

# CHRISTIAN LEADER

THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2024



## *Our Father*

**More than  
a prayer**  
10

**Sufficient  
grace**  
17

**Serving in  
solidarity**  
20



## Always winter

Is God ever really silent?

**God is always speaking, is always active and is always answering prayers even if he is not having people write about it.**

**T**his past Christmas season, one of the Advent sermons at my church touched on the time between the Old and New Testaments, sometimes called “the silent years” because no canonical book was written during that time. The speaker described God’s silence during those 400 years as deafening.

The idea of God’s lengthy silence caught my attention. I briefly stopped listening to think about what it would mean to face the challenges of everyday life, much less times of crisis, without the foundational understanding that God was with me. I’ve always known God is present even if I don’t feel his presence. What would it be like if God withheld his voice? What if he ceased to be involved in our world? I couldn’t imagine living in a world that is always winter, never Christmas, to quote Mr. Tumnus from C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It would be so cold, so silent.

And then the silence was broken, the speaker assured us, by the cry of a baby. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” John 1:14. Christmas Day is when we celebrate that God “put skin on,” but every day is when we experience God’s “with-ness”—his presence.

It turns out, however, that lots of important things happened between Malachi and Matthew; it was hardly a quiet time. During these 400 years, Israel was ruled by the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans. Aramaic replaced Hebrew, providing a common language for the world of that day. Jewish parties emerged—Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots—and synagogues were established as Jews who were now scattered sought to remain faithful. All of these impact the events of the New Testament.

The intertestamental period isn’t the only time in the Bible when God was “silent” for a lengthy period. For example, scholars seem to agree that Genesis 1 to 12 covers 2,000 years. That’s a lot of time for only a dozen chapters of biblical history. And nothing has been added to the Bible since the book of Revelation, which is another 2,000 years of silence. When you think about it, God has been “silent” about a lot of human history.

But has God really been quiet? I’m thankful the answer is no. God is always speaking, is always active and is always answering prayers even if he is not having people write about it. God is with us, moving in our lives, communicating with us through Scripture and

the words of others. We hear his voice speaking to us as we listen and are attuned to his presence. This issue focuses on prayer, one of the ways in which God talks to us and we to him. As I’ve read and re-read the reflections on the Lord’s Prayer, I am thankful that God has never been silent. Instead, he always was and always will be with us, caring for us, forgiving us and delivering us. Thanks be to God.



**Connie Faber,**  
Editor

## CHRISTIANLEADER

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

# Table of Contents



**"I need to point everything to my Jesus because Jesus is our hope and strength."**

## FEATURES

- 10** **More than a prayer**  
Jesus' invitation to life this side of heaven  
By Jana Hildebrandt
- 12** **Who is our Father?**  
By Cliniece Bradshaw
- 13** **Glimpses of God's kingdom**  
By Michele Fiester
- 14** **Three dimensional "bread"**  
By Henri Ngolo
- 15** **Show us, God**  
By Stephen Humber
- 16** **When we face temptation**  
By Daniel Rodriguez

## COLUMNS

- 2** **Editorial**  
Connie Faber
- 4** **From the National Director**  
Don Morris
- 5** **Around the World**  
Community of MB Churches in Congo
- 17** **Testimony**  
Sufficient grace  
By Mary Hall
- 18** **Frontlines**  
Prayer rhythms  
By Kayla Traver
- 19** **Got Questions**  
A balanced diet  
By Caitlin Friesen

## DEPARTMENTS

- 6** **News in Brief**
- 9** **5 Minutes With...**  
Jon Fiester
- 20** **BodyLife**
- Serving in solidarity
  - Moore, Foddrell to share EDC minister role
  - Church celebrates 75 years with a gift for their city
  - Church to build center that serves community
- 27** **Mission & Ministry**  
Registration for LEAD Cohorts opens in January
- 28** **Church Life**





**This is a time  
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It's a time  
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## Prepared for Christ's return

Jesus calls us to be ready for his second coming

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we read that there is a *time* for this and a *time* for that. At the beginning of a new year, we often think in terms of it being time to do this or that. Maybe it's to change what we've been doing that hasn't been good for us or to add something to our life that could be of benefit. We're looking to the future.

In Ecclesiastes 3:8 the author, likely Solomon, writes that there is "a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace." That's not one of our favorite Anabaptist verses. But this is definitely a time for war in our world.

The Bible mentions war over 400 times. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, wars are cautionary tales about the consequence of turning away from God. In the New Testament as recorded by Matthew, Jesus says that when his time is near, "nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

As I write this, Israel is attempting to remove Hamas from Gaza. Other nations appear to be preparing for battle against Israel. By the time you read this, much, much more could have happened. Is this prophesy being fulfilled in our lifetime? Are these events and wars signs of the end times?

I don't know for sure, but they could be. I do know that Jesus tells us to be prepared for his coming as expressed in the parable of the 10 virgins in Matthew 25. We're to keep watch. I'm grieved when I hear God's people say it's not important to study the end times or the book of Revelation. "It'll all just take care of itself," they say. "It's too confusing," say others. I don't think these are good answers.

Approximately one-fourth of the Bible was prophetic at the time it was written. So, if God determined that it was important to provide prophetic exhortations and cautions in his Word, shouldn't we take quite seriously prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled? One of the reasons the Jews didn't recognize the first coming of Jesus was because most didn't make the effort to truly understand the many prophecies about his coming. Are we, in our day, in the same boat about Jesus' second coming?

I realize that there are all kinds of explanations about the end times and how it relates to the events of today. There are countless "theologians" expressing their views on YouTube or other media with sensational theories about what is happening in the Middle East. It can get weird at times. But thoughtful, meaningful studies are available, including our personal study of Matthew 24, 2 Thessalonians and the book of Revelation and other pertinent Scriptures.

This is a time to be in the Word. It's a time to be watching. It's a time for serious students of the Bible to read carefully what has been written for our benefit. The future will be the "now" at some point. Maybe that time is upon us, maybe it's yet far off. But every generation is taught to be vigilant.

I confess that studying the end times has been a passion of mine for over 40 years. I think I've read every theory about how it all comes to pass. I've read countless explanations pertaining to the Antichrist, the beast and what will be the mark of the beast. What I know for sure is that Jesus is coming back! And when he does, I want to be ready.

**Don Morris**  
[don@usmb.org](mailto:don@usmb.org)





## Community of MB Churches in Congo

Communauté des Eglises des Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC, Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Congo) is gearing up for a momentous occasion—its centennial celebration. This milestone marks 100 years of steadfast Christian witness and service. Despite numerous challenges, CEFMC has persevered, and the upcoming centenary is a testament to God's infinite grace and the dedication of its members.

CEFMC is the largest Mennonite community in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a strong presence in eight provinces. Comprising 14 ecclesiastical provinces, 71 districts and nearly 540 parishes, it boasts a membership of 99,770 individuals, including 446 pastors. However, the lack of proper care has led to the unfortunate deaths of several pastors, a heart-wrenching loss.

CEFMC also faces some internal issues, such as tribal conflicts in the southern part of the community. They are seeking support to reconcile these differences and foster unity among their members.

Despite challenges, CEFMC is actively engaged in various areas of ministry. The community has focused on administration, evangelization, mission, development, health, communication, youth, education and religious formation. Their efforts extend beyond national borders, with active participation in South Africa and the Ivory Coast.

CEFMC is aware of the importance of training new leaders to continue its mission and ministry. Despite limited resources, leaders are committed to equipping young people for pastoral and theological studies.

During the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 volcanic eruptions,

Pastor Kimbila, the national representative of the MB conference in DR Congo, invites the global community to come celebrate the conference's centennial in August 2024. *Photo by CEFMC*



CEFMC has been at the forefront of providing support and assistance to affected communities. It has supported war-displaced persons and actively educated members about the importance of fighting the pandemic.

CEFMC invites the global Mennonite Brethren community to join in the centennial festivities that will take place August 7-11, 2024, with a closing worship service to be held Sunday, Aug. 11, at the Centennial Temple, currently under construction. CEFMC also plans a series of conferences and related activities. The celebration requires adequate resources, and CEFMC welcomes the financial support and goodwill of Mennonite Brethren worldwide.

CEFMC eagerly anticipates the presence of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) during the centennial celebrations. The fraternity and collaborative relationships forged with ICOMB have been instrumental in its growth and ministry.

"Let us rally behind our Congolese brothers and sisters as they prepare for this momentous milestone," writes ICOMB executive director Rudi Plett in an August 2023 update, "and may this celebration be a witness to the transformative power of Christ's love and unity in the midst of challenges."

### Did You Know?

- Kinshasa, with a population of 11,587,000, is the world's second largest French-speaking city, after Paris.
- The oldest national park in Africa is DR Congo's Virunga National Park, home to rare mountain gorillas, lions and elephants.
- Mount Nyiragongo, one of the world's most dangerous volcanoes, erupted most recently in May 2021.

# News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel

## USMB Leadership Board approves budget, crafts national director job description

When the USMB Leadership Council and Board met Oct. 13-14, in Hillsboro, Kan., it took action on items related to the national director search and a budget-related agenda.

The Leadership Council reviewed results of a survey designed to gather input regarding the national director and updated the national director's job description. The goal is to appoint the next national director

prior to USMB Gathering 2024.

The Leadership Board approved an income budget of \$1,128,900 for 2024. The 2024 expense budget was approved with one revision: funding for the Integrated Immigrant Ministries coordinator were deleted.

Additional discussion included the formation of a task force to review the USMB communication ministry given a projected increase in Christian Leader production costs, and

seven recommendations from USMB to the Multiply Board of Directors intended to strengthen U.S. mobilization and representation.

MB Foundation hosted the meetings in the recently completed addition to their ministry headquarters in Hillsboro, Kan.

Also meeting were the Board of Faith and Life and National Strategy Team.—USMB

## IIM is now CORD

Recent shifts have resulted in a name change for USMB's Integrated Immigrant Ministries and the dissolution of a related part-time USMB staff position.

CORD is the new umbrella term for USMB's partnership with immigrant churches, including both the CORD Program and the continued work of the CORD Committee, previously known as the Integrated Immigrant Council. A refreshed CORD logo signifies these changes.

At the recommendation of the National Strategy Team, the USMB Leadership Board dissolved the part-time position of Integrated Immigrant Ministries coordinator because of lack of funding. Henri Ngolo has held the role of IIM coordinator since Nov. 1, 2022. He concluded his service as a paid USMB staff member Dec. 31, 2023, but will continue connecting with immigrant churches as a liaison between Congolese churches and the Eastern District, whose support of Ngolo and CORD continues. The hope is to reimburse Ngolo for some expenses, says USMB National Director Don Morris.

USMB's commitment to partner with immigrant churches remains steadfast, Morris says. The first church to receive CORD funding is Christian Center the Hand of God in Hamilton, Ohio. For more information, visit [www.usmb.org/cord](http://www.usmb.org/cord). —USMB



## Sullivan to retire in August

Donna Sullivan, USMB administrative secretary, bookkeeper and event planner, will retire in August 2024, following 40 years of service to the Mennonite Brethren family.

"Donna exemplifies what it means to be a true servant and follower of Jesus," says USMB National Director Don Morris.

"The expertise in administration and accounting that she provided over many years has been of immense value for our USMB family."

Sullivan has served in administrative roles with USMB since Sept. 1, 1990. What began as a part-time administrative assistant job quickly grew to full-time. In 2008, Sullivan assumed all event-planning responsibilities.

"My daughter has often said that I have the best job in the world, and I have always agreed," Sullivan says. "It has been interesting, fun, challenging and fulfilling. I'm so grateful to have had the privilege of working for God's kingdom in my work as well as in Tim's and my pastoral ministry. It has also been such a joy and privilege to have worked with such a great staff team and executive/national directors over the years."

Sullivan's employment with MB ministries began in 1984, when she and her husband, Tim, served on the student development staff at Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kan. She worked as administrative secretary and assistant to the bookkeeper at MB Biblical Seminary, now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, office from 1986-1990.—USMB



## Hoag to speak at USMB Gathering 2024 Pastors' Conference

USMB Gathering 2024, comprised of the USMB National Pastors' Conference and National Convention, will be held in Omaha, Neb., July 23-27, 2024.

Gary Hoag, sponsored by MB Foundation, will speak about biblically faithful leadership during four sessions of the pastors' conference,

July 23-25.

Hoag serves as president and CEO of Global Trust Partners. He earned his doctorate in New Testament from Trinity College, Bristol, England. Author of more than 10 books, Hoag speaks and teaches around the world.

During the pastors' conference,

Hoag will incorporate topics of leadership, accountability for pastors and churches, governance and stewardship. Each session will include interactive discussions.

Make plans to attend USMB Gathering 2024. Registration will be available in early February 2024.—  
*USMB*

## New LEAD Cohorts starting in February

The spring lineup of LEAD Cohorts is coming in January. New topics include leading worship well, emotional intelligence and apologetics.

LEAD Cohorts are free online meeting places for anyone interested in learning more about a specific topic. The only cost is for books as recommended by the cohort leader. Cohorts typically meet online via Zoom for about an hour every two weeks over a three-month span.

Registration links will be available at <http://www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts/>.  
—*USMB*

## Leadership Board accepting national director applications

The USMB Leadership Board is accepting applications for the next national director and has posted survey results used in preparing the job description.

"One of our main questions was whether we had unity in what we wanted from a national director," the Leadership Board says in an email to pastors. "We are a diverse conference, and it was plausible we wanted very different attributes and skills. But the survey shows that across districts, offices and ages, we have similar values."

The survey results and job description are posted online at [www.usmb.org/national-director-survey-results](http://www.usmb.org/national-director-survey-results).—*USMB*

## Central District convenes in Rapid City

More than 100 delegates, ministry partners and guests gathered for the 113th Central District Conference convention at Renewal MB Church in Rapid City, S.D., Nov. 2-4, 2023.

The theme was Perseverance, based on Heb. 12:2. Three pastors spoke during worship sessions: Tim Hall, Butterfield (Minn.) Community Bible Church; Hunegnaw Bekele, Ethiopian Christian Fellowship in Sioux Falls, S.D.; and Jon Fiester, Renewal MB Church.

An announcement about a new mentorship program highlighted the convention, which also included business, prayer, workshops and a Church Planting and Renewal Banquet.

Delegates affirmed a 2023-2024 budget of \$394,000, elected conference leaders, addressed upcoming constitutional changes, heard that the District Ministries Council has appointed a task force to seek clarity for district credentialing policy and procedures in consultation with the U.S. Board of Faith and Life and heard reports.—*CL*



Daniel Rodriguez (third left) introduces Jude Johnson (second left) from Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church in Ogema, Minn., as the first participant in the CDC's mentorship program. Johnson will be mentored by Jon Annin (far right), pastor of Stony Brook Church in Omaha, Neb. Justin Swiers (left) is pastor of Strawberry Lake (left). *Photo by Janae Rempel*



## PDC holds convention

The 2023 Pacific District Conference convention was hosted Nov. 2-4 by Butler Church in Fresno, Calif.

Delegates heard three messages on the convention theme, “The kingdom of God is like...” given by Scott Holman, pastor of Butler Church, Fresno Pacific University president André Stephens and Tim Geddert of North Fresno Church.

The format for district board reports was revised to prioritize questions submitted by delegates. Delegates approved revisions to Article IV of the PDC bylaws that outlines how congregations can withdraw from district membership. Delegates approved the proposed 2024 budget of \$575,000 and elected new board members.

They discussed the pros and cons of the reversion clause and what is involved in following the PDC member church covenant. The convention schedule also included afternoon workshops, an evening home missions banquet and program and a report from FPU.—CL



Delegates pray for Dennis and Connie Fast. Dennis completed his tenure as PDC moderator. *Photo by Connie Faber*

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## Central District hosts Fall Youth Conference

About 100 students and 20 leaders from nine churches met at Inspiration Hills Camp and Retreat Center in Inwood, Iowa, for the Central District's Fall Youth Conference, Nov. 16-19.

Jon Petersen, associate pastor at Bible Fellowship Church, Rapid City, S.D., spoke at the five sessions with messages based in Luke. The event also included small group breakouts, games, free time, a late-night activity and presentations by partner agencies.

Youth performed service projects around Sioux Falls, including serving with Feeding South Dakota, helping at a nursing home, doing park cleanup and participating in a prayer walk and talk.



A band from Tabor College led attendees in singing.

The event was organized by the Central District Youth Committee, including new member Amber Davidson and outgoing members Ron and Karri Muff, in addition to Jon Annin, Jon Petersen and Abby Giwojna.

“The Fall Youth Conference is a great event where we can build our relationship with Christ and others,” Giwojna says. “It’s a time for not only the youth, but the leaders, to come learn more about Christ, worship together, make memories and serve others.”—CDC

Central District youth performed service projects during the Fall Youth Conference, including helping pack 21,352 pounds of food with Feeding South Dakota. *Photo by Abby Giwojna.*



## SDYC held in Wichita

More than 300 students and youth leaders from 15 churches met Nov. 17-19, 2023, at Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., for the Southern District Youth Conference.

Joanna Chapa served as speaker during the event's four sessions, where the theme was, Rhythm.

The event included workshops, youth group breakouts and various activities, including volleyball, video games, board games, coffee, trivia, bowling, arcade games, dodgeball and karaoke.

Presence Worship led attendees in singing.

An offering of \$866.45 was collected for Multiply workers Kyle and Danae Schmidt.

Colton Olsen was affirmed for a second term on the Youth Commission.

"Youth conference was a ton of fun this year," says director Jared Menard. "Our times of worship together were incredibly powerful in each session. Many students recalibrated their hearts and minds back into the rhythms of King Jesus."—SDC

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## LEAD Pods feature Gathering speakers

LEAD Pods episodes in February and March will feature USMB Gathering 2024 speakers Natasha Crain, Gary Hoag and Brian Kluth. The Gathering theme is Salt and Light: Faithful Living in a Secular Culture.

Hosted by Matt Ehresman, LEAD Pods are the official USMB podcast devoted to leadership development and spiritual growth for U.S. Mennonite Brethren. Listen on Apple, Android or Spotify or online at [www.usmb.org/lead-pods](http://www.usmb.org/lead-pods).—USMB

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## Giving Tuesday donations exceed \$10,000

Donations to USMB on Giving Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2023, totaled \$10,950, an increase of \$500 from 2022. Donations will help fund church planting, CORD and leadership development.

"A huge 'thank you' to everyone who gave support for USMB on Giving Tuesday," says USMB National Director Don Morris in an email to donors. "As we continue working together to maximize the impact of these crucial kingdom ministries, may God be the one who receives the glory."

Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. In the 10 years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed \$254,243.—USMB

## 5 minutes with... JON FIESTER

*The cops brought the donuts and the church brought the coffee. Just like every Tuesday morning, neighbors, police and people from Renewal MB Church sat around for coffee, donuts and conversation in the back yard at Knollwood Townhouses, an apartment complex near the church in Rapid City, S.D. But this time, the police chief showed up with a special surprise for Pastor Jon – a Community Service Award. The plaque read: "For directly impacting public safety and the quality of life for the citizens of Rapid City."*



### Why does your church host coffee and donuts for the neighbors and police?

We planted this church in a neighborhood with high rates of poverty which comes with lots of crime. When people get out of their houses and meet their neighbors they start getting a feel for who the good neighbors are. We want as many people as possible to get to know each other, as well as the police in our neighborhood. This is one way to build trust and partnerships which will make the neighborhood safer.

### What is it like for your church to partner with local police?

Our goals are different—the police care about crime prevention and I care about sharing the gospel of Jesus, but we can still do a lot of things together. The crime is a byproduct, a symptom that is fixed by the gospel. The police know that we care about what's going on in our city, and we want to see the gospel have an effect on everywhere sin has had its impact.

### What does that partnership look like on the ground?

We make our building available to the community—like

bringing an indoor hockey rink where 300 people came and watched a professional hockey team play the neighborhood kids. We also live outside our building as much as we can. Last summer I and several others from church took turns walking the neighborhood at night when drug dealers are out in their black hoodies trafficking packages of drugs from place to place. Police are limited in what they can do, and the apartment said it was too dangerous to hire security guards, but there's nothing stopping us from walking around to pray. I haven't had a gun pulled on me yet.

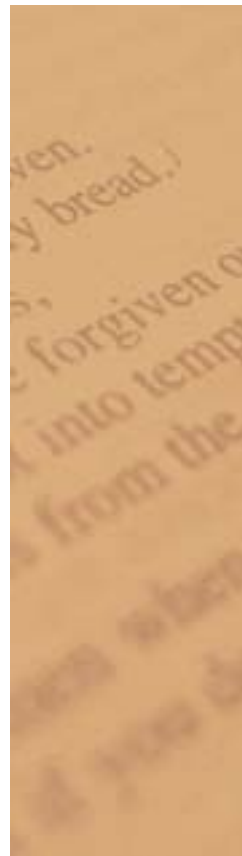
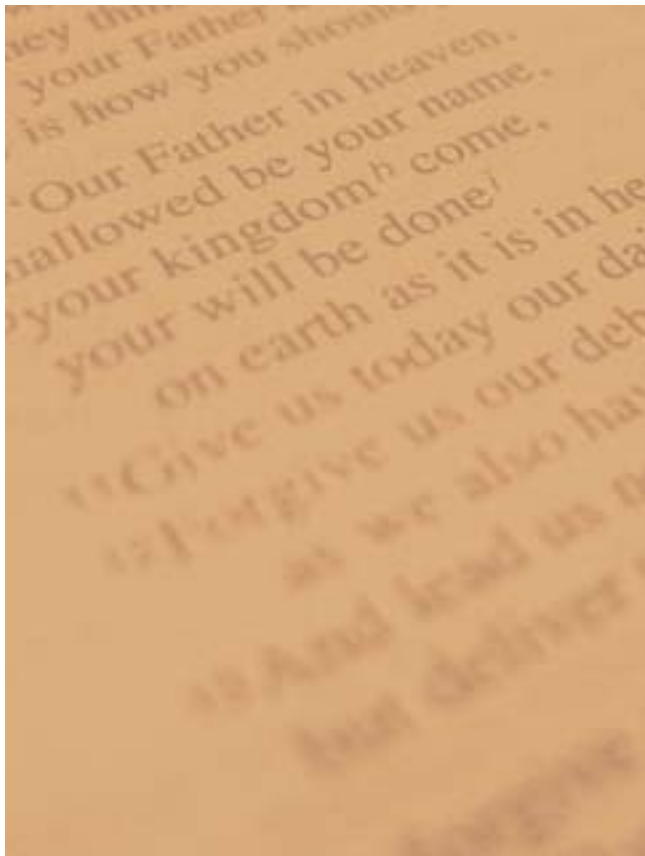
### How do you measure the success of your work?

When we started, our neighborhood had the city's highest rate of calls to the police. Now we've dropped to #2. Our metrics aren't buildings or budgets or butts in the seat. We're looking for whether the gospel is having an impact everywhere sin has had its impact: Are family relationships being healed? Is the need for drugs going down? Is poverty being addressed? Sinful people do sinful things, disciple people do disciple things.

*Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest*

By Jana Hildebrandt

# More than a PRAYER



## Jesus' invitation to life this side of heaven

Sara Maynard's "Rooted Prayer" podcast and her book, *The Prayer of All Prayers*, helped set me on a path to allow the Lord's Prayer to become the framework for my spiritual growth, daily setting a course for how to live. Let me explain, verse by verse, how I have tried to incorporate the rhythms of the Lord's Prayer into each day.

### **A framework for daily life**

The prayer starts with "Hallowed be your name." This phrase causes me to see my need to prioritize worship each morning before I see the news or so-

**W**hat is the Lord's Prayer to you? A prayer memorized as a child? A "go-to" prayer for when you feel inadequate? A prayer associated with liturgy or church tradition?

For me, the Lord's Prayer was nothing but a memorized childhood prayer. As an adult, I valued the ethos of the prayer and could recite it, but it wasn't until a few years ago that I realized the depth of Jesus' words in Matthew 6. Since then, this prayer has become a plumb line for the Holy Spirit's discipling process in my spiritual life.

cial media. When I start my day with worship, everything comes into perspective, and regardless of how good or bad the day is, I can rest assured that the holiness of God never changes.

I love that God's story is a story of **bringing heaven to earth** through redemption. A reminder that, in the end, all things will be redeemed—heaven and earth, creation and God's people. I've read the end of the book and I know that before we see that redemption in its fullness, things will get worse here on earth. But the Lord's Prayer

causes a growing desire in me to be someone who helps the redemptive kingdom break out wherever I go.

I look for opportunities to plant seeds of his grace and love and to join in what Jesus is doing around me. I can't fix the whole world or even the problems in my city, but when I pray "thy kingdom come," it reminds me to sow seeds of "heaven" in my spheres of influence.

What about praying, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Many of us are privileged to not have to struggle with our felt needs. For that we are so very grateful. But seeing God as my first source for financial, physical, emotional or spiritual provision has been a journey. To be honest, I'm quite independent and often capable of managing the problems that pop up day to day. I find that money, a problem-solving mindset and a 21st century desire for an instant answer gets in the way of going to God first with my needs.

I'm still growing in this discipline, and on mission trips, when I connect with people in underdeveloped countries who find joy and peace despite their lack of resources, I'm convicted by how they go to God first. Would I have that attitude if I lived in those same circumstances? I don't know. I try to embrace a faith that God will provide and that I can trust how and when he will do so. I know God will care for me. The question is not how much he cares but how much I trust in his care.

**Forgiveness** is a complex issue, and I sometimes wonder if I understand the depth of it. One of the exercises that has been helpful to me is to ask: What are the ways I can describe God's forgiveness? It is a complete forgiveness, given over and over. This forgiveness removes our sin, as the psalmist says, "as far from us as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). It is immediate, given *before* we ask, given *while* we were still enemies, generous and merciful.

One of the questions we can ask ourselves is if God forgives us this way, how should we forgive others? What would happen if our churches were known for being places where people found freedom from shame or condemnation thanks to forgiveness? Could we be known for allowing those far from God to belong to our church family even before they believe or learn to behave like Christ-followers instead of asking them to behave and believe before they can belong? Is it possible to live in the unity Jesus prays for in John 17 without forgiveness?

The only way I know to approach the relational tensions of life is through forgiveness. The best part about forgiving someone is that I don't have to carry grudges or hurts that I'm not meant to carry.

**"And don't let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one."** The final verse of this prayer reminds me to be careful not to let temptations become footholds in my life that, if left unaddressed, can grow into strongholds. It's a constant reminder that with every temptation, God is always there to rescue me.

We are in a battle against the enemy but someday

“

...the Lord's Prayer causes a growing desire in me to be someone who helps the redemptive kingdom break out wherever I go.

”

we will be victorious. Remember the call at the beginning of the prayer to worship our Father? When our eyes are focused on the holiness of God and as we pray "the kingdom, power, and glory are yours forever. Amen," those temptations and desires tend to pale.

### **A template for communities**

This prayer is a framework for how we live out our faith, but it is also an amazing template for community. We can unite around God's holiness, working together to be churches where people can experience a bit of heaven. Rather than leading from human wisdom, we are reminded to seek the Spirit's leadership daily as our primary source of guidance.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I need others to help me forgive myself and others; I need help finding freedom from shame and judgment. And as for temptation and the battle we fight against evil—an army is always stronger than an individual. We are surrounded by people who can go to battle for us on their knees. What a beautiful picture of corporate life when we live out the Lord's Prayer.

As part of my journey to let this prayer sink deeply into my soul, I've used the Lord's Prayer app (lord-sprayer.app). Along with other believers in my city and state, we pray together for one of the seven themes each day using multiple Scriptures. What do you suppose happens when Baptists, Methodists, Assemblies of God, Catholics, Mennonites and non-denominational believers join to pray for God's name to be holy and for God's kingdom to break out on earth as it is in heaven? In a deeply divided culture, this prayer gives us guidelines for how to walk in relationship with others we might not always agree with. Praying this prayer together has deepened the relationships between churches in our city and state.

As you read the following articles, I hope you will see that this prayer is more than something we memorize as children. It is, in fact, how Jesus invites us to live this side of heaven.

*Jana Hildebrandt is missions, prayer and engagement director at Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.*

# Who is Our Father?

*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed  
be your name.” (Matt. 6:9)*

In this verse, the word “our” speaks for many people and all who accept our Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. “Our Father in heaven” has come to give us eternal life. On the cross, Jesus becomes the ultimate sacrifice for each one of us.

Especially on hard days, I trust the Lord to be my Savior and Deliverer. He became my Father when I surrendered my life to him. In my brokenness and depression, he heard my prayer. He has come to live in my heart forever. I trust him because he never fails me. Many times, I fail him and take my life into my own hands. However, he never gives up on me and his Spirit lives within me.

“Our Father” continues to love us at our lowest points. The great thing is, he is our Father, regardless of our financial status, race, sinful past and life failures. He loves us, and he meets us where we are in life.

When I was so broken and felt that I had no hope, the Lord let me know that I have been forgiven for my sins, and that his love has covered every one of them. Knowing this should give each one of us the assurance that if God can forgive us and our sins, he can and will forgive others for their sins.

I had to learn to forgive myself and to get beyond my past. As our sinful pasts continue to show up and try to convince us that we are not enough, “our Father” reminds us that our repented sins have been thrown into the sea of forgetfulness, and never to return again (Micah 7:19).

Now let’s consider the words, “your name.” I have learned that at “your name,” bondages are broken, (John

8:36) and people are healed (Psalm 147:3). “Your name” heals people physically, spiritually and emotionally. I personally know this to be true because of my past experiences. Now, I stand in God’s promises.

When I call on the name of Jesus, I can feel a calm assurance that he is present. He allows me to remove my mask and be transparent. At times in life, we all pretend to have it all together. However, if the truth be told, we all experience sadness, loss and loneliness. Many of us feel that we have to be strong for so many people, while at the same time we are experiencing our own seasons of hurt and doubt.

During these seasons of hurt and doubt, I have learned—and I am learning—that I can come in the name of the Lord, and he comes full force, like a lion, and restores me. His mercy and goodness assure me that I shall see his glory in every situation of my life, including my troubled times. I have this assurance because he has been a friend like no other. God is worthy of my trust and praises.

He is the Comforter in my battles and gives me victory over every issue in my life. His name should always be hallowed and honored! We are not alone, and on the days that we feel scared, troubled, alone or broken, remember, he will always hold us close when we simply call on his name.

*Cliniece Bradshaw is associate pastor at The Life Center, Lenoir, N.C.*



# Glimpses of God's Kingdom

*“Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10)*

**W**hat is God's kingdom? God's kingdom upends everything we humans think is important. It is in stark contrast to the world around it. Matthew 5 teaches God's kingdom grows out of our acknowledgement of the incredible need we have for our Father God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It gives blessing for those who mourn. Its values are gentleness, lowliness, justice, mercy, purity of heart and peace. In it we expect persecution just as our Savior and the ancient prophets did.

Matthew 6:10 says, “May your kingdom come soon. May your will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven” (NLT). From prayer we receive our kingdom mission orders.

Prayer is genuine and intentional conversation between God and us. Jesus spent a great deal of time in prayer both privately and publicly. His teachings are full of the truth that God knows what we need and wants to give it to us even before we ask.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus acknowledges God's glory, then reveals his great desire for God's kingdom to come soon and, yes, even be done now on earth as it is in heaven. He is welcoming the instructions Father God has for him with a willing heart to engage wherever he is instructed to do his will now in order to bring about glimpses of that kingdom on earth before its full arrival.

Through Jesus' example we begin to understand how we can ask God to show us his glory and where he is at work. As we meditate on who God is in Scripture, we begin to see he is already at work all around us. Based on what the Holy Spirit reveals within and around us, we then ask Jesus to help us bring glimpses of his kingdom now through us. As we submit our lives to his lordship, God is faithful to use them to bring people closer to himself. We join with him doing his will now on earth each day just as the hosts of heaven continuously submit to him in heaven.

We pray for God's kingdom not just in our personal prayers but also praying publicly, united with a community of believers. When we come together, intentionally praying based on the truths in Scripture, the Holy Spirit keeps us in unity, working for the spread of the gospel as Jesus' body. As churches we need to come together intentionally, praying for direction and submission to our part of the kingship of Lord Jesus and the expansion of the kingdom of heaven around us. As we do his will, we know God will not only take care of our needs but show glimpses of his kingdom here on earth just as it is in heaven.

*Michele Fiester is an elder at Renewal MB Church, Rapid City, S.D.*

# Three dimensional “bread”

*“Give us today our  
daily bread.” (Matt. 6:11)*

**T**he Lord's Prayer is the best and most powerful way for believers to stay intimately connected to our heavenly Father. Prayer gets God's attention and brings faith, faith opens doors that lead to obedience, obedience brings determination and determination brings achievement.

In this prayer, for the first time, Jesus authorizes his disciples to call his Father, their Father. In the sequence of the prayer, Jesus tells the disciples to share their needs with their Father.

Why does Jesus include daily bread in the Lord's Prayer? What does this mean to you and me? I see three dimensions to our daily bread—physical, social and spiritual—that provide a holistic approach to the gospel.

First is the physical dimension. Bread is an essential part of daily living. Daily bread keeps us healthy and strong and restores our energy. The human body's well-being depends on good balanced nutrition. Our physical bodies are important. The Bible refers to the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Daily bread also has a social dimension. I have noticed in most gatherings, Christian or non-Christian, that food keeps the gathering going. The first miracle of our Lord Jesus—turning water into wine—happens at a gathering (John 2:1-11). Later, after a long day of teaching, Jesus asks his disciples to feed the crowd and another miracle happens with two fish and five loaves of bread (Luke 9:13).

Jesus rewards those who feed the hungry and take care of the materially poor (Matt. 25:35-40). What good is it

when you see your brother or your sister in need and you tell them "God bless you," without meeting their need? You see the need, you meet the need.

Then there is the spiritual dimension. After you have given God thanks and prayed for the kingdom, then you can ask for your personal needs and make your personal supplications. God is committed to providing for his children daily. It's important to note that all requests before God must be backed up by his word. The word of God is our strong reason in prayer. When we remind him in our prayers of what his word says, he rises up and honors his word in our lives.

I intentionally put this dimension at the end to bring attention to the holistic approach of the gospel. After 40 days of fasting, Jesus says to Satan that humans do not live by bread alone, "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). Here Jesus gives us the secret of how to stay connected to our heavenly Father—through his Word. The Bible has many promises. We must unveil them to keep the church, our families and nations connected to God.

You cannot give what you don't have; you cannot teach what you do not know. Father, give us today our daily Word, we pray. The kingdom first and the rest will be given to us.

*Henri Ngolo attends Christian Center The Hand of God, a USMB church in Hamilton, Ohio. Until December 31, 2023, he was the USMB Integrated Immigrant Ministries coordinator.*

# Show us, God

*“Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12)*

As we look at the words, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,” notice that this phrase comes after the sentence, “Give us this day our daily bread.” The order is important. It would be just like us to think that we must first be clean before God in order to receive what we need. By placing a request for needs before our need to be forgiven, Jesus is saying something so gracious about the nature of God. God cares for us even as we are not fully sanctified.

Despite the order of the phrases, the need to be clean before God is essential. To live in freedom from guilt and shame is absolutely vital to our life in Christ, both for personal joy and also in terms of what we convey to the world around us about how good life in Christ can be. We receive forgiveness as we acknowledge Jesus’ work on the cross. Yet, as is the case when Jesus washes the disciples’ feet, Peter learns that while he was “already clean” he still needs additional cleansing.

There’s something so important about our posture of honesty before God regarding our failings and our openness to God searching our hearts (Psalm 139). We all have blind spots and are not always self-aware. Show us, God! While we can be aware of things we have done, the Spirit can also convict us of things that we have not done. As I get older, there seem to be more sins of omission than commission.

Personally, I have been praying the Lord’s Prayer daily at noon for several years now. It gives me intentional time and space to reflect on my heart. When I get to this

phrase, I consider the morning that has just passed and the afternoon that is coming up. Regularly addressing our need for forgiveness cultivates a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s conviction and humility that we walk out in our life with God and others.

Note that this language is corporate. “Forgive *us* as we...” It’s likely that our tendency is to read this individually. And yet, there is a reality of corporate life in the body of Christ, honesty and vulnerability with each other, receiving and extending forgiveness with each other. The intense individualism promoted by our culture leaves lots of room for us to grow in this area. Show us, God!

Lastly, the request in the prayer is that we be forgiven *as we forgive others*. (This reminds me of “love your neighbor as yourself.”) There is a presumption in Jesus’s teaching here that the experience and enormity of being forgiven by God is something that so transforms us that we will then naturally extend that to others in the same way.

As in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18), to be forgiven by God and not be forgiving of others makes absolutely no sense in the kingdom of God. To have ongoing bitterness and unforgiveness in our hearts toward another or God is inconceivable for the follower of Jesus. We can remind ourselves of Jesus’ posture on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Show us, God!

*Stephen Humber is a regional mobilizer with Multiply, the North American MB mission agency.*

# When we face temptation

*“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matt. 6:13)*

**J**esus, teach us to pray.” This is the request that the disciples have for Jesus. They come to their master because they see the importance of prayer. As followers of Jesus, they want instructions on how they ought to pray. Jesus gives them a prayer that has become a guideline for the church.

This prayer assures us that our Father loves us and wants to have a personal relationship with us. This prayer is an invitation to open our hearts before our Father, and verse 13 speaks about our need for the Father when we face temptations.

Every follower of Jesus faces temptation. We need to be honest and humble about the different temptations that we face in our lives. Jesus experienced temptations in his life, and he conquered those temptations. When the disciples approach Jesus with their request to teach them how to pray, Jesus includes this important area of his followers’ spiritual lives.

The book of Hebrews teaches that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Jesus knows from experience that we are going to face temptation because the evil one—Satan, the enemy of God—is always trying to destroy our lives. Jesus understands our weakness and is teaching this principle to his disciples and us. Let us not ignore temptation and forget to pray about those temptations that daily chase us.

It is not God but our carnal desires that lead us to temptation, according to James 1:12-15. God will provide an escape. When we pray about our temptations, we acknowledge our need and dependence on God. Just like a small kid yells for help from his dad when he cannot reach the cookie jar, we can cry out to God to help with the temptations in our lives.

Because God loves us, he is faithful and will deliver us. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul writes, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

The amazing part of this passage is that we have a faithful God who is always caring for us in the middle of our weaknesses. But what is the “escape” that God is going to provide? I believe that prayer is one way that God offers an escape when we are facing temptations. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray about temptations as a way to escape.

Jesus died for our sins, and he is the ultimate escape from all temptations because he conquered sin on the cross. We are victorious in him. The more time we spend in communion with our Father through prayer the more we will be able to endure those temptations. We will be ready to cry out to our Father for help to keep our lives holy and to enjoy the relationship that we have in him through his son, Jesus.

*Daniel Rodriguez is the Central District Conference minister.*



## Sufficient grace

Trials bring us closer to God

Several months ago, my husband, Tim, and I were talking to our son, who said something that blew me away. He said, "Mom, in all my life I don't ever remember a time that you have not been in pain." My son is 24 years old and married with our first grandchild. My 27-year-old daughter said the same thing.

I cope with many medical conditions. Most days I wake up thinking God's grace is sufficient no matter how much pain I am in. I say "most" days, not "all" days, because I am human and like everyone else, I still have my pity parties with God.

In November 2021 I almost died from carbon dioxide poisoning. I struggle with heart failure, my right diaphragm is paralyzed and I have had seven back surgeries. I have degenerative disk disease, which is a condition where a damaged disk causes severe nerve pain in my legs and foot, and I have had many concussions from falling.

Last summer Tim and I endured the biggest trial we have ever faced, and that is saying a tremendous amount given my background. My numbers were bad enough with my conditions to go onto hospice. My husband and I and our children prayed about this and felt that this was the right deci-

sion, so I went off my BiPAP machine, which takes the carbon dioxide out of my lungs. Our daughter came for the month of July, and our son and family came to say goodbye. My husband and I were at total peace with our decision because, like Tim told me, this was not the end; it was just the beginning of a new journey for us. Tim would work right next to me, and my daughter and son would come hug me and hold my hand.

At the end of August, a miracle took place! My heart failure numbers improved, and my carbon dioxide levels went back to normal, allowing me to "graduate" from hospice.

I still have health issues and definitely need prayer daily. I am thankful for the trials that God allows me to go through, though maybe not in the middle of them, because trials bring us closer to God.

My favorite verses are 1 Peter 5:10-11, which says, "The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, strengthen and support you after you have suffered a little while. To him be dominion forever. Amen." (CSB)

These verses reminds me that no matter how much I have to suffer, God will strengthen and support me. People will ask me how I am doing on a bad day when I am experiencing level 10 pain, and I tell them, "I am alive and well and God's Spirit lives within me." I don't need to complain about my problems. I need to point every-

thing to my Jesus because Jesus is our hope and strength. I am so thankful that I am blessed to be called a child of the one true King.

**I need to point everything to my Jesus because Jesus is our hope and strength.**



**Mary Hall** is a pastor's wife, mother and grandmother. She and her husband, Tim, have been married for 28 years and live in Butterfield, Minn., where Tim pastors Butterfield Community Bible Church.

## Prayer rhythms

Connecting with God,  
one another

When I was 23, I moved across the country, a full day's drive away from my family of origin. To combat my homesickness, my mom and I developed a routine. Every Monday night, I'd sit out on the balcony of our apartment, pull out my phone and call my mom. We'd settle in for a long chat, catching up on the ins and outs of family life, the questions we'd each been pondering, the things God had been teaching us, the little dramas and escapades of our friends and family. This regular rhythm of life was balm for my lonely soul.

Now that I have children of my own, I see how developing good family prayer rhythms and routines has helped to connect our oft-weary souls with our loving Creator. In the same way that my mom and I developed a routine to strengthen our connection, our family has routines of prayer that provide regular points of connection with God. We pray together in the morning to start our home-school day. We pray together before meals. We pray before bed.

Sometimes our prayers sound similar: We thank God for various blessings and lift up prayer requests that are close to our hearts. We take turns praying

aloud, with varying levels of eloquence or giggling. However, all these prayer moments are beating out a rhythm for my kids: trust God, talk to him, he loves you. Trust God, talk to him, he loves you.

Perhaps this doesn't seem all that earth-shattering. However, in a world in which so much of our inner lives take place in online spaces instead of out loud and together, I think it's worth some reflection: Are we making space to talk to God together in our families?

Several strategies have helped my family find some level of success. First, we pray out loud and we take turns. Of course, each of us has our own prayer life as well, but coming together, stumbling through the words, dealing with awkward pauses and malapropisms helps us to agree together in prayer and to hear the concerns of one another's heart.

Secondly, we use books of liturgy (Douglas McKelvey's *Every Moment Holy* is a great one) and prayer templates such as the Lord's Prayer as tools to help provide a framework for our thoughts or to help us express ourselves in a clear, coherent and beautiful way when the well of language runs dry. We don't ask our children to memorize poems and recite them at prayer time. We are talking to our personal, loving Creator, and we want our kids to know that and to begin developing a desire for a relationship with him from an early age.

Our good Father wants to connect with us, and the great news

is, it's never too late to begin. Whether a regular routine of prayer is something your family has had for years or whether it is totally new and a bit daunting, you can begin to "approach the throne of grace with confidence," as Hebrews 4:16 exhorts. Building this rhythm into your days together will not only help draw you closer to one another, but more importantly it will create a beautiful habit of connecting with our life-giving Savior.

**...I see how developing good family prayer rhythms and routines has helped to connect our oft-weary souls with our loving Creator.**



**Kayla Traver**  
is family pastor at  
Cornerstone Church  
in Topeka, Kan.

## A balanced diet

Can Christians use social media wisely?

**D**uring Wednesday night gatherings in my church's youth group, students and leaders are encouraged to verbally ask, write down or text questions (that are on topic) to think about together. We inquire about the passage of Scripture at hand and further define our theology, but we mostly contemplate normal aspects of teenage life: listening to music, watching YouTube videos, participating on social media. Our teens want to discern how Christians can wisely engage with media.

The Bible does not speak directly about mass communication through news channels or include stories that demonstrate how Jesus interacted on social media platforms. We can't look up "podcast" in a concordance. However, Scripture can still help us seek wisdom for our current age just as it has for generations before us. In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus tells his followers, "You are the salt of the earth. ... You are the light of the world." He encourages us in all aspects of life to "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

J.L. Martin, USMB social media coordinator, believes we can be salt and light while engaging with media. He sees great benefits for churches and individuals

as we connect with people all over the world using technology. This is an era in history when we can easily reach out to others and stay up-to-date on important and profound events. "People are on social media all the time...let's use it in a positive way!"

Martin points out the beauty of experiencing life "in the 'right now'" and having direct access to pray with and for people, share encouragement and get free publicity for our churches and organizations.

Martin and others also believe we need to use caution in the media process. In my conversations, older adults seem more concerned about media content ("Is this an enriching Facebook post?") while younger generations are more skeptical of media sources ("Is this a credible news outlet?"). Both are valid concerns. Author and media advocate Eli Pariser asks internet users to be aware of what he coined "filter bubbles"—algorithms that provide individualized online content based on browsing history and location—that can prioritize unhelpful subject matter and skewed information.

"Instead of a balanced information diet, you can end up with information junk food," Pariser warns in his 2011 TED talk, "Beware Online 'Filter Bubbles.'" His advice is still being shared a decade later.

Using media wisely also means increased accountability. Families and friends can discern together when and how to connect with the larger world in a Christlike way. A student acknowledged that talking to their parents about

what they see and post on social media is sometimes "awkward," but it helps them make better decisions. As part of their fight against human trafficking and protecting vulnerable people, Central Valley Justice Coalition in Fresno, Calif., offers resources for online safety and provides practical tools to help children and adults make wise media-related choices.

Whenever and however we engage with media, consider this question from J.L. Martin: "How are we representing Jesus to unbelievers and the unchurched in our world?" The means of mass communication has and will change over time, but our instruction to follow Jesus will not. If our words and actions—even viewed on a screen—point people to who Jesus is, it is an invitation to be salt and light as we positively and cautiously use media to process life together.



**Caitlin Friesen**, a graduate of Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, is married to Ben Friesen and is part of Cornerstone Community Church in Topeka, Kan.

## Serving in solidarity

USMB pastor provides shelter and provisions for Portland immigrants

**T**hree brothers sleep in Lawum Kayamba's office in Portland, Maine.

With city shelters overflowing from an influx of asylum seekers, Kayamba allows people to stay temporarily in his office—as many as eight at a time—knowing the landlord may revoke access to the space.

"Sometimes the social services (at the family shelter) will call me in the middle of the night and say, 'Pastor, we have a family here outside,'" says Kayamba, who has also opened his home for families to sleep. "You look at the situation (and say), 'What can I do?' and then try to help."

The brothers in Kayamba's office are just some of the hundreds of immigrants coming to Maine's largest city.

Eighteen years ago, Kayamba was one of them.

"Because I'm an immigrant myself, I can relate to those people," Kayamba says. "This is why I began to help because I went through (it) myself. I knew war, lack of food, lack of clothing. I share the same experience as them."

The pastor of Disciples International Christian Church (DICC), Kayamba serves Portland's immigrant community by helping with interpretation, transportation and more, in addition to pastoring and working full time.

### From DRC to the U.S.

Born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kayamba hid in the bush with his family to escape the violence of civil war for three years as a child in the 1960s. Mennonite Central Committee



Pastor Lawum Kayamba (right) receives relief supplies provided in October 2023 by Mennonite Central Committee for about 30 families who arrived unprepared for their first winter in Portland, Maine. *Photo by Andrew Bodden/MCC.*

brought Kayamba and others to safety in Kikwit, the location of the MB church office in DRC, and Kayamba later dedicated his life to serve God following his miraculous healing from a serious illness.

With MB church support, Kayamba attended seminary at Kinshasa Evangelical School of Theology. He earned master's degrees in theology from the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology in the Central African Republic and the School of Theology at the University of Natal in South Africa. His ministry in DRC has included planting Ville Basse MB Church in Kikwit, teaching New Testament and Greek in Kinshasa and helping translate the Bible to his hometown language of Kituba.

In 2004, Kayamba's knowledge of English led to an invitation to translate for a U.S.-based organization's church planting conference in DRC, and in 2005, that organization invited him to San Diego, Calif., for a similar opportunity. Kayamba agreed, unaware that civil war back home would make it impossible for him to return to DRC.

For two years, Kayamba was separated from his wife, Suzanna, and their seven children. In 2006, he applied for and received asylum in the U.S., where he settled in Maine after stints in Connecticut and Ohio.

Kayamba's family came to the U.S. in 2007, and they made their home in Portland, where Kayamba had already been connecting with immigrants. In 2010, they planted



DICC, which he describes as a refugee church of 100-150 people. Today, in addition to pastoring and working in health care as a direct support professional, Kayamba trains pastors, trains immigrants to work in health care and continues to serve the immigrant community.

### Portland: A popular place

The city of Portland is a popular destination for immigrants—the term includes refugees and asylum seekers—thanks to its General Assistance and Resettlement programs offering vouchers, housing assistance, casework services and other resources.

“There are many people coming now to Maine because the social services are very good,” Kayamba says. “People hear about Maine even from Texas.”

According to Ruben Torres, communications and policy lead for the Portland-based Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition (MIRC), Portland has as many as 3,000 asylum seekers and 1,000 refugees, but numbers are difficult to verify. Both refugees and asylum seekers have fled their home countries to escape persecution, but while refugees have already received protection under international law, asylum seekers arrive at the border intending to apply for such protection.

Portland has in the past 10 years primarily welcomed asylum seekers from the U.S.’s southern border. Maine has been popular with asylum seekers because of its proximity to Canada, whose favorable asylum laws were appealing to those whose cases may be rejected in the U.S. However, the expansion of the Safe Third Country Agreement between the U.S. and Canada in March 2023 prevents asylum seekers from crossing into Canada from the U.S. unless they qualify for an exception.

The city of Portland operates two shelters, but in 2023, an uptick in ar-

rivals exacerbated a housing shortage. Around 1,650 asylum seekers relocated to Portland between January and October 2023, says Portland’s director of communications and digital services Jessica Grondin in an Oct. 20 email. The city temporarily sheltered 300 people in the Portland Exposition Building, as it had in 2019, then contracted with three nearby hotels to house families.

“We had so many people come into our city that it overwhelmed the resources that we had,” Torres says, adding that MIRC and other organizations have come together to find a housing solution with plans for additional shelters underway.

One reason it is difficult for asylum seekers to afford things like housing and a lawyer, Kayamba says, is that it can take six months or more to receive a work permit. It takes even longer to receive asylum.

Part of the backlog, Torres says, is lack of funding and lack of federal judges and attorneys.

“In the state of Maine, we have something like 13 attorneys who can legally represent people,” Torres says.

Some members of Kayamba’s congregation applied for asylum in 2014 and still have not received anything but a work permit, he says.

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"The system is full, and people keep coming," Kayamba says. "I don't know what will happen."

Kayamba does what he can to help, assisting immigrants with shopping and appointments, taking the bus and interpreting at the immigration office in Boston. In the past, Kayamba served as liaison for 40 families housed in a Freeport hotel.

In 2021, the city awarded Kayamba a certificate of recognition as part of its Natural Helpers Leadership Program.

### Helping hands

In late October, a team from Menonite Central Committee drove from

Pennsylvania to Portland to assess needs and bring relief supplies, including winter clothing for about 30 families who arrived unprepared for their first winter in Portland, hygiene kits, 150 to 200 comforters and more than 1,000 cans of meat.

According to Andrew Bodden, MCC East Coast program director, the contingent delivered aid to DICC and walked through the neighborhood, noting construction of an apartment complex nearby and the gentrification happening as a result.

Bodden says he saw people facing challenges from lack of financial and housing resources.

"Despite this situation, people are friendly, happy and welcoming," he says, adding that MCC is continuing to engage, with possible future opportunities for peace education, immigration law training and participation in the Summer Service program for young adults of color.

Kayamba helps where he can and serves without complaint, Bodden says.

"The pastor role is not the same (in an immigrant setting)," Bodden says. "In a white setting, the pastor is the preacher. Sometimes the pastor has an associate pastor or a pastor of pastoral care, a visiting pastor, a youth pastor. In immigrant settings, the pastor does everything. The pastor is the chauffeur. The pastor is the counselor. The pastor is the psychiatrist. The pastor is a taxi driver. That's the role of Pastor Kayamba, and on top of this, he has a full-time job."

For Kayamba, the work is personal.

"I remember all the trauma we went through," he says. "These people don't come only because they like America, but there are real problems that they are facing like sexual violence and civil war. Politically it's a problem, but as Christians, the Bible is asking us to welcome the foreigners."

"We remember that people came from Europe and other places the same way these guys are coming," Kayamba says. "Biblically and theologically, I think that God is bringing mission here, too. Most (immigrants) are Christian. They are coming to revitalize our churches, to revitalize the kingdom of God." —*Janae Rempel*

For more about the resettlement process, read this resource article: <https://christianleadermag.com/a-refugees-journey/>



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## Moore, Foddrell to share EDC minister role

Moore to travel, represent EDC while Foddrell works locally

James Moore and Darrin Foddrell, both of Lenoir, N.C., are sharing the responsibilities of the Eastern District Conference minister, following the retirement of previous district minister Terry Hunt.

Beginning in January 2024, Moore intends to attend district and national meetings and do most of the traveling since he is retired and has more free time, while Foddrell will work locally with the churches and on updating the EDC bylaws.

"Both James and Darrin desire to connect the EDC more robustly with USMB and other districts while leading a very diverse group of churches," Hunt says.

Moore, who began serving in this new role Oct. 1, 2023, has served as pastor of West End MB Church in Lenoir for the past three years. He has two children and one granddaughter.

"James Moore has a heart for pastoral leadership and walking beside leaders," Hunt says. "He has a passion for churches to grow deeper into discipleship and spiritual transformation."

Moore holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in Christian ministry, both from Liberty University. He anticipates graduating from The Urban Ministry Institute in 2024.

A retired police officer, Moore served more than 28 years with the city of Lenoir as a Sergeant over the school resource officers, community officer and the traffic unit.

Before joining the USMB family, Moore served as associate pastor at Christ Church of Lenoir. He has also filled other areas of ministry, including Sunday school teacher, deacon and youth leader.

"In this new role as district minister I am looking forward to going to visit all the churches in the EDC and working alongside the USMB family," Moore says.

Darrin Foddrell will begin his work with the district in January 2024. He has served in education for 29 years, currently as an assistant high school principal. He has also served on the USMB Leadership Board for one and a half years.

"Darrin Foddrell strongly desires to lead the EDC into a new and exciting area of developing young leaders and church multiplication," Hunt says.

Foddrell holds a bachelor's degree in math and science education from Appalachian State University, and a master's degree in school administration and an education specialist degree in school leadership, both from Gardner-Webb University.

"I am excited about being a district minister, as I will have the opportunity to help with leadership training (and) building solid relationships between Eastern District churches, help cast visions for individual churches and our district and help remind everyone of why we do what we do: to be servants to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ," Foddrell says.

Foddrell and his wife, Carrie, have been married for 27 years and have two teenage sons, Camdyn and Micah. The Foddrells have served as co-youth pastors at The Life Center in Lenoir for five years.—*Janae Rempel*



**"I am looking forward to going to visit all the churches...and working alongside the USMB family."**

**- James Moore**



**"I am excited about being a district minister...to help with leadership training (and) building solid relationships..."**

**-Darrin Foddrell**



## Church celebrates 75 years with a gift for its city

Community center connects neighbors, combats poverty in Visalia, Calif. neighborhood

For 17 years, members of Neighborhood Church in Visalia, Calif., have worked to build relationships with the families of Houston Elementary School, located about three and a half miles from the church building.

Soon, however, the church plans to “stop commuting” and have a more permanent physical presence in the neighborhood they love to serve.

Neighborhood Church and its new nonprofit organization, Neighborhood Degree, are working toward building a community center adjacent to the school that will facilitate a growing number of programs and ministries.

Stephanie Benthin, CEO of the nonprofit, began serving the Houston Elementary neighborhood as the church’s missional strategist in 2008 after receiving a master’s degree in social work.

“The job combined my two loves: my love for Jesus, and his way of loving the world, which I felt was so much at the heart of social work,” says Benthin.

The neighborhood surrounding Houston Elementary has a high rate of poverty and a large immigrant population. In the beginning, church members focused on building trust with the community and meeting physical needs, such as providing coats, shoes and school supplies to students. They helped build a public park next to the school, held family events such as carnivals and movie nights and had ongoing conversations with school staff and parents about how to best serve the neighborhood.

“This last year we really started talking about how there’s this huge burden of poverty across the board,”



Volunteers from Neighborhood Church and its new nonprofit Neighborhood Degree put on a Trunk-or-Treat event in October for the Houston Elementary neighborhood. Photo by Neighborhood Church

Benthin says. “It just permeates everything.”

She explains that poverty affects everything from a person’s health to educational attainment to social relationships.

She and volunteers from the church began thinking of ways to focus on lifting the children of the neighborhood out of generational poverty.

In 2020, they began a mentorship program for former Houston Elementary students who are now in high school, to partner them one-on-one with someone from the church to

help walk them through the process of applying to college or trade school, as well as learn life skills such as budgeting and getting a driver’s license. More than 30 students who participated in the program have gone on to college and another 32 are currently involved.

Lead Pastor Forrest Jenan explains that the church has always used either outdoor spaces or spaces inside the elementary school for their ministry in the neighborhood. Lack of transportation is a common barrier that can prevent residents from com-



ing to the church's building for events, but volunteers also do not want residents to feel pressure to attend their church in order to be in relationship with them.

"We're doing this because we want to love our neighbors whether or not they ever believe what we believe, or come to our church or not," Benthin says. "If you come to our church, you're always welcome, and if you never come, then our relationship stays the same."

However, they found they were somewhat handicapped by the lack of their own building in the neighborhood, especially when COVID-19 restrictions made it virtually impossible to hold events in public spaces.

"(COVID) spearheaded a conversation that had always been in the background, of what it would be to have a space," Jenan says. At the same time, "Stephanie and her team's vision for what they wanted to do kept exceeding what Neighborhood Church all by itself could really fund. So that was the other catalyst to launching a nonprofit."

As Neighborhood Church celebrated its 75th birthday in 2023, the leadership and congregation decided they wanted to give a gift to their city of Visalia: the community center.

"We looked at 75 years of Neighborhood Church history when we celebrated our birthday, but then we said, 'We don't think God's done with us yet. Our work is still unfinished,'" Jenan says.

The church began a capital campaign titled "Unfinished" in part to fund the building of the center, as well as other projects. They put in a bid on Nov. 17 to purchase land on the same block as the school and hope to officially own the land by February 2024.

Neighborhood Degree was approved as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in May 2023, and was also awarded a grant of more than \$1 million over five years from the California Department of Education.

The nonprofit's mission statement is "connecting neighbors to learn together and expand networks to end poverty."

"What the research tells us is that education and resources are key to help people move out of poverty, but actually the biggest thing is their social network," Benthin says. "We want this neighborhood to become a place that is safe and empowering

for kids and families. It's not just handing out acts of charity, but really deep relationships and love for people."

Benthin says she and her team have partnered with the parents and students of Houston Elementary in discussions about their vision for the community center.

"They've really been part of the process," Benthin says. "Having this physical space demonstrates that we are here for you and we're not going anywhere. This is our place; this is something we built together."

—Jessica Vix Allen



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## Minnesota church to build center that serves community

Basketball court, multipurpose area with kitchen will be included

Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church in Ogema, Minn., was established 75 years ago as a mission church on the White Earth Indian Reservation. The diverse congregation of 100 or so swells when summertime guests arrive to this lake country. Today's congregation remains focused on the needs of its neighbors and community as they build an event center on adjacent land.

"Families have gathered, worshipped, and grown together here," says member Pat Swiers. "One thing that's been enjoyed together is a small basketball court outside the church building. A lot of community folks bring their families. That sparked the idea to build something for our church and community that would be faith-based, multi-use and year-around."

An indoor venue is vital during northern Minnesota's harsh winters. The planned 52-foot by 82-foot building has 20-foot sidewalls to accommodate an indoor basketball court and multipurpose area. A third of the building will have bathrooms and a kitchen, with a large upper-level meeting room.

"We want this to be a gathering place for anyone who is part of the community at any time," Swiers says. "The emphasis will be on the fact that it's for the community, and a goal is to have it perceived that way."

Initial fundraising by the church has been transferred to a newly formed nonprofit, Connections 34, named for the highway alongside the church and event center.

"This is a remote area; there are not a lot of places for anyone to go," says Eden Baer, treasurer of Connections 34, whose board includes indi-



Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church has begun work on a community center that will provide a year-round location for community activities including basketball. *Photo by Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church*

viduals from both the church and the community. "Connections 34 has a 50-year lease on the property."

According to Swiers, excitement within the Native American community is growing as they realize they can meet here with freedom to share their Christian faith, something that is becoming more restricted on the reservation.

One of Swiers' Native American friends says, "Our neighbors are in need of a place to gather that will allow unity in the body of Christ."

For Strawberry Lake's bi-vocational pastor, Justin Swiers, son of Pat Swiers, the event center provides a new way to spread the same message.

"This project means a new way to make the community feel comfortable with us and let them be part of

our lives as we try to be part of their lives," Justin Swiers says. "Our hope is that this project will be an encouragement for people to interact in a new way with the church, and that it will connect us in ways we didn't even expect."

The C34 Mission Statement says it well: "A faith-based community outreach that seeks to glorify the Lord in service to others while focusing on building meaningful relationships."

Property arrangements are final, tree removal and initial dirt work is complete and a website is being established.

Arrangements have been made with MB Foundation to receive donations for the project ([www.mbfoundation.com/givetconnections34](http://www.mbfoundation.com/givetconnections34)).

—Elaine McAlister

## Registration for LEAD Cohorts is open

LEAD Cohorts offer education, encouragement in group setting

USMB continues to come alongside our local Mennonite Brethren churches, serving in many ways to help maximize each church's full ministry potential. One of the LEAD initiatives that has been well received and has provided significant resourcing for hundreds of people is LEAD Cohorts.

LEAD Cohorts are online meeting places of small groups of MB pastors and ministry leaders, including many who are lay leaders in their churches. It's about meeting with like-minded people who are striving to follow Jesus well, learning new things together, sharing life experiences with one another and being encouraged within a group setting.

Claassen has been a regular cohort leader and will lead another this spring.

"[God] used the LEAD Cohort as time to teach, equip and encourage me," says one cohort participant. "As a result, I have seen my faith increase. Two words to describe my experience: Disciple awakened!"

LEAD Cohorts are meant to make a significant difference in people's lives. Although cohorts provide solid training and growth, it's also rewarding to simply connect with others, perhaps someone a thousand miles away.

"My participation in two different cohorts has allowed me to get to know pastors from other parts of the

ter" tab or send an email to Janae Rempel (admin@usmb.org). Tell her which cohort you'd like to take part in, and she'll get you set up—it's that easy. Promotional emails will also be sent out in January that provide for easy registration.

USMB National Director Don Morris says, "We're providing a lot of variety in these cohorts, including ones in Spanish and Amharic for Ethiopian leaders. And for the first time, we plan to offer a cohort for worship leaders this spring."

When Morris first began exploring offering cohorts several years ago, he was rebuffed.

"The people I spoke with about offering cohorts didn't think it would fly," he says. "I spoke to the wrong people. I then decided we were going to see where it went and if it didn't work at least we had tried. But the response has been amazing and hopefully the benefit for those participating has been genuinely fulfilling. One thing I've noticed at our conventions, people who've been in cohorts together already have a connection and can then develop that relationship even further. We often say that USMB is like a family. I think LEAD Cohorts fit right in with who we are."

Whether it's *Praying Scripture Over Our Kids*, *Teaching Apologetics*, *Leading Through Uncertain Times*, *Youth Ministry Realities*, የኢትዮጵያ ቤተክርስቲያን መጋቢዎችና መሪዎች - ሳሙኤል አሰፋ, *La descripción general del Nuevo Testamento*, or *A Group About Nothing for Those Who Want to Talk About Something*, there's a spot in a LEAD Cohort for you. There is no charge for participating in a cohort. Sign up at [www.usmb.org/leadcohorts](http://www.usmb.org/leadcohorts).—USMB

“

**We often say that USMB is like a family.  
I think LEAD Cohorts fit right in with who we are.**

”

Typically, groups meet every two weeks via Zoom for about an hour. Groups are intended to have a relatively short life span of about three months. Cohorts kick off twice each year, usually in February and then a different lineup is offered in September.

Many cohort leaders have led groups several times.

"It's been a joy to lead a LEAD Cohort," says Chandelle Claassen, who is a life-coach. "Thanks for the opportunity to do it again."

country that I don't get to interact with on a regular basis," says one pastor. "I have valued the times when we have been able to share the joys, struggles and fears of ministry together and encourage and lift one another up."

The various cohorts being offered can be found on the USMB website—[www.usmb.org](http://www.usmb.org). Click on the *Resources* tab and then hit *LEAD Initiatives for Pastors and Churches*, then *LEAD Cohorts* on the right. To sign up, simply use the red "regis-

# Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel

## MILESTONES

### Baptism/Memberships

Nine people were baptized Dec. 3 at **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.**

Zayne Adolf, Jay Hernandez and Hadley Tate were baptized at **Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, Dec. 3.

Kyle Holdaway and Peyton Holdaway were baptized Dec. 3 at **South Mountain Community Church, Draper (Utah) Campus.** Kayle Richins, Kelsi Richins and Peyton Shane were baptized Nov. 26; Brodan Van Noord and Wesley Richins, Nov. 19; Stef Rocha and Tyler Robertson, Nov. 12; Maddie Augason, Nov. 5; and Trinity Gannaway and Laurel Ochareon, Oct. 29.

Two people were baptized at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, Nov. 26.

Vivian Coates, Brittany DeLeeuw and Boston DeLeeuw were baptized Nov. 19 at **Lakeview Church, Grantsville (Utah) Campus.**

Julian Barlow was baptized at **Lakeview Church, Stansbury Park (Utah) Campus,** Nov. 19.

Zoey Parnell, Zach Parnell and Emma Brown were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus,** Nov. 12. Bella Price was baptized Nov. 5.

Two people were baptized Oct. 29 at **SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Pierce Bevill, Ian Bevill, Elana Doty, Kaile Tripp, Austin Tripp and Amber West were baptized at **South Mountain**

### Community Church, Lehi (Utah) Campus.

Jim Ellison, Linda Ellison, Elaine Hanson, Ken Wolfert, Kate Wolfert, Justin Walters, Emily Walters and Isaac Immel were received as members at **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**

Eli Baker, Anna Baker, Nora Baker, Cameron Decker, Libby Deitrick, and Jesse Deitrick were baptized and/or received as new members into **New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla.**

Gabby Needham, Jamison Needham, Patrick Needham, Payton Needham, Lydia Morriss, Dominic Morriss, Elle and Dennis were baptized Sept. 10 at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**

Nicole York was received as a member at **Okeene (Okla.) MB Church** July 30. Jayce Schultz and Kalystah York were baptized May 14 and received as members May 21.

### Workers

Joshua Murrell was installed as associate pastor at **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, Dec. 3.

Mitchell Redondo concluded his service as outreach director at **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**

### Deaths

**Dick, Jane Lonette,** Denver, Colo., wife of a former MB pastor, Sept. 13, 1940—Oct. 22, 2023. Parents: John and Martha Lutt. Spouse: Mervin Dick (deceased). Children: Kevin, Kora Flaming; six grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

**Flaming, Bob Alvin, Sr.,** Fairbury, Neb., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., Oct. 30, 1933—Oct. 20, 2023. Parents: Albert and Marie Flaming. Spouse: Sara Ann. Children: Rachel, Saralyn, Victor Jr., Bob Jr.; eight grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

**Glanzer, Susan Marie,** Huron, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., Feb. 15, 1929—Nov. 14, 2023. Parents: Zack M. and Susie (Stahl) Hofer. Spouse: Pierre H. Glanzer (deceased). Children: Richard, Myra Smidt, Corwyn, Curt; nine grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

**Heinrichs, Velma Jean,** Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, Sept. 13, 1935—Nov. 26, 2023. Parents: Isaac and Lena Sawatzky. Spouse: Willard Heinrichs (deceased). Children: Douglas, Roxane Paone, Karla; four grandchildren.

**Hofer, Doris,** Visalia, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, March 17, 1929—Oct. 10, 2023. Parents: Adolph Henry and Adelene (Becker) Unruh. Spouse: Clarence Hofer (deceased). Children: Barbara Fels, Norma Hamm, Sandy Harper, Doug, Patti Roeske; 10 grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

**Kroeker, Jeanette Audrey,** Omaha, Neb., member of Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Feb. 26, 1941—Oct. 11, 2023. Parents: Jacob A. and Mary M. (Goossen) Klaassen. Spouse: Paul Kroeker. Children: Kim Getsee, Greg; five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

**Lutt, Opal,** Minot, N.D., charter member of Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, Oct. 23, 1928—Oct. 1, 2023. Parents: Cicero and Alma (Nelson) Van-

nett. Spouse: Arthur Lutt. Children: Patricia Froese, Arthur Jr., Dorothy Doerksen; nine grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

**Merrick, Karen L.,** Enid, Okla., member of Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., Oct. 25, 1939—Sept. 2, 2023. Parents: George and Lena Eby. Spouse: Charles Merrick. Children: Michael (deceased), Patrick, Christina; six grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren.

**Morgan, Wynona,** Clovis, Calif., North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Feb. 19, 1932—Sept. 20, 2023. Parents: Delbert and Mary Elva (Foster) English. Spouse: William Morgan (deceased). Children: Eddie, Kelly, Mark, Page, Carol (deceased); seven grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

**Nachtigall, Ed,** Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 27, 1927—Oct. 25, 2023. Parents: Henry and Elizabeth (Regier) Nachtigall. Spouse: Bonnie. Children: Kelly, Terry, Gerald, Marcia Frank; eight grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

**Penner, Reno LaVern,** Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Dec. 2, 1933—Nov. 6, 2023. Parents: Jacob and Elizabeth (Reddig) Penner. Spouse: Edith Eitzen.

**Peters, Sarah,** Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Oct. 3, 1929—Oct. 13, 2023. Parents: John and Sara (Reimer) Doerksen. Spouse: Jonie Peters (deceased). Children: Ron, Dottie Moody, Ed; eight grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren.

**Reimer, Delmer James,** Hesston, Kan., active member of churches in Hillsboro, Wichita and Hesston, June 1, 1929—Oct. 31, 2023. Parents: Pete



and Agatha Reimer. Spouse: Geraldine Louise Toews. Children: Timothy, Mark, Steven, Paul; 12 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren.

**Reimer, Luetta**, Fresno, Calif., member of Butler Church, Fresno, Aug. 26, 1944—Oct. 28, 2023. Parents: Sam and Bertha Feil. Spouse: Wilbert Reimer. Children: Elaine, Paul; five grandchildren.

**Reimer, Marjorie**, Corn, Okla., member of Corn MB Church, July 31, 1929—Oct. 26, 2023. Parents: Fred and Millie Moritz. Spouse: Verno Reimer (deceased). Children: Vern, Lucille Penner, Delmer; five grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

**Schellenberg, Arlene**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 3, 1934—Oct. 12, 2023. Parents: Herbert and Marie (Thiessen) Eitzen. Spouse: Richard Schellenberg. Children: Rick, Steven, Kevin, Suzanne Hoffman, Darrin; 12 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

**Schroeder, Nathan "Nate"**, Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Sept. 3, 1956—Nov. 15, 2023. Parents: Herb and Linda Prieb Schroeder. Spouse: Bonnie Janzen. Children: Natalie Chism, Cody, Emery, Valerie Classen; five grandchildren.

**Wall, Dorothy**, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 13, 1939—Oct. 12, 2023. Parents: John and Sarah (Enns) Schellenberg. Spouse: Carl Wall (deceased). Children: Brenda Neufeld, Denise Thiessen, Jackie Clothier; nine grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

**Warkentin, Doris**, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 19, 1937—Dec. 2, 2023. Parents: Henry and Clara (Fast) Kliever. Spouse: Stanley Warkentin (deceased). Children: Don, Laura Lee (deceased), Duane (deceased), Jeff, Karl; 13 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren.

## REACHING IN

### Discipleship

**House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.**, provided a video seminar on parenting.

### Fellowship

More than 100 people attended a "Friendsgiving" feast at **Greenhouse Community Church, Saratoga Springs, Utah**.

Women from **Hesston (Kan.) MB Church** attended a gift exchange and salad supper Nov. 30.

People from **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, did a "Turkey Trot" Nov. 23.

Women from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, made macrame ornaments Nov. 19.

**Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif.**, hosted a tamale-making class Nov. 18.

People from **Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**, met in homes for a meal Nov. 5.

**Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Minn.**, held a "Brunch Sunday" Oct. 29, a new fifth-Sunday event including food, song requests, prayer, Scripture and a devotional.

People from four Omaha, Neb., MB churches: **Stony Brook Church, Faith Bible Church, Iglesia Agua Viva and Iglesia Manantial de Agua Viva** gathered Oct. 28 for a joint service with special guests from the Matthew Training Center in Mexico.

Women from **Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, had a Brush of Color sign-making event Oct. 27 and 28.

**Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, held a community Thanksgiving dinner Nov. 19.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, hosted a costume volleyball and BBQ event Oct. 18.

Seniors from **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, gathered for a soirée Oct. 21.

**Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash.**, women held a Chai and Pie event Nov. 4. The congregation gathered for 24 hours of prayer Oct. 26.

### Worship

**Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, partnered with Fresno Pacific University to host a night of worship Nov. 30.

### Celebrations

**Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D.**, celebrated the 80th birthday of its women's ministry with a party and meal Nov. 12, including encouraging people to dress in 1940s attire.

**Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, celebrated its fifth birthday in September 2023.

**South Mountain Community Church, Draper, Utah**, celebrated its 25th anniversary in October 2023.

## REACHING OUT

### Locally

**North Fresno (Calif.) Church** partnered with Fresno Area Community Enterprises to provide gifts for people in the community.

**SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan.**, collected a \$9,000 offering for a nonprofit serving mothers and babies. The congregation held a Christmas Family Fest Dec. 8.

People from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, delivered gifts to neighbors Dec. 9.

**New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla.**, volunteers made approximately 3,000 bierocks to sell at the Mennonite Relief Sale.

**Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, donated items for a Thanksgiving outreach dinner.

**Pine Acres Church, Weath-erford, Okla.**, donated money for Christmas gifts for teenage girls.

**North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, coordinated a gift-wrapping party for foster care children, Dec. 2 and 3.

**Women at Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, S.D.**, collected donations for winter clothes for people in need.

**Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**, hosted "Merry Christmas Bakersfield" Dec. 8 with hot cocoa, crafts, train rides, face painting and

## Church Life continued

food trucks. People brought jackets Dec. 3 for local outreach partners to distribute. The congregation raised funds for holiday gifts and meals for foster families.

**Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.,** prepared 125 Thanksgiving food baskets for community families.

**Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.,** hosted more than 250 people for its Thanksgiving Neighborhood Feast Nov. 15.

**Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Minn.,** hosted "Small Church Sunday" October 22 to celebrate the benefits of small

faith communities. Normal attendance tripled for the event, which included a pancake lunch.

**Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.,** collected 38 hoodies to donate to Doorstep for local families.

**Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.,** prepared a "rest stop" for city police and first responders Oct. 21.

People from **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.,** and **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.,** did neighborhood cleanup Oct. 21.

### Globally

The **New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla.,** congregation packed 250 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child. Fifty-nine children attended vacation Bible school, and donations to the Children's Hunger fund provided 3,075 meals.

**North Fresno (Calif.) Church** collected items for MCC relief kits.

**Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.,** dedicated 295 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child (OCC) Nov. 19. Forty people from the congregation and community volunteered at the OCC processing center in Dallas, Nov. 24-26.

## Classifieds

### Local Church

**Youth Pastor/Campus Pastor:** Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., is seeking a full-time youth pastor/campus pastor. The church began Readyland Preschool in 1967. Today there are 300+ students on our church campus each day, from preschool through 8th grade. Primary responsibilities include: direct Junior High and High School ministries, train volunteer leaders and organize camps and mission trips. This person will also serve our school as a campus pastor, assisting in chapels and being available to teachers, classes and students for spiritual guidance. For a full job description, contact [www.heritagebible.us](http://www.heritagebible.us).

**Lead Pastor:** Koerner Heights Church in Newton, Kan., is searching for a lead pastor. Please find more information at [koernerheights.org/employment](http://koernerheights.org/employment) or email [frontdesk@koernerheights.org](mailto:frontdesk@koernerheights.org).

**Worship Director:** North Fresno Church, Fresno, Calif., is seeking a part-time (20 hours/week) worship director. Qualifications: bachelor's or master's degree in music or Christian ministry and more than two years of full-time experience in worship and music ministry. For more information and to apply, visit <https://northfresnochurch.org/jobs/> Email questions to [office@northfresnochurch.org](mailto:office@northfresnochurch.org)

**Children's Pastor:** North Fresno Church, Fresno, Calif., is searching for a full-time children's pastor to lead the congregation in passing along and sharing the way of Jesus with children in the church and community. There are currently 65 children birth to 6th grade involved in Sunday school and midweek programming. Qualifications: bachelor's degree in child development, social sciences, liberal arts, Christian ministry or related fields and two-plus years of active ministry in leading children. If interested send resume to [ChurchStaffing.Com](http://ChurchStaffing.Com), North Fresno Church, Fresno, CA. Full job description available upon request. Forward questions to: [cpsearch@northfresnochurch.org](mailto:cpsearch@northfresnochurch.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/>

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## A photograph of a modern church building at night. The building features a large, illuminated glass facade that reveals the interior. A prominent cross structure is visible on the left side of the building. The architecture is contemporary, with a mix of glass and solid wall sections. The scene is set against a dark blue night sky.

From building facilities to building the Kingdom, investment funds have assisted South Mountain Community Church in its growth from a church plant 25 years ago to more than 4,000 attendees on five campuses today. Praise God for what He is doing in Utah!



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