By the time this issue of Christian Leader is in the mail, Dawn Kleinsasser will have completed her 10th weeklong bicycle trek around the state of South Dakota. Her first ride took her from west to east across the state, from Mount Rushmore to Sioux Falls. This year's route for the annual Ride Across South Dakota (RASDaK) winds in a loop through the Black Hills. Dawn and her husband, Brent, farm in Huron, S.D., and are members and Celebrate Recovery leaders at Bethesda Church. She finished her early morning CrossFit workout and took a moment to talk about her annual 500-mile adventure.



What prompted you to try this challenging sport?

When our last kid went to college, I needed to do something besides my work on our farm. I tried a couple of one-day bike rides and then found the "Faces to the Falls" ride on the internet. I wasn't an athlete in high school. My husband jokes that I waited till I was 50 to become an athlete.

How did your first attempt go?

It was the most challenging thing I have ever done. South Dakota's wind and the hills can make for very grueling days. I went all by myself the first year, but I met great people and have made some really close friends. My biking friends and I stay in touch throughout the year and we have gone on other biking and hiking trips together with our husbands. These amazing people are the real reason I continue to go back every year.

What do you do to prepare?

I don't ride my bike very much to train. In South Dakota it often doesn't get warm enough until May. I go to the gym four morn-

ings a week and strengthen my legs with weight training and lots of squats and lunges rather than sitting on a bike. This year I started CrossFit, which seems to help me on the bike.

How competitive is the event?

This is a ride, not a race, with nearly 250 riders. Even though it's not a race, there are challenges. Biking is 40 percent ability and 60 percent mental. When you are out on the open road and the wind is blowing you think it's never going to let up. You have to just settle in - not think about the 80 miles you're going today, but just making it to the next stop.

What do bikers do that the church could learn from?

Biking people are good at working together. On windy days we stick together and draft off each other. We work together to pull each other through the hard times. At the end of the day we laugh together. After I spend a week with them I feel so encouraged. It's the cheapest therapy you can get.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi

In March 2023, the International Community of Mennonite Brethren called the global community to support and pray for those affected by Cyclone Freddy. This exceptionally long-lived, powerful and deadly storm travelled the southern Indian Ocean for more than five weeks in February and March, killing at least 1,434 people, with 1,200 deaths recorded in Malawi.

Shadreck Kwendanyama, chair of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi (MB Malawi) says people were left without daily essentials—food and clothing as well as houses, crops and animals. Infrastructure such as roads and bridges was destroyed by the devastating floods.

In an email to the CL, Kwendanyama reports that 3.74 million people will be affected by hunger in the coming year due to Cyclone Freddy. "Everything was washed away, and there is also an inadequate harvest in most parts of the country," he says. "In the north, there were dry spells due to climate change. The whole church in Malawi is affected."

Kwendanyama thanks God for disaster relief aid from the government and others. "But it is not enough," he says. "Our sister churches were completely affected, and as a country it has affected us directly and indirectly, especially economically. It has affected children's education as well as family businesses. People will need short- and long-term intervention to survive. This is our daily prayer."

MB Malawi, which currently numbers 69 churches and 19,945 mem-



Children's Sunday School choir at Dzaleka Refugee Camp. Photo by MB Malawi

bers, was born in 2009 when Safari Bahati Mutabesha from DR Congo began a church in Dzaleka Refugee Camp. Today, MB Malawi has grown beyond the refugee camp to 10 additional districts in Malawi.

MB Malawi seeks to plant holistic churches through door-to-door evangelism, open air meetings, Bible study groups, discipleship training and sending missionaries locally and internationally, currently to DR Congo and Mozambique. MB Malawi prays for people to be transformed into Christ-followers through the power of the Holy Spirit, growing as a community of grace, joy and peace for healing and hope to the world.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Pray for the grace to **plant vibrant churches** and for more open doors, especially to unreached groups in Islam-dominated areas.
- Pray for **equipment**. Their van was involved in a fatal accident, and ministry without a vehicle is very hard. The conference lacks a public address system which is needed in evangelism efforts to plant more churches.
- MB Malawi has grown very fast because of mission leadership training. Leaders want to **build a guest house** to accommodate short term students who currently sometimes sleep on a bare church floor for the one- to two-week training sessions.

Did You Know?

- The economy is fueled by agriculture, with tobacco and tea as the top exports.

- Lake Malawi accounts for 1/5 of the country's total area and has the largest number of fish species of any lake in the world.

- Malawi is one of the 50-plus countries to never win an Olympic medal.



Good trouble

Faithfulness to God does not guarantee deliverance

An old story tells of a man who is hiking. As he nears a cliff, he stumbles, falling over the edge. Fortunately, he grabs onto a tree branch, but it leaves him dangling hundreds of feet from the ground.

"Is anyone up there?" he shouts.

At first, he hears nothing. But eventually a voice comes from above. So, he shouts, "Can you help me?"

"Yes," comes the voice. "This is Jesus. I can help you!"

"Great!" the man replies. "What do you want me to do?"

Jesus answers, "Just let go of the branch, and I'll catch you."

There is a pause, and then the man shouts, "Is anyone else up there?"

Sometimes it seems that God is part of the problem, as if we don't have enough problems already! Just when we hope that God can get us out of some mess we're in, God either is silent or asks us to do something that seems like it will just make things worse, perhaps fatally worse.

Jesus answers, "Just let go of the branch, and I'll catch you." There is a pause, and then the man shouts, "Is anyone else up there?"

”

In the Bible we find various accounts of

people in trouble. Some get into trouble because they disobey God. In the Psalms we hear people who are suffering despite being innocent calling out to God for help (e.g., Ps. 26). Jesus cites three situations in which bad things happen that apparently have no connection to someone's actions, right or wrong (Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-7). More surprising, perhaps, is how many people get themselves into trouble *because* they are being faithful to God.

Daniel's three friends and the furnace

Some of the more interesting stories of the Bible are of this type. The prophet Daniel has three friends: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, better known as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Along with Daniel, they are deported to Babylon (modern Iraq) after their nation is destroyed in the early sixth century BCE. In Babylon, they find things to be thankful for but also many challenges.

We easily recognize the context—a powerful, God-rejecting empire asks allegiance, including worship, of its subjects. We know from Daniel 1 that sometimes these young men find acceptable ways to compromise with the king. But in Daniel 3, they directly face Nebuchadnezzar and tell him, "No."

The king's fiery furnace now becomes the focus of attention. It is terrible, but it can be made seven times more terrible. With such a threat, Nebuchadnezzar thinks he can motivate universal allegiance to himself and his regime. And the furnace can be so easily avoided! Simply bow to the ground—no one will know what you are really thinking while you do this. Just cooperate and go on with your day. But to comply is to give an earthly monarch too much esteem.

Followers of Jesus say "no"

Christians have a legacy of saying "no" to governing authorities who demand allegiance that involves disobedience to Jesus. Many Christians suffered and died—some by being burned—rather than be unfaithful to the God who loves and calls them.

And yet, our history is also complicated. Just what does it look like to love God above all else while also respecting our neighbors? We find many things to be thankful for in our country. But when it comes to governing authorities, Jesus says that he *is* Lord. When should we say "yes" and at what points should we say "no" to our own nation?

Is following Jesus consistent with attending patriotic events? Pledging allegiance to the flag of our country? Singing our national anthem? Holding political office? Serving in the armed forces?

For many centuries and into the present day, Christians have come to different conclusions on how to be salt and light for our world, to be peacemakers like Jesus and to love our enemies as he commanded (Matt. 5:9, 13-16, 43-48). Yet we can expect that those with whom we disagree on such matters have something we need to hear.

We should also note the other followers of Abraham's God in the court of a foreign king: Joseph and Moses in Egypt, Queen Esther and Nehemiah in Persia and Daniel himself in Babylon. Ecclesiastes gives counsel on how to relate to a ruler (Eccl. 8:1-9). Jesus, in the governor's presence, famously distinguishes his kingdom from that of Pilate (John 18). We learn that followers of Jesus are among the household of Caesar (Phil. 4:22).

Paul speaks before rulers and calls us to submission but not obedience to those in authority (Rom. 13:1-7). Peter insists, "We must obey God rather than human beings!" (Acts 5:29). Christians are citizens of God's kingdom, with its own culture, values, priorities, loyalty and enemies (Eph. 2:19-22).

These texts and these believers can be models for us of what it means to love God while we respect the country in which we find ourselves. Likewise, Christians in various contexts around the world may have insight about living in this tension.

Allegiance to God

The young men in Daniel 3, when facing the king, state three important things. First, "Our God is able to deliver us from you and from this furnace" (3:17). They know who their God is: Creator of the universe!

Second, "We don't know if God will deliver us" (3:18). These men believe that you can't manipulate God or pre-

dict what God will do. Notice some examples from the New Testament: Peter is miraculously delivered from prison (Acts 12). But James is brutally killed and likewise Stephen, while forgiving his murderers (Acts 12 and 7). Paul is attacked so harshly that people think he is dead, yet he survives (Acts 14:19). Others are sawed in two (Heb. 11:37). Jesus is crucified and rises from the dead! So, God is able to deliver, but death may come first.

Finally, the friends say, "We are not going to bow down to your big fat statue" (3:18 paraphrased). They would rather die than give their primary allegiance to anything or anyone other than their God. They put their lives into God's hands and are committed to being part of God's bigger plans *even* if these plans aren't especially clear. Do you and I know God well enough that we are ready to obey when the outcome is not certain?

With us in the darkness

The life of faith in God is a journey. Sometimes we walk in the light, and sometimes we walk at night. During the day, all seems clear, everything makes a lot of sense. We hear God's call; we choose to obey. But eventually the darkness comes, things are not so clear, things no longer make so much sense.

Jesus models faith for us in a time of despair when he uses the words of Psalm 22:1 on the cross: "My God! Why have you abandoned me?" Such laments are a resource for us in a dark time of suffering before the resurrection of God's people.

Darkness—before a raging, fiery furnace—comes for Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in the form of a king who demands what they cannot do: bow down to a pagan image. Yet after casting the three into his furnace, the king notices a fourth person walking around in there. Let us have confidence that God is with us in such seasons!

The furnace for us may involve betrayal, legal troubles, being victims of violence or family tragedies. As with Daniel and his friends, it might also involve the government of the nation in which we live.

Our darkness may be more subtle. It could include the temptation to take shortcuts, to hold onto grudges or to not stand up against wrongs when we see them. It may come in the form of health or financial struggles or an arrogant superior. Sometimes we are tempted to react to our fear and insecurity by striking out against others. We may even consider abandoning God's call.

We serve a God greater even than those who hold grotesque power in this world. We serve a God who calls us to participate in Jesus' plans with our gifts and experience, a God who sees clearly during our dark times though we do not. What others mean for ill, God can work for good (Gen. 50:20). God also gives us fellow believers, just as the friends of Daniel had each other. And as with these three, God is with us in the furnace. When the night comes, we can trust, in the darkness, what God has shown us in the light.

Douglas B. Miller is professor emeritus of biblical and religious studies at Tabor College.

The Lord's
message is
ringing out!

Are we listening?

The global church can teach us much
about faithful discipleship

By Vic Wiens

1900, Christianity was mostly Western: 80 percent were either European or Anglo American, and almost all missionaries were sent from the West to Africa, Asia and Latin America. Today, some 70 percent of Christians are African, Asian and Latin American, and nearly half of cross-cultural missionaries are sent from the non-Western world.

This is even more pronounced in our global MB family, the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB). Of over 500,000 global members, some 81,000, or 16 percent, are in North America and Europe!

To be sure, quantity is no indicator of faithfulness, and not all growth is healthy growth. Having visited and served most of our 22 global MB conferences and many emerging conferences, I have not a few stories of unhealthy church life. However, the stories of inspiring faithfulness and healthy fruitfulness are many more.

Paul commends the Thessalonian church for their faith, hope and love. He declares them to be a model for churches in other regions. They were making a joyful noise, and so he affirms, "The Lord's message rang out from you ..." (1:8). Today, the Lord's message of faithful discipleship is ringing out from global churches. Are we listening?

How would our collective discipleship deepen if in addition to pursuing "lifelong learning" we would also pursue "world-wide learning"?

We often do well to seek after church models of faithfulness for our context and our generation. Indeed, in his amazing grace and generosity, God points us to not one but at least three sources. One, biblical churches, as seen in Acts, the church-directed letters (Romans) and the seven churches of Revelation (my favorite models are Jerusalem, Thessalonica and Philadelphia).

Two, historic churches and movements as seen throughout 2000 years of insightful church history. As a 19th century renewal movement, Mennonite Brethren found helpful models in previous renewal movements, such as the 12th century Waldensians, 16th century Anabaptists and 18th century Moravians. We continue to learn from Western renewal movements, and this is good.

There is a third source of models for faithfulness and fruitfulness—global churches! In fact, this has always been the case, because the Church has been global throughout Christian history. However, our generation is different.

The global witness

In our age of information, travel, migration movements and Majority World church growth, this model is more visible than ever before. In

faithful

Faithful in reverent worship and prayer. I recently returned from Thailand where I was so encouraged by how young leaders are stepping up to lead and stepping out to both expand and consolidate new churches. I was also challenged by their displays of reverent worship. Whether worshipping with middle class businesspeople or in a poor storefront church, everyone removes their shoes and sandals! Where God's people gather to worship and pray is holy ground.

In Brazil, Renewed MB Church has rented a large space on the rural periphery of São Paulo, built lodging, a chapel and a food court. They call it "Prayer Mountain" (popularly called *Monte Menonita*), and hundreds come to pray every Friday night from all over the megacity.

faithful

Faithful in balancing celebration and suffering. We've all heard of the tremendous growth of the church in China. The gospel has survived and in fact thrived in China. Chinese churches are sending missionaries all over the world—reason to celebrate! Yet the celebration is tempered with a theology of suffering. Western missiologist Paul Borthwick tells of asking four young believers about the quality of their pastor's preaching. Their reply, "Oh yes! He is a very good preacher. He suffered in prison for many years for the gospel." There was a clear link between the quality of his message and the credibility gained through suffering.

faithful

Faithful in joyful giving. When I'm with my African friends I humor them, "Better get ready, because I'm pretty sure you'll be leading the offering time in heaven!" In places like DR Congo and Angola, the offering seems to be the highlight of the service. Ushers prompt all participants, row by row or section by section, to go forward and deposit their gifts. The music is loud and joyful; the givers are dancing and smiling. There are large buckets and instructions are given as to the designation of each bucket (general offering, construction, pastor's salary, mission work, etc.) There is no hurry, and often the offering will take 20-30 minutes.

faithful

Faithful creativity in poverty. While most churches in the Majority World would be eager to have a dedicated church building, the reality is that most do not. Yet what they lack in political freedoms or material resources they make up with Spirit-inspired creativity for the sake of living as a faithful church. Global church facilities I've been in include a cave in Egypt, large shade tree in Malawi, tents on basketball courts in the Philippines, linen sheets on rooftops in India ... storefronts, schools, and homes. The question put to Moses, "What is in your hand?" finds creative answers in global churches.

faithful

Faithful investment in the next generation. Some of our finest MB leaders have come out of Paraguay (including two of three ICOMB executive directors). One may not expect such high-profile leaders from a lower profile country. The difference? Paraguayan Mennonites in general, and Mennonite Brethren in particular, have invested heavily in Christian schools at all lev-

els. This impacts not only Germanic Mennonite families but multiple people groups and social classes. They understand Christian education to be an expression of their missional calling and are faithfully growing where they have been planted.

faithful

Faithful in hungering after the Word. I was recently in the Philippines with my good friend Bob Davis, ICOMB U.S. advocate. He encouraged our Filipino partners with photos of church workers in a restricted SE Asia country who were crammed into a hotel room receiving instruction from veteran leader PK. Some were on the floor, at least seven were on the bed, and a few got chairs. Bob tells me this happens all the time. Such is their hunger for the Word and for solid instruction. For them, reading the Bible is not an academic exercise but a daily bread in similar contexts to which the Bible was originally written—uncertainty, violence, oppression, poverty, exile, etc.

faithful

Faithful in sacrificial mission. While serving with Multiply, I got to know many workers from sister conferences serving side-by-side with North Americans. We call them International Partner Missionaries. Some of them serve as tentmakers (bivocational) when their sending conference is unable to supply them with full support or when their field of service disallows religious worker visas. They are part of a global pattern, like the apostle Paul's team in Corinth or the Moravians of old.

Many Africans, Filipinos, Koreans and Chinese are crossing the globe as tentmaker missionaries, working hard in their day jobs and laboring sacrificially in their spare time for the gospel. Others offer the ultimate sacrifice, like the saints of old, "the world was not worthy of them" (Hebrews 11:38).

"Never before has Christianity been geographically, culturally and linguistically so diverse. The Church has gone global," says missionary and author Patrick Johnstone. This global Church points us to our shared future of a diverse yet united people gathered around the throne, looking to our one Savior and celebrating both our unity and our diversity. If we will spend eternity as friends and neighbors, appreciating each other and learning from one another, should we not start now?

Vic Wiens volunteers as equipping coordinator for ICOMB. He recently retired from 40 years of service with Multiply, including 25 in Brazil with his wife, Marty. They now live in Abbotsford, B.C.

Further reading:

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Broken and beautiful

I can testify to God's presence and a deeper understanding of the fruits of grief and pain

Like so many, my wife and I have experienced faith-testing trials. Esther deals with two chronic pain disabilities—a work-related neck and back injury from 2006 and chronic concussion migraines from a 2019 auto accident. She has had her neck fused at C5-7, has a neurostimulator implanted for back pain and has a nerve ablation surgery about every six months to manage the migraines.

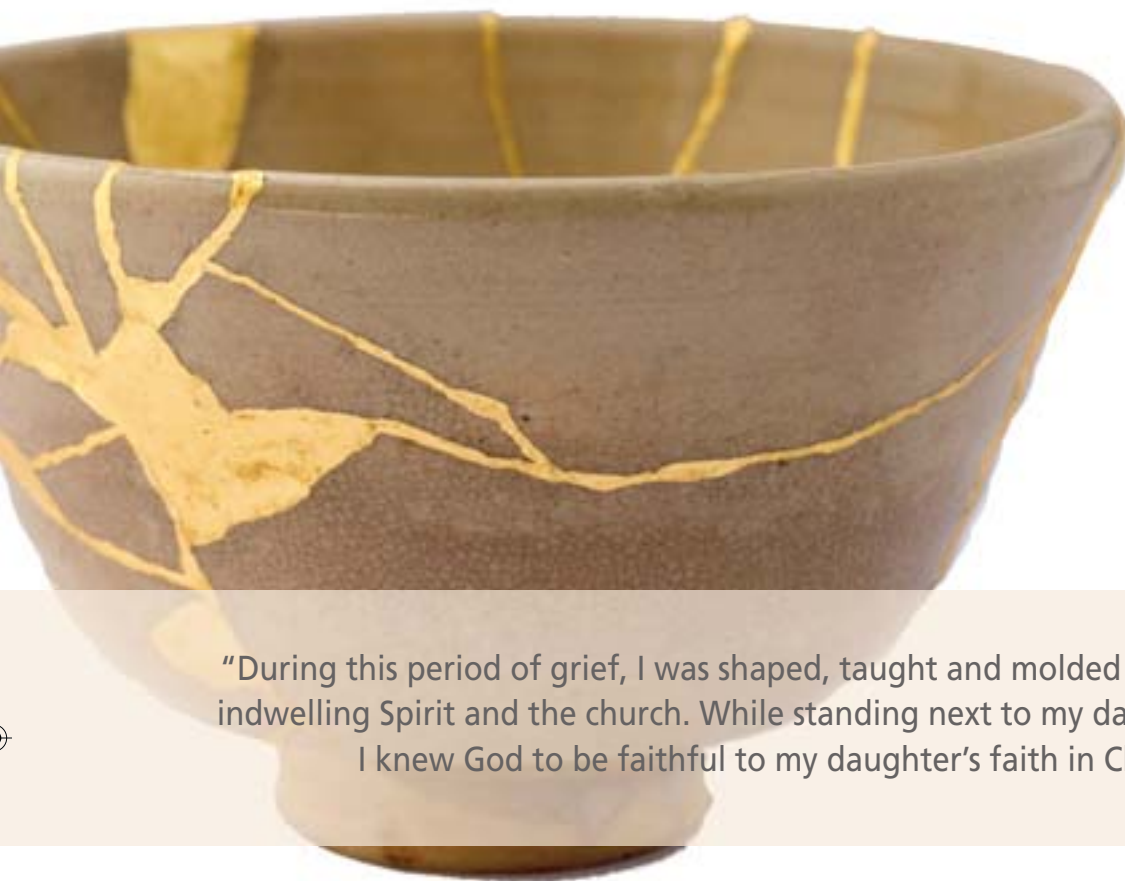
We have also experienced emotional pain. In August 2018, our son-in-law Dan died from a heart attack. Our now widowed daughter, Tanya, passed away only months later in November when her car went off the road in a blizzard. Thinking she could walk the mile or so home, she left the disabled car, became disoriented and died of exposure.

For three days, civil air patrol, search dogs, snow machines, ATVs and close to 100 volunteers searched for Tanya. On the third day, the sheriff pulled me aside and asked me to come with him to identify her body. Afterward, the TV crews were waiting for us. With microphones shoved toward me, reporters asked, "How are you feeling?"

I think I said something like, "We are devastated by her death," and I thanked the many people who had searched and prayed for us.

That's what came out of my mouth, which was totally different from what was in my mind: Where were you, God? Why would you let this happen? Were my prayers lacking or were you unwilling? You've answered the prayers of others; why not ours?

Now almost five years later, we can testify to God's presence and a deepening understanding of the fruits of grief and pain. I can also confess to a "theological amnesia" during this journey of reorienting to the reality of living in a fallen but redeemable world.



By Rick Eshbaugh

■ God promises to never leave us nor forsake us. These words are repeated throughout Scripture as a promise to God's faithfulness, grace and mercy. David's opening statement in Psalm 23 proclaims, "The Lord is *my shepherd*." This implies not only that God is willing to claim us as his sheep but also that we must choose God as our shepherd. I learn from David's life that when tough times come, whether that is being chased by Saul or chastened by Nathan,

"During this period of grief, I was shaped, taught and molded by God's Word, indwelling Spirit and the church. While standing next to my daughter's casket, I knew God to be faithful to my daughter's faith in Christ."

Faithfulness in brokenness

In James we are told, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-3, ESV).

When I read this passage too fast, I tend to hear, "When your faith is being tested by trials of various kinds be *joyful*." But that is not what this passage teaches. Trials are not joy-filled moments. Joy is the *outcome* of a tested faith, producing steadfastness to a faithful God even when we don't understand. To hold tight, tenaciously, knowing God holds us tighter. We experience joy knowing that despite trials there will be fruit for the kingdom.

So, what does faithfulness in times of grief look like? It looks like *kintsugi*, a Japanese art form where broken pieces of heritage pottery are put back together with a glue of lacquer and gold dust. The seams are highlighted, not hidden. The result acknowledges the broken places and reminds us of the valuable process used by the Artist to bring us back together.

How is this possible?

we must choose to either run to God or run from him. I found in my grieving the choice was not a one-time decision, but one

I would have to make continually.

The rod and the staff remind me of Jesus telling us there will be trials in this world or, as Jeremiah calls them, times of heat and years of drought. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear *when heat comes*, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious *in the year of drought*, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jer. 17:7-8, ESV).

■ In this fallen world, heat and drought are going to be part of our journey and during these times we are invited into a deeper walk of faith and understanding. If we are still breathing, God is still shaping and teaching us. Grief becomes a tough, teachable discipleship moment. Think of it this way—before the event we have a perception of how we think things should be, i.e., as a Christian I will be shielded from pain. We *orient* our lives around this perception. During the pain event we become *disoriented* because the pieces of our lives have come undone. How we put them back together will become our *reoriented* perception that guides our relationship with God.

So, how do we make sure we have a godly reorientation?

■ When it comes to this process of reorienting, our theology matters. This is where “theological amnesia” can cripple our healing. It occurs when we forget who God is and who we are to him. Paul Tripp, in his book *Redeeming Money*, says that we must anchor our four identities to be able to have a proper understanding of theology.

Creator: “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb. 11:3, ESV). Since God is our Creator, he knows us completely. In Psalm 139, David is amazed by how God knows his ways, thoughts and even the days ordained for him. As creatures, we do not need to know everything, but we do need to remember God, as Creator, is all powerful, all knowing and all loving, and we belong to him.

Sinner: When I worked at a natural gas plant, my task was refilling a container with a chemical called Mercaptan, also known as methanethiol. It is a sulfuric, foul-smelling chemical that is injected into the pipeline since natural gas comes out of the ground colorless and odorless. Without this chemical, you cannot detect a leak. A small drip goes a remarkably long way, as did sin when Adam and Eve disobeyed after being tempted by Satan. As a result of sin, humanity and creation are no longer “very good.” This world is not as God created. What once did not exist in mankind (sin) now has become the predominant descriptor of who we have collectively become.

Saint: The good news is God in his sovereignty chooses to be just and the justifier by sending Jesus Christ to redeem us. That which we cannot do, God

does for us. We are justified, proclaimed saints, and we are being sanctified by our Creator. During this period of grief, I was shaped, taught and molded by God’s Word, indwelling Spirit and the church. While standing next to my daughter’s casket, I knew God to be faithful to my daughter’s faith in Christ. I also remembered our call as his people to testify to the hope we have in Christ. I cannot imagine the terror of facing death without faith in God’s mercy and redeeming love.

Sufferer: Though we are redeemed, we are not removed. We remain so that we may be ambassadors, messengers of truth and people of hope. Having suffered, we share a common language with those entering into this season.

In the days, months and years that followed Tanya’s death, I needed these four theological realities to regain my own bearings before I could help others. I found the fruit of grief to be the knowledge that I was never alone, a greater urgency to participate in God’s redeeming work, a tenderness towards those who suffer and a deeper assurance of God’s faithfulness.

In summation, as a fallen creature, my God has redeemed me. As a sufferer being sanctified, I can testify to the hope and presence of God with us. Like the kintsugi pottery, I can choose to surrender the broken places, knowing the Artist’s hand is on me for, “You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand on me” (Psalm 139:5).

Rick Eshbaugh is director of financial discipleship with MB Foundation. He and his wife, Esther, live in Hillsboro, Kan.

— THROUGH IT ALL —

We know that life as a follower of Jesus isn’t free of problems. Life will not always go as planned or expected. How do we as faithful Christ followers respond to challenges and disappointments, to pain and loss? Go to christianleadermag.com to read these stories of faithfulness shared by U.S. Mennonite Brethren.

“Our Ukrainian Invasion” by Boris Borisov

Russia had invaded Ukraine and millions of refugees were on the move—some of them headed for Spokane, a city with a significant population of Russian and Ukrainian refugees who came in the 1990s. How would Pacific Keep and other churches help hundreds of refugees who were on their way to Spokane? Furthermore, as a pastor who left a Russian speaking congregation to plant a church to reach the 2nd generation in the American context, how would Boris Borisov stay faithful to that call? Pastor Borisov reflects on these questions in this essay on faithfulness in a time of crisis.

“Long-term Faithfulness” by Suzanne Hadley Gosselin

Ginger Skillen, Mark Wetterholm and Joanna Chapa are among those who live with long-term, chronic health issues. Ginger and Joanna have been diagnosed with long COVID while Mark still has no clear answers for his symptoms. They have been forced to make unexpected changes to their daily lives as they struggle to find answers for their health issues. They spoke with writer Suzanne Hadley Gosselin about God’s purpose and presence in suffering.

“Pointless” by Christine Eldridge

In this short story, a teenager talks with her mom about the point of life and death as the family prepares to attend the funeral of a young man. “Life is pointless,” Jenna tells her mom.

Fighting fear

God's presence
brings peace

Uncertainty gripped my heart as I wound my way up the snow-covered road. I had worked longer than planned so left later than I intended for the special weekend retreat with women from my church, Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore., at a Christian conference center at the base of the Cascades.

I was supposed to lead worship for each session, and I feared I might miss the first meeting, or, worse, have to turn around and try again in the morning if I couldn't find the first turnoff. I had planned to leave early enough to make the 45-minute drive in daylight but did not take into account how early the sun sets at the end of February.

Heading out, I entered the address into my phone's GPS, hoping it would navigate as far as possible before losing service. When daylight disappeared completely, I realized how foolish I was to venture out alone. The snowy conditions and darkness made it nearly impossible to see the edge of the road, much less any signs. I had not seen another car for miles, and my phone now showed "No Service." I figured I was on my own to find my next turn.

I have dealt with fear all my life, with fear of the dark being one of my biggest fears since childhood. My vivid imagination only makes things worse.

I reminded myself that God saw me, knew exactly where I was and where I needed to be. "Please God, make it really clear where to turn so I don't miss it," I prayed.

Moments later I heard the map voice: "In 800 feet turn right." Peering through the darkness, my headlights caught the half snow-covered sign for the road I was to turn on which I would have missed if "the voice" had not alerted me. "Thank you, Lord!" I spoke into the darkness, grateful that God used the voice to direct me even though a quick glance at my phone showed "No Service."

The second snow-covered road was narrower than the first. Again, I felt lost. Numerous roads branched off into the cold, dark woods of Silver Falls State Park. What if I took a wrong turn and got stranded in the snow with no one knowing where I was? I had packed warm clothes and boots and had two cozy blankets, but the thought of spending the night alone in the dark snowy woods sent a chill down my spine.

"Please, Lord, I need you to make it really clear again where to turn so I don't miss it."

Going further I heard, "In 600 feet turn left." Rounding the bend, my headlights flashed over the sign leading to Christian Renewal Center. Upon turning, I looked at my phone. No service.

Turning off my car in the parking lot behind the lodge, I let go of the steering wheel and

breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Jesus!" I said out loud.

Looking back over my life, I see how I've let fear steal my peace and influence my actions. Something that has helped me move beyond my fears and do things that I never would have done in the past is to remind myself that the Lord is my good Shepherd. While driving, whenever I started to feel fearful, I would say out loud, "I will fear no evil because you are with me," (Ps. 23:4).

As I entered the warmth and safety of the lodge with 15 minutes to spare, I felt the tension finally leaving my body. And to my delight, I discovered the building's name: "Good Shepherd Lodge."



Pam Fahndrich

attends Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore., where she serves as a worship leader. She and her husband, Tim, have two adult children and own a digital media company. Pam enjoys connecting with people and building authentic relationships.

The dandelion is a dandy

What Christians can learn from a tenacious plant

Between the Aspen seed cotton and the dandelion parachute seed fuzz, it was the cotton-fuzziest spring in many years. The Aspen cotton covered the ground in places like snow. As I cut hay, a cloud of dandelion fuzz followed me down the field, plugging the tractor radiator and air cleaner, tickling my nose.

Following "the cloud" gave me plenty of time to wonder why we have to put up with dandelions. Why would the Creator waste his time designing a seed that propagates itself so easily on a plant that nobody wants? If we want a good crop of alfalfa, we must work the soil, buy genetically designed (and expensive) seed, plant and fertilize and then hope the bugs and severe winter weather don't kill it. And the dandelions? Well, they just appear, and it seems nothing can destroy them.

However, the dandelion, beside its unique seed design, has other attributes that are often overlooked. As a salad green, dandelion leaves contain nine times more vitamin C than lettuce, three times more anemia-preventing iron than spinach and 42 times more vitamin A than iceberg lettuce.

At one time, the United States imported up to 50 tons of dande-

lion root a year that was used in a tonic for the liver. Dandelion roots also contain a liquid latex. Researchers have experimented with a Russian variety to produce rubber. Perhaps more importantly, the dandelion flowers are easily picked by children as a gift for mothers and grandmothers, and grandpas can show grandkids how to make a chain out of the dandelions' hollow stems.

While I don't plan to quit raising alfalfa in favor of dandelions quite yet, there must be a good purpose for the dandelion. The Bible tells us in I Cor. 1:27-29, "But God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

While society contains some "alfalfa" types, people highly gifted and well-cultivated, most of us are more like the dandelions—just ordinary people. And like the dandelion, God designs all of us with unique characteristics of great value. While great deeds are noteworthy, life benefits the most from every day, God-designed seeds of kindness—a smile, word of affirmation, a helping hand. The common, ordinary gifts people give that, like dandelion seeds, are freely born on the breeze of life, filling the world, reproducing generation after generation.

The dandelion doesn't seem to care that it's not a rose or an orchid. It is eager to show its yellow flower, the beauty God designed for it to display for all the world to see. We should also be eager to share what God has

given us. In the field where alfalfa is the favored crop, the dandelion is there to fill in when the alfalfa begins to fail and thin out. Can we be willing to fill in when we are needed?

Gardeners and lawn keepers will hoe, chop, dig and spray, only to find the dandelion back again. We can copy the dandelion's tenacity to spring back when someone tries to destroy us. Gen. 1:31: "And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

While great deeds are noteworthy, life benefits the most from every day, God-designed seeds of kindness.



John Kauffman writes as the Five Oak Farmer. He is a lay leader at Exeland Mennonite Church, Exeland, Wis.

Calling for 24 hours of prayer July 7-8

National director asking USMB to pray for new fervor

Dear USMB family,

Fervent prayer is essential. If any movement is going to happen, if any fruit, if any impact, it will be undergirded with prayer. I find it reassuring in a way that God often waits on us to come to him in concerted, intense prayer before he responds.

uted the movement of The Navigators to this kind of intense prayer. It was this book that began God's call on my life for full-time ministry.

We have recently witnessed the prayer movement at Asbury University where students and then others coming from across the country met for a spontaneous,

terns to break out more time for prayer? Could it be we're afraid that even if we commit more time to speak with God that whatever we're hoping for won't pan out? I think there's probably some truth in all of those.

This letter is a call to prayer for us as a USMB family. Might we collectively intensify our prayer, both in time and in expectancy, asking God to bring new life and fervor to our churches, our mission, our ministries and our leaders?

I am typing this letter through tears. Immediately after writing the previous paragraph, the hairs on my arms and neck stood on end and I began to weep, and I couldn't stop weeping for some time. God is calling us to pray—and to pray much.

I'm not completely sure what God wants us to pray for—except that we pray collectively that he might use this USMB family of churches in ways we haven't dreamed. To be open to a movement that he directs. To keep praying and keep seeking him. To pray for unity. To pray for the lost and to preach the gospel, keeping to the truth of Scripture and seeking Jesus as our center.

I'm calling our USMB family to a 24-hour time of prayer and fasting on 7/7/23. Perhaps begin July 7 at 6 p.m. and end July 8 at 6 p.m., or something close to that. God, we're asking for you to move among us!

*Don Morris,
USMB national director*

**Might we collectively intensify our prayer,
both in time and in expectancy, asking God to
bring new life and fervor to our churches, our
mission, our ministries and our leaders?**

God could certainly bring movement to ministries without our prayers. But I believe he wants us engaged with him, acknowledging him as the source. Jesus himself told us, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; *apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5, emphasis added).

In my early 20s I read *Daws*, a book about the life and ministry of Dawson Trotman, the founder of Navigators, an interdenominational Christian discipleship ministry. Known as "Daws" by those close to him, Trotman would spend hours in prayer. He attrib-

round-the-clock prayer service that lasted more than two weeks. It was national news. What is the outcome of that event? I'm not sure we'll know for some time the full extent of what God will do.

Many have said several people came to know Jesus during those 17 or so days, so there is certainly eternal fruit.

Several people have commented to me recently that there has never been a great movement of God that wasn't first preceded by a season of intense prayer. If that's true, why don't we pray like that, expectant of what God might do? Could it be we're just too lazy or busy? Too engulfed in our current life pat-

Cultivating connections

Community gardens produce more than vegetables

Gardens are places to plant seeds and watch them grow—not always as one might expect. For two California MB churches, community gardens provide an opportunity to grow produce and plants as well as relationships.

Hope Kingsburg, located in Kingsburg, and Neighborhood Church in Fresno transformed unused properties into community gardens for neighbors to plant produce and landscaping and connect. While each garden is set up differently, both churches share a similar mission to use their soil to plant seeds not only in the ground, but also in the hearts of their neighbors.

Garden plots for rent

Hope Kingsburg designed its community garden to be primarily self-sufficient, relying on the gardeners to care for the 24 plots available for rent, while the church maintains the property upkeep and utilities.

Hope Kingsburg broke ground on its garden project in 2017 after a city worker contacted Jordan Ringhofer, pastor at the time before accepting his current role as Pacific District Minister, with ways the church could fund a project turning an unused property across the street into a community garden. Ringhofer says he was excited for an opportunity to connect with the agricultural community.

"It's a bridge to relationships, and relationships are essential for us to effectively reach our communities," Ringhofer says. "The goal was to see how we could continue to open that bridge between community and the church by giving the garden a chance and remembering that it's



Riley Paull, left, and Rebekah Lehrman from Hope Kingsburg take a break from weeding to move lady bugs to the roses where they are needed to control pests.

better to try something than to not do anything and if it doesn't work, then you move on to the next thing."

Of course, no garden is without toil. Brenda Deason, former chair and current member of Hope Kingsburg's outreach team, says the garden has been an undertaking, from the paperwork to the groundwork, but has also provided a place for the

church to show love for its neighbors since none of the gardeners attend Hope Kingsburg.

Kathy Heinrichs Wiest, a member of Hope Kingsburg who oversees the garden, says most plots stay full, though the greater growth has been the cultivated relationships.

"Our garden is set up to serve as a place to connect with our neigh-

bors," Wiest says. "Not everyone is going to show up to the church door Sunday morning, but those who like to garden are going to spend a lot of time there. It's a great place we can connect with those we might not normally see, build relationships with them and tell them about Jesus."

"It's a bridge to relationships, and relationships are essential for us to effectively reach our communities"

Front yard friendships

About 20 miles northwest in Fresno, Neighborhood Church meets in two homes, including the home of pastor Joe White, who sought to make the two-acre property around his house engaging for neighbors as a garden and place to fellowship.

White invites residents of the neighborhood to his front yard to freely take from a garden of more than 100 edible plants and landscaping the church tends. Neighbors can gather around the house at a fire pit and stage or walk trails, including one with four stations that with various plants represent creation, the fall of man, Jesus' resurrection and eternity to symbolize the gospel.

The garden is a new project for the church this year, and Neighborhood plans to expand it into a park on a formerly neglected property down the road with raised beds for neighbors to grow their own produce, a dog park and trails to enjoy. The expansion project has allowed the church to work with local government and its neighbors, both those who are involved with Neighborhood Church and those who are not.

"The way we see it, the church is all of our neighbors," White says. "We're

working with people who call our neighborhood home, and we see them as our church whether they attend the services or not. Even if most of them have never come to church we still see them as ours and our responsibility as God has trusted them to us, and this park is important to us for that reason."

Joe's wife, Heidi, is one of the project's leaders. She says the garden and park projects have provided an opportunity to meet new neighbors, get to know them and invite them to voice and execute their ideas for the park before it opens.

"We want to communicate to our community that we care about their space and voice, their complaints and hopes and their dreams for this place and be intentional in listening, since that is how a lot of relationships start," Heidi White says. "We are really hoping they'll become involved with it and maybe someday our church."—Caitlyn Decker



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Pipeline slows to a trickle

Educators, ministries involved in leadership training identify potential shortage

As USMB NextGen's Leadership Pipeline enters its second season, we at the *Christian Leader* wanted to provide an update after Year One. The Pipeline launched in March 2022 to identify and train a pool of future leaders, beginning in high school and college. But in visiting with Kyle Goings, USMB NextGen chair, I stumbled upon a much larger story pointing to a potential shortage of young leaders.

The number of interns in the Pipeline decreased from 10 interns in 2022 to just four in 2023. Meanwhile, the number of organizations seeking interns has more than doubled, from six to 16.

"We knew we were going to struggle finding candidates," Goings says. "The second year we are exploding with churches, but we really struggled with potential interns."

Goings attributes this lack of young ministry leaders to four primary causes: fewer students choosing ministry as a profession, MB

colleges not attracting or producing ministry leaders as they once did, a lack of intentionality by churches to call out leaders and the changing expectations Gen Z (ages 7-27) and Millennials (28-40) have of church.

"I don't know if churches see the sense of urgency that we're seeing," Goings says. "We study the statistics and look at leadership development. I do think (a leadership shortage) is coming down the pipeline. That's not trying to be punny. I don't know if the American church is ready for it."

Recalling a similar conversation with Church Planting Mobilizer Brian Harris, who has also identified a leadership shortage, I wondered if the lack of young ministry leaders in the Pipeline is indicative of a widespread trend. Are others in our national MB family experiencing similar declines in students pursuing ministry, and if so, what can be deduced from these trends?

The Pacific District Conference also engages interns, so I contacted District Minister Jordan Ringhofer. While

churches are investing in students during the summer, Ringhofer says fewer students are pursuing vocational ministry.

The PDC's Board of Next Generation Leadership program has had a summer internship program since 2003 with more than 250 participants. In 2021, its focus shifted to providing grants to churches for internships.

Before the pandemic, the PDC issued close to 20 grants per summer, but after, that number dropped to four or five. This number is slowly increasing as churches return to regular programming, though church budget strains post-pandemic have limited some churches' willingness to hire interns, Ringhofer says.

Mental health among young adults is another factor.

"Students today don't know how to cope with their struggles and stressors," he says. "It's manifesting in different ways."

MB Foundation, too, provides scholarships for young people interested in pursuing MB ministry and



Heidi Quiring, standing, leads a training session for summer 2022 Leadership Pipeline interns. Quiring, along with Russ Claassen, Newton, Kan., and Kyle Goings, Wichita, Kan., are employed by USMB as Leadership Pipeline mobilizers.

Photo by Kyle Goings

has, if anything, seen an increase in participants since the pandemic.

Rick Eshbaugh, director of financial discipleship who oversees the Leadership Generation Fund, says the agency has distributed 75 grants to high school and college age students for internships and schooling since the program's inception in 2016, averaging 10 per year with the exception of 22 in 2017 and five in 2020. Numbers are climbing, he says, and for 2023, he expects as many as 16, to which he attributes word of mouth and repeat applicants.

Enrollment trends

However, representatives from all three U.S. MB institutions of higher education report declining enrollment in programs preparing students for full-time ministry. Varied and complex factors—the pandemic, suspicion of church, interest in other vocations and cultural and generational differences—make it difficult to pinpoint definitive reasons for the decline.

In the last five years, Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, Calif., has witnessed an approximate 60 percent decline in enrollment in programs preparing students for ministry, corresponding to a 25 percent drop in FPU's total student enrollment, says Melanie Howard, chair for the Biblical and Religious Studies Division.

"While it is possible that this trend is continuing, tracking more recent data has proved challenging due to the ongoing effects of the pandemic on enrollment across higher education," Howard says.

Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary has also experienced a decline in enrollment the past five years, from

164 students in Spring 2019 to 113 in Spring 2023. Wade French, director of seminary enrollment, attributes this to a variety of factors, including churches no longer requiring pastors to have seminary degrees, a decreased value on higher education, decreased church attendance and students' tendency to enroll in career-oriented programs such as marriage and family therapy, teaching or law school. Approximately 55 to 60 percent of the FPBS student body is pursuing a degree in Marriage and Family Therapy, French says.

At Tabor College, Wendell Loewen, professor of youth, church and culture, recalls having 40 students enrolled in Bible or ministry majors when he came to the MB institution in Hillsboro, Kan., in 1997. That number has dwindled to 11 for Fall 2023.

"I see fewer and fewer prospective students interested in ministry," Loewen says. "Part of it might be a recruiting strategy, but that's not the whole answer. Ministry is just not a valued career option in our culture. The role of the church in a community has changed."



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Graying leaders

USMB NextGen's Goings cites a 2017 Barna study highlighting a shortage of young leaders and referring to the "graying of America's clergy." The study reports there are more Protestant pastors over age 65 than under 40. The number of pastors over 65 nearly tripled from 1992 (6 percent) to 2017 (17 percent), while the percentage of pastors under 40 decreased from 33 percent to 15 percent. Contributing factors include longer life expectancy, economic concerns causing pastors to work longer and fewer young people going into ministry.

"We're heading toward a cliff as church in America," Goings says. "These wonderful, dedicated, Jesus-loving pastors are retiring. There's either going to be a huge influx of potential new leaders or many churches will shut down because they can't replace their pastor."

Data suggests the number of people identifying as atheist is rising. A 2018 Barna study labels Gen Z "post-Christian," reporting that 59 percent of Gen Z claim a Protestant or Catholic Christian religious faith, compared to 65 percent of Millennials, 65 percent of Gen X and 75 percent of Boomers. While 7 percent of Millennials identified as atheist, that number nearly doubled for Gen Z (13 percent).

Tabor's Loewen says life no longer centers around work, school and church in a culture where church is an add-on for spiritual consumers.

"Studies show that spirituality is still important, a need for something that helps a person get through life," Loewen says. "But for many, Christianity isn't the answer and maybe even the church isn't the answer, even if they are Christians."

FPU's Howard notes an increased interest among Gen Z in studying Scripture and ministry through non-profits and nondenominational mission organizations.

"This seems consistent with most data on Gen Z Christian students that indicate they are deeply committed to Christ but are not convinced that they can follow him faithfully in existing church structures," she says, listing abuse scandals, ultra-politicization and inner-denominational and inner-church squabbles as contributing factors to this hesitancy.

Brian Ross, associate professor of pastoral ministries at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, echoes these findings, saying many social institutions, including churches and seminaries, were not built for the world Gen Z is living in, which includes access to smart phones and the internet, a rapidly diversifying cultural demographic and an unstable world affecting mental health.

"Now, quite literally, the whole world is available to everyone in their back pocket," Ross says. "If one wants to lead a respected, positive community today, their first thought is not church ministry."

Reasons for hope

If younger generations, specifically Gen Z, are leaving the church, and if fewer young people are pursuing ministry roles, what solutions might we employ? Where is the hope?

Regarding openness to faith and church, FPBS's Ross suggests that when a person hits rock bottom, they may become open to a different life. Christian spiritual disciplines are personally transformative, and when culture doesn't work, Jesus and the Bible become more attractive, he says.

For Tabor's Loewen, the pandemic proved people still need community.

"Jesus is still the answer," he says. "How we help people address their needs, their brokenness, might end up looking different than it has."

The Pipeline, while not a catch-all solution, will continue to be a resource, Goings says, but churches must call out young leaders.

"An intern is not just another hired hand," Goings says. "An intern is investing in the next generation. Most churches don't have strategy or intentionality when it comes to leadership development."

Goings says Gen Z students are hungry for a genuine, authentic relationship with Jesus. He likens the current cultural moment to the Babylonian exile during the time of Daniel. The future of the church hinges on finding the faithful remnant whose faith is not compromised.

"We're living in this 'modern-day Babylon,' Goings says. "We need to look for the few but resilient disciples, the resilient next generation who's going to lead us back. I don't think the church will ever fail. God's pretty clear on that. I think Gen Z is the greatest hope the church has seen in five generations."—*Janae Rempel*

You can read more from these interviews in this online-only article.



Kids take the stage at summer arts camps

FPU, Tabor camps encourage students' talents in music, theater

For many kids, attending camp is a staple each summer. Students interested in the arts can attend camps offered by the two U.S. Mennonite Brethren-affiliated colleges.

Both Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, Calif., and Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kan., offer summer camps in June for students interested in developing their talents in music and theater.

FPU has held its annual music camp for more than 10 years, giving students entering grades six through 12 a chance to learn and perform in an area that interests them. Campers can focus on band, orchestra, choir, piano, contemporary worship or musical theater.

George Dougherty, camp director for 2023, says the camp is a way for FPU to give back to the local community.

"We have over a million people in very close proximity, and there are other music camps," Dougherty says. "But many will get a facility up in the mountains, and my observation has been they seem to be more expensive. We're able to offer something more affordable and accessible because it's right here in the Valley."

Dougherty estimates the camp draws 50 to 70 students each year, most of whom stay on campus for the week, although they do have the option of attending as day campers.

Students take classes on musicianship, attend master classes in their area of concentration and rehearse pieces in preparation for a final concert for parents on the last evening of camp. They also enjoy evening recreational time with their fellow campers.



Orchestra is one of the areas in which FPU music campers can focus their attention during the annual June camp. *Photo by FPU*

"It's close-knit; they have greater opportunity for one on one, personalized attention," Dougherty says. "It's a family atmosphere."

Tabor College's musical theater camp, started in 2019, follows a similar format, with campers alternating between workshops, rehearsal times and fun group activities.

Greg Zielke, camp music director and producer, says students come in with varying levels of experience in theater, but all are given the opportunity to learn more about areas of interest such as choreography, makeup, sound and lighting, set design and acting and singing.

"One of the things we've prioritized is that everybody is given a chance to be successful," Zielke says. "Everybody gets to be featured, and we try to help them to be very supportive of each other."

The camp has a theme each year, and the songs selected for the final performance for parents center around this theme.

"It's kind of daunting at first; the

students come in and they've never seen any of this music, but by Saturday, they're rocking and rolling," Zielke says.

Both directors have received positive feedback from campers and parents, and they particularly enjoy seeing past campers return later as counselors. The camps also help with recruiting efforts, as middle and high school students get on campus and learn more about what the colleges offer.

Dougherty and Zielke both emphasize the integration of faith into the camps, seeing them as an opportunity to encourage students and point them to Christ through devotional times, sacred music and discussions with instructors.

"We're trying to really lean into making it an experience that isn't just theater, but really has the kids investigate things about God," Zielke says. "If they leave feeling like they've been loved on and they've learned something, that's our goal."—*Jessica Vix Allen*

Lights, camera, action!

Documentary showcases Thrive Center's work with Ukrainians

A USMB church's work with Ukrainian refugees is airing in a documentary on public television reaching up to 60 million people.

Boris Borisov, pastor of Pacific Keep Church (PKC), is featured on a June segment of Viewpoint, hosted by actor Dennis Quaid, as part of a larger story on Thrive Center, which houses Ukrainian refugees in Spokane, Wash.

Viewpoint's team creates short-form, 3- to 6-minute segments designed to educate and inspire, and this segment highlights Thrive's work to solve complicated housing problems.

"The story focuses on how arriving refugees from Ukraine have found a hub where they're able to transition into a new culture and country and get a foundation under their feet," Borisov says. "It shows the church is involved in finding solutions at a practical level."

Borisov and others from local churches, including USMB's Pilgrim Slavic Baptist Church, started the Ukraine Relief Coalition (URC) in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. URC coordinates prayer, humanitarian aid and refugee resettlement.

Many Ukrainians landed in Spokane when the Biden administration authorized Uniting for Ukraine, a streamlined process allowing up to 100,000 Ukrainians to apply for humanitarian parole for a two-year stay in the U.S.

URC partner Thrive International secured a vacant hotel to provide temporary housing. Within two weeks, 200 refugees filled Thrive Center, which has remained full and has had a waiting list of as many as 80 families. At the end of May, 30



Boris Borisov, pastor of Pacific Keep Church, completes his on-camera interview with Viewpoint's film crew. *Photo by Don Morris*

families were on the waiting list.

Conversations about the documentary began when USMB National Director Don Morris received a phone call from Viewpoint's producer.

"He indicated he had read some things on our website that might fit the parameters of this series—programs of outreach, help for people in need," Morris says. "I mentioned the Thrive project and his ears really perked up."

Morris connected the producer with Borisov, who worked with Viewpoint's creative team to narrow the documentary's focus. Filming took place one day in February and included on-camera interviews and refugee family stories.

"I talk about the importance of relationship and how the church really brings that community," Borisov says. "We focus so much on the economic needs of people—housing, transportation, jobs—but we forget that our highest need is to be fulfilled spiritually, and only God can provide that."

The documentary was to air on public television in June and a link to the documentary will be provided on the CL website. A regional commercial is expected to air in the Spokane area for a year.

The segment calls for support for Thrive Center, though Borisov also requests prayer for legislation allowing Ukrainians to stay in the U.S. The parole status of Ukrainians admitted under Uniting for Ukraine will begin expiring in April 2024. Borisov is helping draft the Ukrainian Adjustment Act, which would allow Ukrainians to apply for asylum status and stay permanently in the U.S.

For Borisov, the documentary highlights a unique partnership fulfilling both physical and spiritual needs.

"The church can work with organizations that provide all these other material things, but we're the ones who know the importance of God," Borisov says. "The Thrive Center has the church as a partner at the table providing the gospel and the message of Jesus." —*Janae Rempel*

Who pastors the pastors?

District ministers equip, support local pastors

Pastors are often among the first people church members seek when needing prayer or support. But who supports pastors? For U.S. Mennonite Brethren, the answer is often their district minister.

Each of the five district conferences has a district minister (DM) who cares for pastors, providing connection, information, resources and encouragement. While DMs plan regular gatherings online and in person, the two newest DMs are introducing new ways to meet needs in their districts.

USMB's newest district minister, Daniel Rodriguez of the Central District, is facilitating continuing education courses for pastors, beginning with a 12-week hermeneutics course in English and Spanish involving 32 students from 11 CDC churches.

"(Students) have seen that what they are learning is helping them in their ministry in the local church," Rodriguez says. "They feel like this class is helping them develop better skills at interpreting God's Word."

An Old Testament Survey is planned for the fall, and Rodriguez hopes to offer courses in additional languages.

To foster unity and combat isolation, Rodriguez hosts a quarterly Zoom prayer meeting with a devotional, district news and prayer.

Jordan Ringhofer, Pacific District minister since October 2020, is also seeking to foster connection.

"Post pandemic there's a lot more support from my executive board for leaning into using resources to help pastors connect and build relationships," Ringhofer says, recognizing that a biennial district convention does not always meet connection needs.

A quarterly Zoom meeting offers updates, prayer and sharing and al

lows people to ask questions of Ringhofer and executive board chair Dennis Fast. A summary of the minutes is distributed via email.

"We want to make sure we prioritize opportunity for transparency, accountability and communicating with our district," Ringhofer says.

Another new opportunity is a monthly Zoom for Lectio Divina, a contemplative Scripture reading. The district is planning quarterly spiritual formation retreats by region.

Ringhofer also offers book studies for small groups of pastors.

"Our pastors are incredible resources, and our churches are incredibly gifted and incredible resources," he says. "We want to

build that personal connection between one another." —*Janae Rempel*
Tim Sullivan, Southern District,
Terry Hunt, Eastern District, and
Aaron Hernandez, LAMB District are
the veteran district ministers. Sullivan
has served 19 years, Hunt, 18 and
Hernandez, 16. Read this article on-
line to learn about pastoral support
in all five district conferences.



Moses Akot, a student in South Sudan, proudly displays his MCC school kit supplies. (Loreto Schools Rumbek photo/Herbert Orwa)



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Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel

MILESTONES

Baptism/Memberships

Eleven people were baptized at **Pacific Keep Church, Spokane, Wash.**

Anthony Keo, Joshua Keo, Megan Barnes and Raquel Keo were baptized at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, June 4.

Avery Franz was baptized and received as a member June 4 at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.** Mikaelyn Franz was also received as a member.

Levi W., Jeremy I., Jackson C., Catherine B., Leah Q. and Eddie Gama were baptized and received as members May 28 at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church.** Aubrey Bisher, Bob Steger and Suzanne Steger were also received as members. Makala S. was baptized and received as a member June 4.

Six people were baptized May 28 at **Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**

Three people were baptized May 21 at **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.**

Joe Cowper, Jordan Calhoun and Kasey Tolley were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus** May 21.

Dan Sigley and Sara Sigley were received as members May 21 at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.** Luke Isaac was baptized May 14.

Caleb Lavin, Trinity Cox and Kurt Cox were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus**, in May.

Jairo Ramirez, Maria Ramirez and Yaneyry Martinez were received as members at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church**, April 23.

Brenda May Wheatley was baptized May 7 at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus.** Braden Fox, Aaron Hall, Desai Madrigal, Kamryn Manzanaras and Doug Wright were baptized April 23.

Jalen Berry, Kye Schreck, Luke Johnston, Chakobie Washa, Keaton Falasco, Tucker Habekott, Chance Habekott, Titus Lubbers, Max Burd, Jadalynn Blatnick, Barrett Blatnick and Cooper Bell were baptized at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, April 16.

Maddie Anderson, Chloe Heim, Owen Heim, Carter Heim, Deb Davis, Brenda Shockey, Mike Feidt and Melissa Feidt were baptized April 9 at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**

Robert Solis, Delia Solis, Tahmokie Darlington, Aubryanna Darlington, Harley Newton and Cade Harkey were baptized and received as members April 9 at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.** Victoria Newton, Adam Harkey and Jaclyn Harkey were also received as members.

Jason Benham, Dominique Benham, Jonathan Fast, Emily Fast, Linda Allen, Mark Joseph, Julie Joseph, Mike Hofer, Barbara Hofer, Mike Hawkins, Tami Hawkins, Richard Brandt, Sonia Sanchez, Tanner Marks, Adrienne Kaspian, Darren Stiles, Donna Preheim, Emily Roberts, Eric Madding and Annette Madding were received as members at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church**, April 9. Joey Santos, Brook Hatch and Caleb Pauls were baptized.

Amy Mercado was baptized at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, April 9.

Josie Perez was baptized at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, April 2.

Workers

Brent and Amy Deffenbacher began serving as pastoral couple at **Bethany Church, Fresno Calif.**, June 1. Bruce and Janice Porter concluded their service as interim pastoral couple.

Jamie Mack concluded her service as pastor of worship at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** May 28. Connie Nicholson concluded her service as pastor of children and families June 25. Rhonda Dueck concluded her service as associate pastor June 30.

Mallory Gaskell began serving as family ministries pastor at **SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan.**, June 1.

Kayla Traver began serving as associate pastor of family ministries at **Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, May 15.

Alan and Edie Lewis concluded their service as interim pastoral couple at **Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, May 7.

Christina Conner began serving as children's ministry director at **North Oak Community Church.**

Deaths

Baptista, Robert, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 1, 1981—May 15, 2023. Parents: Joe and Lisa (Cooper) Baptista. Children: Hannah, Zackary, Jordyn.

Bergen, Samuel L., Fresno, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Dec. 8, 1932—April 14, 2023. Parents: Samuel N. and Agnes (Sawatzky) Bergen. Spouse: Marvis Bergen. Children: Gregory and Keith; nine grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Buller, Kyle Nathan, Inman, Kan., member of Zoar MB Church, Inman, Jan. 12, 1978—April 26, 2023. Spouse: Neal and Anita Buller.

Buller, Ruth Helena, Salem, Ore., member of Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Jan. 8, 1927—April 1, 2023. Spouse: Edwin Jake Buller. Children: Carolyn Anderson, Maynard, Alan; 10 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren.

Classen, Wilmer G., Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, April 18, 1930—Jan. 12, 2022. Parents: Henry A. and Sara Dick Classen. Spouse: Verna Jean Hiebert. Children: Michael, Sharon Schroeder, Diane Wingert; four grandchildren.

Cumbry, Adrian, Fresno, Calif., member of North Fresno Church, April 6, 1986—May 2, 2023. Parents: Shilanda Cumbry (deceased). Child: One daughter.

Dalke, Delores, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, April 24, 1941—May 12, 2023. Parents: Julius and Martha (Rempel) Penner. Spouse: John Foster Dalke (deceased). Children: Mark, Matt, John (deceased); two grandchildren, two step-grandchildren.

Depew, David D., Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, May 4, 1957—May 9, 2023. Parents: Doug and Orpha Depew. Spouse: Debbie. Child: Daniel.

Friesen, Iris Huetta, Salem, Ore., member of Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, April 28, 1931—April 27, 2023. Parents: Russell and Hazel Proudfit. Spouse: Wilbur Friesen (deceased). Children: Greg, Gary, Dolly Harrell, Ken; 10 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

Holmen, Chris, Reedley, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Died April 8, 2023.

Merrifield, Alma Ellen, Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Oct. 29, 1939—March 16, 2023. Parents: Don Tomlin and Hazel Dell (Bolton) Foster. Spouse: John Merrifield. Children: David, Susan, Elizabeth Dubuisson.

Neufeld, Orville Glenn, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Nov. 8, 1937—March 28, 2023. Parents: H.C. and Anna (Toews) Neufeld. Spouse: Ida Pearl (Penner) Neufeld (deceased). Children: Phil, Chuck; five grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Nightengale, Larry Don, Cordell, Okla., member of Bible MB Church, Cordell, Nov. 6, 1938—March 19, 2023. Parents: Walter and Nora (Lau) Nightengale. Spouse: Melba Jean Brown (deceased). Children: Kevin, Lisa Willard; four grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

Nikkel, Beverly Ann, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 12, 1941—April 29, 2023. Parents: Bill and Mildred (Wiebe) Ediger. Spouse: Ken Nikkel. Children: Linda, Ron; five grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Palmer, Angelyn Ruth, Huron, S.D., member of Bethesda Church, Huron, March 18, 1961—May 31, 2023. Parents: LaVerne and Tootie (DeNolf) Stahl. Spouse: Patrick Roy Palmer (deceased). Children: Joshua, Joseph; six grandchildren.

Penner, Geraldine "Gerry" Faye, North Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., Dec. 29, 1936—Jan. 28, 2023. Parents: John H. and Selma (Schmidt) Martin. Spouse: Willy Penner. Children: Ronna Raber, Ivan, Leon, Carla (deceased); eight grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren.

Presley, Leonard Ross, Fort Smith, Ark., former pastor of Post Oak MB Church, Indiana, Okla., Dec. 20, 1953—Dec. 4, 2021. Parents: William Arthur and Mary Alice (Hobbs) Presley. Spouse: Dora Ann Anuszewski. Children: Steven, Adrianne Arrington, Rebecca Lowe, Phyllis Plana, Mariam Daniels; 14 grandchildren.

Regier, Arlen Duane, Hesston, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., April 5, 1937—Aug. 15, 2022. Parents: Edward and Agnes (Epp) Regier. Spouse: Clara Lee Taylor. Children: Shara Schroeder, Melanie Lamprill, Rebecca Adamson; nine grandchildren.

Reimer, Gwendolynn Marie, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Aug. 22, 1927—April 12, 2023. Parents: Christian and Rheba Ummel. Spouse: Willis Reimer (deceased). Children: Douglas, Carolyn Penner, Virgil, Stephen, Elaine Rider; 12 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

Rhodes, Gary Lynn, Hesston, Kan., of Hesston MB Church, April 24, 1945—June 3, 2023. Parents: Arthur Leroy and Esther Lucille (Dunkin) Rhodes. Spouse: Janice Schecter. Children: Holly McCracken, Ty; four grandchildren.

Schmidt, Elvera, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church and North Fresno (Calif.) Church, July 25, 1939—April 3, 2023. Parents: Peter Abram and Elizabeth (Richert) Langemann. Spouse: Henry J. Schmidt (deceased). Children: Debra Brady, Laura Roberts; five grandchildren.

States, Carolyn L., Hays, Kan., member of North Oak Community Church, Hays, Jan. 14, 1947—April 25, 2023. Parents: Henry and Dorothy (Lerew) Duncan. Spouse: Alan E. States. Children: David, Ryan, Sarrah Schneider; five grandchildren.

REACHING IN

Discipleship

Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz., held women's workshops: Resolving conflict biblically, Praying for prodigals and Faith over fear.

Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., held a spiritual retreat May 21-22.

Fellowship

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., held a Father's Day breakfast June 17, ice cream party June 9, and Mother's Day tea May 13.

Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., had a free family fun night May 26.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., celebrated dads June 18 with mobile mini golf, a "Mommy and Me Party" May 20 and Mother's Day with acai bowls May 14.

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a trailer tune-up and brake check June 3.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church men held a golf tournament June 3.

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., hosted an ice cream social June 11. Women made peppernuts June 3.

Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb., held a playground dedication May 28.

Corn (Okla.) MB Church held a discipleship appreciation event May 21.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted a summer play-

group, a family social June 25 and a men's breakfast May 20.

Two churches held picnics May 21: **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, and **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Salem MB Church, Bridge-water, S.D., women held a program, "Reflect Upon Our Mothers," May 18.

Churches with Mother's Day weekend brunches were **Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, and **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Two churches held ice cream socials: **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** women on May 8 and **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, on May 10.

Men at Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., sponsored a trap shoot May 7.

Worship

North Fresno (Calif.) Church held a hymn sing June 28.

Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., held a worship night at Aroma Coffeehouse May 12.

Celebrations

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted the Council of Hispanic MB Churches at which Alfred and Betty Foth, retiring pastors of Agua Viva Hermanos Menonitas, were honored.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., celebrated its 29th anniversary May 7.

REACHING OUT

Locally

Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif., volunteered at a teacher appreciation event June 7.

Classifieds

Local Church

Lead Pastor: Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., is seeking a man to lead this growing congregation into the next phrase of God's plan for our church. PAC has contemporary worship and a vibrant children's ministry and values biblical, Christ-centered truths. For more information and for an application form visit <https://www.pineacres.org/job-opportunities>

Executive Pastor: North Fresno (Calif.) Church is seeking an executive pastor to assist the lead pastor in executing the strategic direction of the church under the oversight of the Leadership Board. The executive pastor will ensure that the church's systems, practices, and policies responsibly and effectively support its ministry activities. This role manages the church's administrative systems and employment activities and oversees the office operations and church facilities, along with branding and communication responsibilities. If interested, please send resume to: xpsearch@northfresnochurch.org. See full job description at Churchstaffing.com. For a personal conversation please contact Chuck Buller, who is helping facilitate this search, at: Charles.buller@hotmail.com

Worship Pastor/Director: Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church is looking for a full-time or part-time worship pastor or director. The job description is flexible depending on gifting, availability and experience but could also include other ministries. If interested, send resume and worship leading sample or link to hmbcsearchteam@gmail.com or contact us if you have more questions.

Family Ministries Pastor: Buhler (Kan.) MB Church is seeking a family ministries pastor. Position will oversee ministries to children and youth (through high school). Priority for this position will be to advance discipleship for students and families. Buhler MB is an established church in a small town. For more information (job description) and to apply please visit <http://www.buhlermbchurch.org/Staff-Hire>

Lead Pastor: Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., is seeking a lead pastor. We are a Christ-centered, Bible teaching church and have a multi-generation group ranging from young children to young adults and senior citizens. Bible exposition, contemporary/traditional praise and worship are featured in our church services. Potential candidates can apply at <https://valleyviewbiblechurch.wordpress.com/pastoral-search/> or contact Charles Sauerwein at candc@ucom.net / text 620-272-6928 or Wayne Bartel at lynnbartel65@att.net / text 620-339-2243

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.

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/>

Events

Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif., would like to formally invite you to our upcoming missions conference September 24-27. Our keynote speakers are Dick Brogden from Live/Dead, Tracy Evans from iReach Africa and Stephen Mairori from International Christian Ministries. Visit our website to register, submit questions and view a tentative schedule.
<https://www.mountainview.org/missions/ltm-conference/>



The harvest is plentiful
but the workers are few

Invitations to serve on missional teams
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Church Life continued

The Center for the Arts at Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted 304 people in 17 camps, 390 in art and dance classes and 215 in private lessons.

Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D., did CityServe projects, including Meals on Wheels, trash cleanup and a baseball league for children with disabilities.

Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., women gave \$400 to Good Neighbor Ministries in Omaha, Neb.

SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan., held a community breakfast May 6.

Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn., hosted a women's conference May 6.

Hesston (Kan.) MB Church held a block party May 3.

Globally

Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D., took an offering to fill 465 school kits.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church sent 200 dresses to Ethiopia.

Two Hillsboro, Kan., churches collected loose change for Mennonite Central Committee: **Ebenfeld MB Church**, \$177.68, and **Hillsboro MB Church**, \$834.75.

Iglesia Manantial de Agua Viva, Omaha, Neb., pastor Jose Guerra and his wife, Yanira Lopez, host a radio broadcast with listeners from Mexico, Colombia, Canada and the U.S.

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