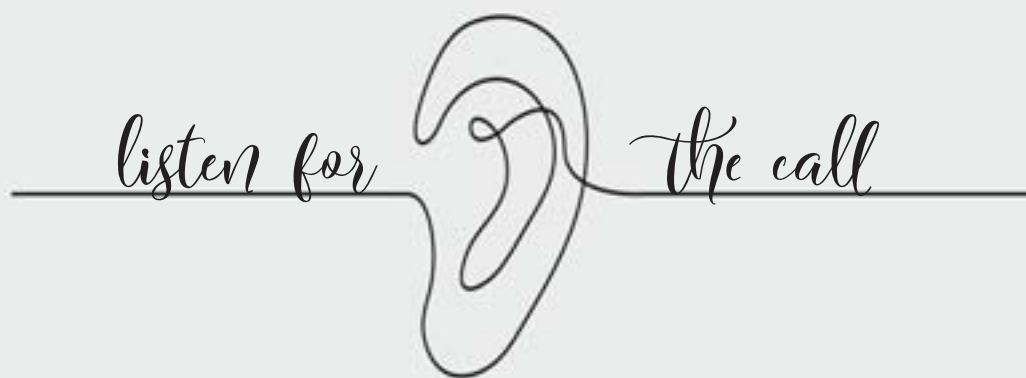


CHRISTIAN LEADER

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God calls all of us...to be his ambassadors living as faithful disciples in our families, neighborhoods and communities and using our gifts in a local church.

Ordinary people

God calls all of us

The first week of April, as this issue was being finalized, my father unexpectedly entered hospice and instead of living weeks, he lived days. As we reflected on his life, it became clear that Victor Jost was about three things: loving Jesus, his family and farming.

When my dad was a senior in high school, his father had a question for him. Was he interested in going to college? Dad was the youngest of five children, and I imagine my grandpa had asked his older children the same question. Three had chosen to attend Tabor College: Dad's two sisters and his oldest brother who also attended seminary. The brother closest to him in age had become a builder. When asked about his plans, my dad said he wasn't interested in college; he wanted to be a farmer.

For 76 years, until he and my mom moved to an assisted living residence due to her Parkinson's disease, my dad called the family farm his home. My dad loved farming and while he didn't expand his land or livestock into a "big" operation, he worked hard at a job he found rewarding.

Thinking about my dad's life in terms of God's call, I have concluded that the joy and contentment Dad found in his profession is a sign that God did in fact call him to be a farmer. Like so many of us, my dad's interests, skills and passions prompted him to choose something other than vocational church ministry. And, like many of us, Dad recognized that as a follower of Jesus, he had a part to play in God's plan that disciples disciple disciples.

My dad served his local church as a youth group sponsor, deacon and Sunday school teacher. He financially supported immediate and extended family members when they served as missionaries in the U.S. and other countries. He was active in The Gideons International. Dad isn't unique in this; lots of people do these things.

At his funeral, Dad was remembered by family and friends as a quiet, gentle and steady man who had a good sense of humor. People spoke of his kindness, wisdom and patience. Again, these attributes aren't unique to my dad; many people are remembered for their God-shaped character.

The U.S. Mennonite Brethren conference currently needs more people to answer God's call to serve him as pastors, church planters and missionaries. USMB is investing time, energy and creative thinking in calling and training men and women to serve the church in their vocations.

But God calls all of us—whether we work in education, business, industry, agriculture, government, technology, service, health fields and the home—to be his ambassadors in the workplace, living as faithful disciples in our families, neighborhoods and communities and using our gifts in a local church. Maybe the most extraordinary thing about God is that he partners with ordinary people doing ordinary things to communicate his extraordinary love.



**Connie Faber,
Editor**

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When a pastor says to me that he feels “beat down,” that he receives derisive emails and texts during the week and even antagonistic facial expressions while he’s preaching... folks, this is just not right.

Appreciate your pastor

Pastors deserve to be treated with kindness

While pastoring at Pine Acres Church in Weatherford, Okla., from 1991 to 2004, my wife, Janna, and I experienced a congregation that wonderfully supported and loved us. However, I remember several times during those years, as I shared our good experience with fellow pastors at conventions or other gatherings, many said they weren’t experiencing the same thing. Often, we’d hear pastors and their spouses share stories of intense conflict, pain and disillusionment. I remember thinking how fortunate we were to have such an encouraging congregation to serve and love.

I made a lot of mistakes as a young pastor. I was rather “green,” so to speak, beginning at Pine Acres Church right out of seminary. But the people were so gracious. I remember several older members who, with a smile, would say things like, “Pastor, we don’t necessarily like some of the changes that are happening, but we want you to know that even though it’s hard for us, we support you; we’re behind you; we’re praying for you.” You cannot imagine how uplifting those words of encouragement—and acts of sacrifice—were to me.

Listening to pastors is one of the privileges I enjoy in my current position. Many, many pastors and ministry leaders share their joy in serving Jesus through serving their congregations—feeling loved and supported. But allow me to share that far too many express that they feel beat down, even harassed, by the people they have been called to serve. They convey feelings of great sadness, experience deep loneliness and yet don’t know what to do to change things. What once had been a confident impression of being called by God to serve as a pastor has become pain—deep, emotional anguish.

I’m not saying that pastors are without fault and that most congregations are cruel. But I am saying that even if a pastor isn’t knocking it out of the ballpark, they do deserve to be treated with kindness, encouragement and Christ-like conversations. When a pastor says to me that he feels “beat down,” that he receives derisive emails and texts during the week and even antagonistic facial expressions while he’s preaching ... folks, this is just not right. The principles expressed in Hebrews 13:17 apply to what I’m writing about: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

If you are one who disparages your pastor even to the point that they feel harassed, please, stop! If you often share derogatory evaluations of sermons or are that person sneering at your pastor while he’s preaching, please, stop! If you feel the need to ridicule your pastor, consistently placing them in a negative light with other church members, please, stop! This is not being the church that Jesus calls us to. Instead, let’s appreciate and encourage our pastors. If you have a disagreement, invite your pastor for coffee and talk openly with them in a Christ-like way.

Just as Paul writes to the church in Colossae, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Col. 3:12-14 ESV)

Don Morris
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Templo Nueva Vida Palmview, Texas

Established 1980
Latin America MB Conference
Lead Pastor:
Jesse A. Hernandez

Our congregation in three words:

Enthusiastic, Loving, Generous

Connect with us!

On YouTube:

@templonueavidapalmview5044



Top Photo: For Easter, March 31, Templo Nueva Vida held a joint bilingual service singing simultaneously in Spanish and English. Twice a year, the congregation holds bilingual services. "We have a blast, singing Spanish and English at the same time," says Pastor Jesse Hernandez. Currently TNV offers a 9 a.m. English service and an 11 a.m. Spanish service on Sunday mornings.

Middle: Templo Nueva Vida began construction on a new church building in 2019 (background) on a lot adjacent to its old building (foreground) and finished the project in February 2023. The new building seats up to 200 people; the old building was limited to about 80. The congregation praises God for being debt free.

Bottom: Every other week, the Templo Nueva Vida congregation serves 50 to 60 families through its food bank. The congregation is comprised of winter Texans and full-time Texans who reach out to winter parks and neighboring families.

Photos by Jesse Hernandez

News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel Shafer

LAMB churches host USMB boards for March meetings

USMB boards met March 20-23 in McAllen, Texas. The Board of Faith and Life met March 20, National Strategy Team on March 21, Leadership Council on March 22 and Leadership Board on March 23.

Board members present Thursday afternoon toured the southern border, both at the bank of the Rio Grande River and at the partially finished border wall located about one mile north of the river. Board members said the tour was informative as well as sobering. Local USMB churches Mission MB Church, Grace Point at La Grulla and Templo Nueva Vida each hosted the board for an evening meal.

The Leadership Board and Council approved a change to USMB bylaws and accepted Jason Quiring, Saratoga Springs, Utah, and Samuel Hailemariam, Indianapolis, Ind., as nominees to the Leadership Board. Bylaw revisions and board nominees will be voted on by delegates to the 2024 National Convention. The board also discussed the national director search process.

The Leadership Board heard a report from Board of Faith and Life chair Dave Loewen who reported that BFL approved a Covenant of Sexual Ethics for Pastors that will be added to the Ministry Licensing Application Packet, continued work on distributing its statement on



Mission MB Church hosts dinner for the Board of Faith and Life. Photo by J.L. Martin

responding to lesbian, gay and bisexual persons and discussed talking with church leadership about transgender issues.

In his report, National Director Don Morris reported that the National Strategy Team (NST) reviewed the outcome of the January vision summit that focused on leadership development. The NST also met with Scott Thomas, the new church planting mobilizer and discussed working with the national and district boards of Faith and Life to have a unified approach to pastoral licensing and expectations.—CL

Bylaw revision to be discussed at Gathering 2024

Congregations were notified in April of one proposed change to the U.S. Conference of MB Churches bylaws that will be voted on by delegates to the 2024 National Convention, July 25-27 in Omaha, Neb. USMB bylaws stipulate that congregations be given 90 days advance notice of any proposed bylaw changes.

The change is to Article IV Conference Relationships, Section 1 Relation to Member Churches, specifically concerning the reversion clause. The proposed change



gives district conferences flexibility in addressing a church's capital assets if the church dissolves or leaves the conference and indicates that no legal action will be taken if a church denies a reversion request.—CL

Registration is open for USMB Gathering 2024

Registration is open for USMB Gathering 2024 in Omaha, Neb., July 23-27.

Join the USMB family to hear from an exciting lineup of featured speakers. Together, we'll explore faithful living in a secular culture with Natasha Crain, author and speaker; Gary Hoag, president and CEO of Global Trust Partners; Brian Kluth, National Director of NAE Financial Health; Don Morris, USMB national director; and the new national director. MB Foundation is sponsoring Hoag and Kluth.

For more information or to register, visit www.usmb.org/gathering2024 or call 1-800-257-0515.—USMB

Leadership Pipeline offers digital classroom

USMB NextGen's Leadership Pipeline is designed to assist churches and students with ministry internship programs through training, community and encouragement. This summer, the Pipeline is offering eight weeks of online training for ministry interns via a digital classroom.

Pipeline interns are paired with a ministry mentor from the church hiring the intern to guide them through the internship. Each week, interns will watch one or two short training videos and then join other interns nationwide for an online cohort to discuss that week's topic and for prayer and encouragement. Topics include understanding, living out and sustaining your calling.

For more information or to sign up, visit www.leaderpipeline.net or send an email to info@usmb-nextgen.com or any of the Pipeline Mobilizers: Russ Claassen (russc@sdcmb.org), Kyle Goings (kyle@ridgepointwichita.com) or Heidi Quiring (heidiqu@multiply.net).—*USMB NextGen*

FPU signs transfer agreement with West Hills Firebaugh

Leaders of Fresno Pacific University and West Hills College Coalinga Firebaugh Center have signed an academic partnership agreement to help community college graduates earn bachelor's degrees.

Firebaugh students who complete associate degrees in qualified majors can transfer to a FPU bachelor's degree completion program, according to the Memo of Understanding signed March 4, 2024. The format encourages adult students to achieve their educational goals while balancing work and family responsibilities. Students meet one night a week in cohorts throughout an accelerated program.

Plans are to begin with the bachelor's degree in liberal arts, which prepares graduates to become elementary school teachers, and to expand into more academic programs.

The San Joaquin Valley has the lowest college completion rate in California and the second lowest per capita income. Most students at FPU and West Hills Community College District, of which the Firebaugh Center is a part, are the first in their families to pursue college.

"It is truly exciting and inspirational for us to have the privilege of educating these students, and empowering them to improve, not only their own lives, but those of their families and communities as well," says André Stephens, president of FPU. "The honor is truly humbling."

FPU also has a partnership with Reedley College for its bachelor's degree in early childhood development and offers pathway programs with area K-12 school districts.—*FPU*

Multiply hosts Partnership Workshops

Two Mennonite Brethren churches in Oklahoma and Kansas hosted Multiply Partnership Workshops in April, including Corn (Okla.) MB Church on April 20 and Zoar MB Church in Inman, Kan., on April 27.

Co-led by East of the Rockies mobilizers Stephen Humber and Joanna Chapa, the workshops offered encouragement for church leaders, especially mission leaders, and helped connect North American churches to missionaries, national leaders and churches in other countries.

"Partnership Workshops are an important event for church leaders for deeper discussions around their specific church's global engagement and what healthy partnership looks like," Humber says.

A relatively new event, Partnership Workshops have also been held in Hillsboro, Kan.; Fairview, Okla.; Mission, Texas; Reedley, Calif.; Fresno, Calif.; Bakersfield, Calif.; and Blaine, Wash. Churches east of the Rockies interested in hosting a workshop may contact Stephen Humber at stephenh@multiply.net. Pacific District churches may contact director of mobilization Galen Wiest at galenw@multiply.net.—*Multiply*



| [Read longer versions of these and other articles at christianleadermag.com](http://christianleadermag.com) |

CDC youth leaders attend retreat

The Central District Youth Committee and Strawberry Lake Mennonite Church, Ogema, Minn., hosted the second-annual youth leader retreat Feb. 16-18. Thirty youth leaders representing seven churches attended the event.

David Hochstetler, pastor of Sand Lake Chapel in Stone Lake, Wisc., spoke on topics pertaining to discipleship through mentoring and prioritizing youth leaders' health.

"It's a great event for fellowship and training for our Central District youth leaders," says Jon Annin, Youth Committee chair. "Everyone who comes leaves refreshed with a couple extra tools in their ministry tool belt."—CDC



Tabor College reports record enrollment in graduate programs

Tabor College has reached a record graduate enrollment of 100 students. With a near even split between M.B.A and M.Ed. enrollment, both programs are growing. Graduate students hail from 26 states and 12 countries.

"Reaching 100 students is a significant milestone for our graduate programs," says President David Janzen. "Students are discovering the value of our distinctive, high-quality M.B.A. and M.Ed. programs, and we're honored to serve such a diverse group of postgraduate students."

With 459 students enrolled in undergraduate courses, Tabor reached 91 percent retention for the 2024 spring semester.

Total spring enrollment is 623, including students living on campus, 53 in dual-credit classes, and two online undergraduates. A fall-to-spring increase of 17 students led the graduate programming to its record-breaking 100 students.

The next M.Ed. cohort will open May 13 while the M.B.A. starts Aug. 19. To learn more about Tabor's graduate programs, including course outlines, scholarships and financial aid, visit www.tabor.edu/online.—TC

5 minutes with...

J.L. MARTIN

Most Christian Leader readers will know J.L. Martin as the U.S. Mennonite Brethren social media coordinator, bookkeeper and event planner. In recent years, Martin's long-time interest in weightlifting and fitness has led him to a new sport, Spartan Racing, where runners compete on courses with obstacle challenges. Competitions have taken him from his home in Hesston, Kan., to Nashville, Tenn., and Austin and Dallas, Texas. He took a moment out from his social media posting to rave about this new pastime and the community it fosters.



How did you get started in Spartan Racing?

I've always worked out in the gym and thought it would be nice to put this to use in some form. The social media posts of people finishing this race looked interesting. I'm not a runner, but the different obstacles and challenges piqued my interest. My wife thought I would do one and be done. My kids thought I was crazy. However, now they are very supportive. I've done two 5Ks and a 10K and plan to do another 10K in June.

How does the competition work?

There are heats of the race that people are competing to win prizes, but I do the open races where you're competing against yourself. My first race I was just trying to make it to the end, but now I try to finish a little bit faster than last time and complete more of the obstacles. It's best to have a friend you're running with. You stick together for all of it and cheer each other on.

What kinds of obstacles are involved?

There are various walls to climb or hop over, monkey bars

to cross, carrying sandbags, a spear throw and, at the very end, a little bit of mud. The penalty for failing an obstacle is 30 burpees or a penalty lap, which does slow you down a bit. On my first race, I didn't know about this.

The name Spartan implies this is for super athletes.

No, it is suited to all ages and fitness levels. I've seen a guy in his 80s racing. Men, women, people of all types of fitness levels are doing it all together. It's designed so there's a challenge for every single person, even the most fit person.

That sounds like hard work. What brings you back to do it again?

It's a fun community of people with a great attitude of helping each other out on the course.

It's not a "get out of my way" competition. Like when you have to jump up to get on a platform, people stay and help the next people up. It's a community a lot like the church where you have brothers and sisters supporting you along life's journey.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Christian Church of Peace in Mexico

Iglesia Cristiana de Paz en México (ICPM, Christian Church of Peace in Mexico) hosted its annual assembly March 2, 2024, bringing together pastors and leaders from various churches affiliated with the MB conference in Mexico. This national conference of nine congregations and two new preaching points has 19 pastors and a membership of 359. Total attendance is 983 and 35 people were baptized in 2023.

Led by Pastor Carlos Ortega, president of ICPM, the gathering (pictured right) provided an opportunity to reflect on the past year and chart a course for the future. During the assembly, Ortega delivered a comprehensive report on the events of 2023, expressing gratitude for the privilege of serving as president for six years. He acknowledged the challenges faced in the past but celebrated success in stabilizing the conference's finances, ensuring transparency and addressing inherited issues.

One notable achievement is the conference's partnership with Biblical Institute of Asunción (IBA) in 2023. This collaboration resulted in scholarships to Mexican students pursuing undergraduate and master's degrees, demonstrating the conference's commitment to supporting education and empowering future leaders.

Elections were also held during the assembly to form the Administrative Council for 2024 to 2027. Among the elected officials are Carlos Alberto Ortega Castellanos as president, Israel Chávez Barajas as vice president, Héctor Resillas Ortiz as secretary and Roberto Gracia Calderón as treasurer. These individuals will play



pivotal roles in guiding the conference forward in the coming years.

In conjunction with the assembly, Elton DaSilva, the new global director of ICOMB, led a workshop titled "Biblical Principles for Effective Ministry, Missionary Growth and Organizational Health." The workshop drew participation from over 35 individuals, including men and women, leaders and pastors from various ICPM churches. The workshop aimed to equip attendees with the tools to build healthy organizations rooted in biblical principles, fostering growth and sustainability.

Following the assembly, ICPM continued its tradition of unity and worship on Sunday, March 3. Members from churches across the region, including Guadalajara, Colima, the State of Mexico and Tijuana, gathered under tents, creating a vibrant atmosphere of fellowship and celebration. More than 200 individuals came to worship, share meals and enjoy recreational activities, strengthening bonds of faith and community.

ICPM looks ahead with a renewed sense of purpose and unity. Through collaboration, service and a commitment to biblical principles, the conference remains dedicated to spreading the message of peace and love in Mexico and beyond.

Did You Know?

- Chocolate originated in Mexico. The Aztecs and Mayans typically enjoyed it as a drink and used the beans as currency.

- Mexico's Great Pyramid of Cholula is the largest pyramid in the world, even larger than the pyramids of Giza.

- Mexico is a big consumer of Coca-Cola, with 163 liters per individual annually, a rate of consumption not seen anywhere else in the world.

Encountering God

A reflection on the call of Moses

Moses is without equal in Jewish history. He is instrumental in saving the Hebrews from slavery and becomes the first and greatest of Israel's prophets. Not unexpectedly, the Torah offers a profound insight into how he is called to serve God.

If the account of Moses' first encounter with God in Exodus 3:1-15 offers the backstory needed to understand the role he plays in Israel's history, it also outlines important principles about how God gets us to participate in his great plan of redemption.

The text begins with an allusion to Moses' occupation as a shepherd at the employ of his father-in-law, Jethro. When God's call comes to Moses, he is in the wilderness of Sinai, several weeks' travel away from home, taking advantage of greener pastures for his flock.

Moses is not a man of great wealth nor is he socially prominent. But judging by his response to God, it's safe to assume that Moses is content with his life and is not, at the age of 80, looking for a career change.

An encounter with God

But something extraordinary happens. Moses is about to have a supernatural encounter that will forever change his life.

"There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush" (Exod. 3:2).

God doesn't just appear to Moses. There is first an allusion to the LORD's messenger whose presence anticipates the imminent appearance of God himself. And then there is this mysterious bush that doesn't burn up.

Initially, Moses does not realize the full significance of what he is witnessing. As a shepherd, he will have been familiar with this kind of bush, which would typically be a few feet in diameter at the most. That this bush would be burning in Moses' vicinity will have immediately caught his attention.

But what triggers his curiosity is the bush itself, which keeps burning. It is the perfect "bait" to bring Moses to the place God wants him. This isn't just a "strange" (Exod. 3:3) sight. It is "spectacular" (*gado!*).

Once Moses is near the bush, it is the LORD, Yahweh, who calls out to him: "Moses, Moses." The repetition of the name is typically an indication of endearment. God does not wish to terrify Moses.

That this was the case is confirmed by Moses' prompt response: "Here I am."

Now that the actors have been introduced, the stage is set for the crucial discussion that happens next. God sets the rules of the game. First, Moses is to remove his sandals, for the ground on which he stands is "holy."

The ground is holy, set apart, or sacred only because Moses is in the presence of God. If something is said to be holy, it is only by association with God. Moses is told to remove his sandals as a sign of respect.

This is no gratuitous encounter between God and a man. God has an agenda. The Israelites are facing an existential threat. God not only wishes to deliver them from bondage but also intends to lead them into a land that will be theirs, a "land flowing with milk and honey" (v. 8).

God's rescue plan

God has a rescue plan for his people, and Moses is going to play a critical role in its deployment: "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (v. 10).

What follows is a conversation, some might say a debate, between God and a reluctant Moses, who has no interest whatsoever in what God may have in mind for him. The sharp contrast between Moses and the enthusiastic Abraham (Gen 12:3) is stunning.

While Moses remains dutifully respectful, he doggedly refuses to be recruited by God. Moses' unwillingness to take on God's mandate comes to a head in Exodus 4:13, where Moses categorically rejects God's proposal. But God will not take no for an answer: "Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses" (v. 14). While God dutifully addresses every one of Moses' objections, the option to walk away is not on the table.

Two reasons stand behind God's intransigence. First, whether he acknowledges it or not, Moses is in God's debt. God saved his life when he was an infant (Exod. 1) and allowed him to be raised by his own mother. Second, this is not about Moses or even about just rescuing the Hebrews.

Delivering the Hebrews is part of a more comprehensive master plan to save humanity. The Savior, the Son of God, no less, will be born of a Jewish woman, die for the sins of the world and rise from the dead. There is no plan B (Matt 26:39).



Moses did not have the option to refuse God's call. The time has come for him to play his part. The question is not whether Moses will serve God but how and in what capacity that will happen.

This extraordinary story highlights several principles that we would do well to consider.

God's call is strategic and opportunistic. Like Moses, most of those God calls into service are not wealthy and prominent people. Each person brings a unique set of skills and personality traits that God can use at critical points in his redemptive project (Eph. 2:10).

Can we not hear the thunderous echo of Mordecai's words when he calls on Queen Esther to risk it all to save her people? "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14).

Once God saves us, he has a claim on our very lives. To be saved is to be ushered into a loving, dynamic and joyful relationship with the Creator of the universe. The moment we accept the gift of life, we become citizens of the kingdom of God. As such, we have privileges, responsibilities and obligations. To resist God's call in our lives is to do so at our greatest peril.

To those God calls, he offers all the support required for the task at hand (John 14:26).

While **we are not at liberty to deflect God's claims upon our lives**, the story of Moses' encounter with God teaches that there is space for some legitimate pushback. Adam, Cain, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job, Habakkuk and the psalmists offer notable examples of individuals who challenge God and live to tell the tale. God's openness to dialogue with men and women reflects a unique and extraordinary feature of the Judeo-Christian faith.

God's call is always a win-win proposition. God wins in that a precise part of his plan is carried out. Those who are called also win. They are given meaning, purpose and a reason to live that transcends the boundaries of human existence. As the magnificent Psalm 8 proclaims, they partake of God's glory.

Answering God's call in our lives doesn't mean we understand everything. Like Moses, none of us ever see the whole picture. Sometimes we are given the grace of a small insight into the greater reality. Sometimes we are not.

What God asks of each one of us is to jump on the ice when invited to do so and to bring the best of who we are and what we have to the task at hand. The rest is up to God.

Pierre Gilbert is associate professor emeritus at Canadian Mennonite University.

Called by name

Do you long for a word
from our Good Shepherd?

Do you expect to hear the voice of Jesus, our Good Shepherd? John 10 records Jesus' words: "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice" (vv. 3-4). Based on these words, followers of Jesus ought to hear and decipher the voice of Jesus.

One summer day in 2016, my wife and I made a routine drive to a neighboring city to grocery shop. As we approached its outskirts, I looked over my left shoulder and said, "West Salem needs greater gospel impact."

While unexpected, this statement rolled off my tongue from a relatively new knowledge of the area. I was entering my 17th year of youth ministry at my medium-sized home church in a town of 15,000 people. A number of strong, healthy churches served my community, but when I considered West Salem, I could only think of three, though West Salem contained far more people than our town. God stirred my heart that day. The Good Shepherd began to speak.

I need the reminder that God speaks; perhaps you do as well. While I do not doubt his ability to speak, I get wrapped up with the peripheral things of life and forget to listen for the voice of my Good Shepherd, a voice I should know and expect to hear.

Called by name

Two months later, an older gentleman from church who was familiar with the churches in West Salem called with unsolicited and pointed words, "Kingwood Bible Church will soon need a senior pastor, and you are the man."

I recall thinking, "Where is Kingwood Bible Church, and who are you to tell me how God wants me to serve?" I intended to put this nonsensical command aside as my own plans differed radically.

Reread John 10:3b and note that it says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." Our Good Shepherd knows each sheep by name. Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg make a wonderful observation



By Nathan Ensz

in *Christ-Centered Exposition on John*: “He calls his sheep by name because his sheep aren’t alone.” Believers of Jesus find togetherness with other followers, and yet Jesus uniquely knows each individual. I’m grateful my Good Shepherd knows me. He fashioned me and understands the best way to call me.

My personality appreciates time to mentally adjust to new ideas, and in the process of a potential major transition, Jesus allowed for the needed time. Approximately four months following those pointed words by the older gentleman, I found myself irritated that I could not stop thinking about Kingwood Bible Church. It seemed the harder I tried to erase his words, the louder I heard them.

Finally, I picked up the phone and called the gentleman back. “Do you know if Kingwood still needs a senior pastor?” I asked. He responded in the affirmative and at the end of our conversation, I asserted that I would reach out to Kingwood. However, Jesus moved in my spirit following that phone conversation, indicating that I needed to wait until mid-February to contact Kingwood, about two months later.

How fascinating that sheep know the voice of their shepherd. Do you ever feel as though you don’t know the voice of Jesus, our Good Shepherd? I wish I more adeptly recognized his voice. Occasionally followers of Jesus receive a “burning bush moment” with clear words and immediate instructions. Other times it comes quietly, and the course of time affirms his voice. Most often, I believe, Jesus’ voice works this way so that as clarity comes, the voice of our Good Shepherd is confirmed.

Confirmation of a call

In my case, I needed clarity. My wife and I received a copy of Mark Batterson’s *Draw the Circle: The 40-day Prayer Challenge*. This book became another piece of Jesus using his voice to call. We began reading the book separately, but when we realized this, we began to read it together. During those 40 days we kept a journal, and I am utterly amazed at how God directed people and conversations, all bringing further affirmation to the initial voice I heard months earlier.

Acting in obedience, I waited until mid-February to reach out to Kingwood. Valentine’s Day 2017, I woke up and sensed from the Lord permission to knock on Kingwood’s door. My wife and I drove that familiar highway and literally knocked on the locked door. After a church volunteer let us inside, we intro-

duced ourselves and asked if Kingwood was still looking for a pastor.

I now realize why Jesus told me to wait until mid-February. Kingwood believed they had secured a pastor from Washington. The week before I knocked on the door, that candidate called and explained that he didn’t know why, but God told him not to accept the position. Another story of a sheep listening to the voice of our Good Shepherd.

Following five interviews and a candidating weekend, my family relocated to West Salem, one year after I first initially heard the voice of my Good Shepherd.

Wait and listen

Does God always work in the way he moved my family to West Salem—slowly and over the course of time? Of course not. Sometimes he provides a “burning bush” and change or action takes place in far less than a year. Other times he seems to remain completely silent, and years after years pass by without hearing his clear voice.


If your story consists of waiting, keep waiting. Our Good Shepherd will speak, and when he speaks you will know his voice. Perhaps his lack of an answer is his answer. Or perhaps his lack of an answer right now keeps you pressing into him, ever ready to hear his voice when he speaks. Not hearing an immediate voice from our Good Shepherd tests our motives. Regardless of what Jesus wants to accomplish in the waiting, he will eventually speak and you will come to know his voice.

What in your life presents you with longing and desire to hear a word from our Good Shepherd? Hear this loud and clear: our Good Shepherd speaks. He hears us, knows us, cares for us, leads us—and speaks to us. As sheep, we follow Jesus our Good Shepherd, but we also may benefit from this reminder: we know his voice.

Do you need assurance that you correctly heard the voice of our Good Shepherd? If so, I applaud you for wanting to make certain the voice you heard really belongs to Jesus. If you are uncertain, wait. In due time, you will know whose voice speaks. This may take months, but as you seek the Lord, he will orchestrate all things so that in the end you will know with certainty, “This was the voice of my Good Shepherd.”

Nathan Ensz is lead pastor at Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore. In 2022 he received his master’s degree in ministry, leadership and culture from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.

“ I get wrapped up with the peripheral things of life and forget to listen for the voice of my Good Shepherd, a voice I should know and expect to hear. “



God is very
clear when he
has something
specific for his
children

There was a stretch of time in my early- and mid-20s when I was obsessed with discovering God’s call for my life. It was always at the forefront of my mind, a frequent topic of conversation with God in my prayers. My life was a waiting game, constantly asking:

- What do you want me to do, Lord?
- Where would you have me go?
- What’s next, what’s next, what’s next?

I was on a perpetual scavenger hunt, anxiously turning over every rock and peeking behind every corner, searching for clues that didn’t even exist. But what God has been showing me in my early 30s is that he is—and always has been—very clear when he has something specific for his children. He won’t let us miss it; we’ll know it when we see it.

Samuel was literally sleeping when the Lord called him—and he called again and again each time Samuel went back to bed in confusion.

Moses was with his father-in-law’s flock, minding his own business and tending his sheep as he did on a day-to-day basis, when he encountered God in an ordinary bush made extraordinary.

Saul was on his way to Damascus when he was literally blinded by a bright light from heaven.

Choosing to obey

And although God might not do something dramatic to get our attention every time, I still don’t think he’ll let us miss it. He’ll poke and prod and nudge and wink. But I do believe he lets us choose to respond in either obedience or disobedience. I heard a pastor say that to be a Christian and not follow Jesus is absolute torment, and the pastor is absolutely right. I know it deep within my soul when I’m walking against the wind of the Holy Spirit rather than in step with him.

In 2018 I was given the opportunity to move to Abbotsford, British Columbia, for a 10-month internship with Multiply. I was excited; this was a dream job. I had just completed the TREK program, serving alongside long-term workers in Chachoengsao, Thailand, and now I would be helping to train and send young adults cross-culturally to do the same. I was home in Kansas only eight weeks between the two adventures, and I couldn’t wait to get started.

But it didn’t take long before this Midwest girl felt in over her head.

Just a couple of months into my time in Canada, the loneliness, homesickness and anxiety were raging at full force. I felt unqualified for and exhausted by my job. I missed my family and friends, and I couldn’t find *queso blanco* at any restaurant anywhere. And to top it all off,

YOU WON'T MISS IT

By Becky Spahr

there was this quiet voice in the back of my mind that whispered incessantly, "What if this ends up being longer than I thought? What if God asks me to stay in Canada forever? What if I don't get to move back home to Kansas?"

Day after day these questions swirled around in my mind. To others, this may have seemed to be rooted in anxiety or irrational fear. Where were these questions even coming from? However, there was something that I hadn't shared with anyone.

Just a dream?

Exactly one week before I moved to Abbotsford, I had a dream. In this dream, I was in the sanctuary of a small, familiar church. At the front of the room was a large piece of paper pinned to the wall where the congregation wrote hopes, dreams and desires.

The worship service concluded, and I made my way to the back of the room. Turning before I exited, I glanced at that large piece of paper to see where I had written, "Move back to Kansas." I was taken aback as I realized my contribution had been emphatically crossed out by a thick, black marker, while the surrounding entries remained untouched. And then, I woke up.

I remember sitting up in bed in my childhood home in Kansas and wondering if it was just a dream or if God

was trying to tell me something. Would this temporary move be more permanent than I thought? I quickly buried the dream in the furthest corner of my mind where I hopefully would forget it. I wasn't successful.

“

I heard a pastor say that to be a Christian and not follow Jesus is absolute torment, and the pastor is absolutely right.

”

That fall and early winter, I struggled with God on a regular basis over this matter. Why did these questions haunt me so? It was clear I wanted to go home more

than anything. I could barely wait for my 10 months to end; why would God ask me to stay longer? I tried justifying to him why I couldn't stay, why I was needed at home, why I wasn't equipped for this. I prayed, and I prayed, and I prayed. But the whole time I kept my hands clamped over my ears, so afraid of what God had to say to me.

Ready to surrender

It was finally in January of 2019 that I gave in and surrendered. After two convicting sermons on obedience at a weekend conference and a sleepless night of tossing and turning, I knew I had to stop fighting it: God was calling me to stay. I talked to my boss, my pastor's wife, and a few trusted friends, and they all agreed that it seemed that God was inviting me to stay on staff full-time at Multiply rather than return home at the end of my internship.

I sobbed and sobbed when the decision was final, but it was the kind of weeping that releases all tension, leaving nothing but peace and satisfaction. I knew in my heart of hearts that this was what the Lord had in store for me, even though I didn't know why.

What was first a 10-month commitment turned into three years of life in Canada. Full disclosure, year two in Canada ended up being harder than the first. I walked through spiritual battles and men-

tal health struggles, and then a world-wide pandemic was added to the mix. I did end up moving back to Kansas in the summer of 2021, and looking back, I know that God was at work, even though I couldn't see it then.

Of course, there were some bright and beautiful spots amidst all the hardship, and God used both the ugly and the beautiful to prune and grow me. My trust in him has increased, having seen firsthand that he is with me even in the darkest of valleys. I have learned to distinguish his clear, loving voice from the confusing and accusing voice of the enemy.

Rather than waste my time in anxious fear about the future or about missing out on what God has for me, I am (slowly) learning to live in the present with open ears and an open heart. I am convinced that as I continue to spend time with Jesus and abide in his Word, the clearer his calling is, and that I will surely know it when I see it.

Proverbs 19:23, "The fear of the LORD leads to life and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm."

Becky Spahr, a 2015 Tabor College graduate, is a graphic designer in Wichita, Kan. She has written and self-published a book, Keep Choosing Yes. She is a member of Ridgepoint Church.

Listen for the call

Moses' encounter with God recorded in Exodus 3 changes the trajectory of this shepherd's life. God has a plan for Moses and a role for him to play in God's plan to rescue his people. God also has a plan for you and me and he uses our experiences and the people around us to guide us in our journey. This issue features personal essays from men and women about their "burning bush" moments. Read two additional essays at www.christianleadermag.com

Am I a burning bush? by Shelly Spencer

As we partner with God in what he is doing in the world—which often requires unusual degrees of love, faith, sacrifice and patience—others take note. "What's this? How is this possible?" And that's a holy moment we can invite them to step into.

When there's no burning bush by Travis Jost

Looking back on my journey from a banking career in Kansas to living in Burundi, Africa, I wanted a burning bush moment that I never got. I had a litany of scrambled thoughts and not much clarity. My only clear response was to proclaim, "Lord, I'm available." It wasn't until later in my journey that I saw the parallel with Moses' response, "Here I am."

Simple service

Do what you can

We arrived at the homeless shelter early and immediately sensed poverty and a feeling of hopelessness. Boarded up windows on houses, trash and general squalor confronted us all around. Men and women stood in the cold, some waiting to catch a ride on the bus and some waiting with nowhere to go. A man dug in the dumpster with his feet 6 inches off the ground. Some people talked to themselves, their bodies dirty and their clothing in many stages of disrepair.

In contrast, my sister and I, along with our husbands, sat in a warm car with fresh clothes on, stomachs full and homes to return to after our Christmas shopping outing. It felt like we were in another country, but we weren't.

Our Women of Joy group at Cross Timbers Church had recently completed a Bible study about Acts called *The Gospel on the Ground* by Kristi McLelland. The study encouraged us to spread the mustard seeds of faith wherever we go and instilled in us an understanding that it is our responsibility to reach out to those in need, just as Jesus did.

In response, our hearts urged us to help the local homeless community. So, in December 2023, I and the other women in the study collected 160 pairs of warm, thick

socks for Homeless Alliance in Oklahoma City.

I felt guilty to be bringing so little, although a few minutes earlier I thought we were going to make a huge dent on the sock shortage in this homeless community.

A young woman met us at the front door and took the socks from us. We talked for a moment and asked what else they needed. The woman said the shelter would go through 50,000 pairs of underwear within a year. With no laundry facilities, most people wear out their clothing and throw it away. It's hard to imagine, but clean clothes cost money.

The exchange took only 15 minutes, but our lives were changed. We saw that serving doesn't have to be a huge ordeal; God simply asks us to do what we can.

Our group's new challenge is to continue to collect items for the shelter all year round. We've placed a tall wicker basket with a removable bag in our classroom and are now collecting underwear for the shelter. It's fun to see the basket fill up. When the bag is full, we'll take the donations to the shelter and begin again. We plan to start a new collection this fall and would like to get the church involved in the project as well.

We are grateful for the Lord's urging and that we followed his leading. Our group of women ranges in age from 60 to 90, and this experience has shown us that we can continue to be used by God in both big and small ways.

“

The study encouraged us to spread the mustard seeds of faith wherever we go and instilled in us an understanding that it is our responsibility to reach out to those in need, just as Jesus did.

”



Janna Morris is a wife, mother and grandmother. Her 14 grandchildren are her pride and joy. She and her husband, Don, who is the USMB national director, are members of Cross Timbers Church in Edmond, Okla., where Janna serves with the kitchen ministry.

Embracing the season

A journey of hope unfolds

With the arrival of spring, the promise of warm weather lingers on the horizon, casting sunshine into every aspect of our lives. There's something inherently hopeful about the season, with its longer days and warmer temperatures. It hints of a resurgence of plants coming to life anew.

As we reflect on the transition from winter to the emergence of spring and the warmth of summer, a multitude of hopeful events unfold. This marks more than just a change in seasons. It signifies a revival of energy and progress. Families embark on vacations, yards undergo cleaning. In my community, farmers tirelessly engage in the essential tasks of disking and planting, while the countryside witnesses the miracle of cows giving birth.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity." As the grip of winter loosens, it releases nature from its hold. It gives our daily lives hope, energy and potential.

Spring not only marks the end of winter but also signals the end of the school year. The countdown to the last day of school is a ritual for my kids, each passing day filled with growing anticipation. I vividly recall the year my oldest, on the brink of high school graduation, eagerly

counted down the days. The approaching end brought a sense of hope and excitement, signaling the conclusion of the school journey. The prospect of "No More School" became a beacon of hope and a sense of accomplishment.

While it may be perceived as the end of a chapter—marked by the conclusion of the school year—graduation is equally significant as a beginning. Graduating from high school signifies the beginning of a new and exciting phase in life. I remember the mix of emotions as we celebrated this milestone—a blend of pride, nostalgia and anticipation for the future. Rather than viewing it solely as an end, it should be seen as the opening of a door to fresh opportunities, experiences and personal growth.

Almost 30 years ago, a keynote speaker posed this challenge: What happens today prepares you for tomorrow. It was a profound statement that resonated with the essence of life's experiences. Whether the events are good, bad or fall into the ugly, each occurrence plays a role in shaping and preparing us for what lies ahead. Life, in all its ways, serves as a dynamic teacher, imparting lessons that become the foundation for our journey into the future.

Isaiah 43:18-19 reads, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" As we navigate the seasons of life, let us embrace each day as a new adventure of hope and possibility. Just as spring brings new life and the promise of a fresh beginning,

so, too, we should approach each day with a renewed spirit. When we open our hearts to the wonders that unfold, we find hope in the beauty of the unknown.

Every moment on our journey forward has the potential for growth, joy and the discovery of new paths. Let's be reminded that our life experiences, like the changing seasons, contribute to the richness of our existence.

Life, in all its ways, serves as a dynamic teacher, imparting lessons that become the foundation for our journey into the future.



Stuart Curry is pastor of Salem MB Church, rural Bridgewater, S.D.

What should I wear?

No universal dress code for church

It's an age-old question: "What should I wear today?" It's usually easy to find our uniform or an outfit that meets our needs for the day. Things can get more complicated when the question changes to "What should I wear to church today?"

There is not a universal dress code for the church around the world. A few denominations have requirements for attire—such as plain clothes for Amish and head coverings for certain apostolic groups—but the majority of communities don't have defined clothing expectations. Even so, church attendees often have an opinion about what they should wear, especially for a weekly worship service, and some feel there is an implicit communal dress code.

We don't know Jesus's favorite outfit to teach in or what early church participants wore.

There is no photographic evidence of style in biblical times and Scripture doesn't explicitly say much about church attire. Jesus spoke to people about their concerns regarding clothing (Matt. 6:25) but never insisted on a correct way to dress for worship.

Today what is considered appropriate church attire varies and is influenced by cultural, geographical and generational factors. I asked people across these demographics how they respond to the question "What should I wear to church?" and received so much

feedback. From people who think this is an irrelevant topic of conversation to others who are very passionate, people shared their thoughts and personal stories about church attire:

"Come as you are."

"Try to respect the culture of the church you're attending, but if you can't dress according to the church's custom, don't let that keep you from going."

"Women were expected to wear a dress or skirt when I grew up. Pants were not acceptable. I'm now in a community where that is not an expectation, and I appreciate it."

"Going to church on Sundays is like going before a world leader. Why would you dress casually when spending time with the creator of the universe?"

"[I] attended a church where everyone had a much higher income and definitely followed the 'dress your best' idea. Unfortunately, it made me feel very out of place and unwelcome because I could never dress as nice as them."

"Dress modestly."

"[Wear] whatever makes you comfortable! Most people come in jeans or whatever they enjoy and feel comfortable in."

"We should present ourselves in our very best before the Lord. It troubles me that pastors are wearing jeans and T-shirts."

"When my children were little, dressing up for church was huge! As a Sunday school teacher, I often had to adjust plans to protect the clothing of students. Kids come in comfortable clothing now, and I really think they (and their parents!) are happier as a result."

There are a lot of different ways people dress for church and just as many reasons why they choose their outfits. Churchgoers tend to agree that the most important thing to "wear" is not a particular clothing style but the outward expressions of your relationship with Jesus. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Col. 3:12).

When in doubt, consider this advice from a wise friend of mine: "Wear clothes."

Churchgoers tend to agree that the most important thing to "wear" is not a particular clothing style but the outward expressions of your relationship with Jesus.



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

Tabor 20 benefits students, college and churches

Scholarship offers incentive for Mennonite Brethren students

In fall 2020, Tabor College welcomed close to 30 freshmen from Mennonite Brethren churches, an increase of 244 percent from the previous year as reported in a September 2020 press release.

The increase can be attributed to the Tabor 20 scholarship, which awards \$29,500 annually to qualifying students from Mennonite Brethren churches and is intended to reverse a trend of fewer MB students enrolling at the MB institution in Hillsboro, Kan.

Since the inception of the Tabor 20, 64 students have received the scholarship. By offering this incentive worth \$118,000 over four years, Tabor seeks to create a mutually beneficial partnership in which MB churches and prospective students have an option for a Christ-centered education and MB students impact Tabor's campus in positive ways.

Reversing the decline

The Tabor 20 scholarship was introduced in 2019 and implemented in 2020 before David Janzen succeeded Jules Glanzer as Tabor College president in 2021.

In fall 2021, the enrollment of 49 MB students was the lowest it had been in 35 years, compared to a high of 197 students in 1988. Put another way, nearly 46 percent of Tabor students were from MB churches in fall 1986, a percentage that plummeted to 8 percent in fall 2021.

"Allegiance to an MB identity and to MB institutions seems to have waned over the past 30 years," says Janzen, who invites feedback from churches that do not consider Tabor a school of choice. "I don't



Tabor College promotes its Tabor 20 scholarship for MB students at USMB NextGen's high school youth camp ASCENT. Pictured is ASCENT 2023 in Glorieta, N.M. Photo by Michael Klaassen

think many MB churches encourage their students to go to Tabor, whereas 30 years ago they did. We work extremely hard to make Tabor the place where families want their students to attend."

To be eligible for Tabor 20, high school graduates must regularly attend an MB church, meet standard admissions criteria, complete an on-campus interview and write an essay.

Overall MB student enrollment has increased to 63 MB students in fall 2023, or between 11-12 percent of overall enrollment.

"I would say that the Tabor 20 scholarship is part of that," Janzen says. "It's not the only reason but it is definitely a part of why those

numbers are coming back up."

Although the trend is reversing, the scholarship has not resulted in a flood of MB students as some prospective students gravitate toward community colleges or state universities, Janzen says.

Tabor distributed scholarships to 29 MB students in 2020, but since then has not reached its cap of 20 new recipients per school year, distributing 10 in 2021, 14 in 2022 and 11 in 2023. Admittedly, some eligible MB students qualify for larger academic scholarships and choose those over the Tabor 20.

Student impact

The first Tabor 20 scholarship recipients are among the 129 students

on track to walk in Tabor's 115th commencement ceremony May 4.

Many spiritual leaders on campus are Tabor 20 students, Janzen says.

One of those leaders is Carson Duba, who came to Tabor from Bethesda Church in Huron, S.D., to play soccer and study in a spiritual environment.

Set to graduate with business and Bible degrees, Duba serves as Campus Ministries Council (CMC) president.

"Spontaneous prayer and worship nights in the prayer room have been one of my favorite experiences at Tabor College," Duba says, who at the time of the email interview was looking forward to a CMC gathering and "getting an opportunity to encourage, empower and pass on ministry to the younger generation of students."

To equip Tabor 20 students to lead on campus and in churches and communities, last year Tabor began offering an intentional curriculum focused on scholarship, discipleship and leadership. Though not a required class, it's expected that Tabor 20 students attend this once-a-month gathering led by Professor of Youth, Church and Culture Wendell Loewen and Campus Pastor Ryan Lee.

"This is a way of engaging with our constituency, especially the MB churches and students coming from those churches," Janzen says.

Tabor 20 scholarship recipient Trent Ensz, a December 2023 graduate from Kingwood Bible Church in Salem, Ore., says he has noticed a culture shift on campus.

"When I first got to Tabor, the spiritual atmosphere was cold and stagnant," says Ensz, who majored in graphic design with a minor in marketing. "Now I can confidently say the culture of campus is one of passionately and persistently seeking Jesus together as one body."

Another Tabor 20 student, Emma Heide, chose Tabor to pursue swimming and found community.

"I really enjoyed my small group at

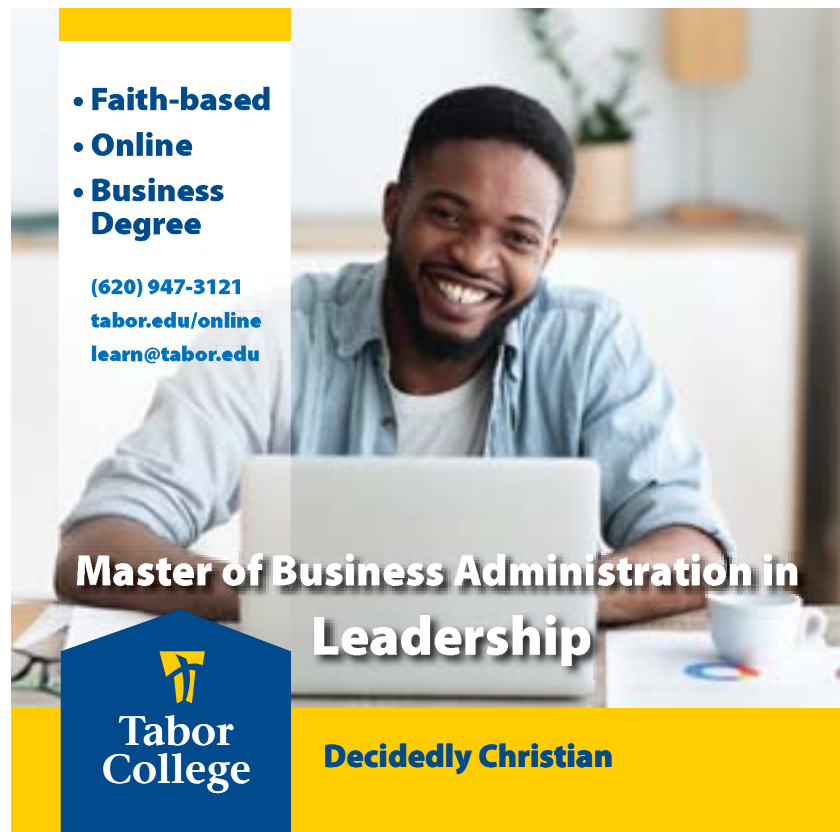
Ridgepoint Church (in Wichita, Kan.), and I was really sad to leave," says Heide, who graduated in December 2023 with an elementary education major and minors in English for Speakers of Other Languages and special education. "But Tabor was the best place for me to continue to grow in my faith," she says. "I basically was able to find the same community with the new friends I had met."

A glue that binds

Janzen's hope for the future of Tabor 20 is threefold: first, for churches or individuals to help fund the Tabor 20 scholarship through donations; second, to be able to afford to extend the scholarship to children of Tabor alumni; and third, to encourage more MB students to attend, including those from immigrant churches.

"In many ways, Tabor can become the glue that holds MB churches together when (students) come and have common experiences here, build friendships and then graduate and go into MB churches and start planting churches," Janzen says. "I'm hopeful that in 20 years, we look back and say, 'Tabor 20 scholarship at Tabor College is a big part of the health of our conference of churches.'"

For more information about Tabor 20 or to apply, visit www.tabor.edu/tabor20.



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Two churches join forces to serve in Wolf Point

Denver volunteers travel to Montana for summer mission trip

For two Mennonite Brethren churches, distance is not a hindrance to their collaborative effort to serve a northern Montana community.

Mosaic Church in Littleton, Colo., and Gospel Fellowship Church (GFC) in Wolf Point, Mont., are separated by more than 500 miles, but a summer mission trip has provided an opportunity for teamwork and hospitality.

In summer 2023, members of the Mosaic congregation traveled north to serve alongside the GFC congregation in Wolf Point for a week-long mission trip involving community service projects, outreach and a Vacation

Bible Adventure (VBA)—a children's program created by GFC similar to vacation Bible school.

Wolf Point is located on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and the VBA program and service projects are two of GFC's primary means of outreach to the reservation.

"Sadly, as with many Native American reservations, crime, alcohol and drugs are rampant issues," says Mike Andrews, GFC senior pastor who previously served as Mosaic's pastor of discipleship and care ministries.

"We see a lot of homeless on the reservation, broken homes and children that are abused. It's heartbreaking to see but definitely makes a

place where we want to share the light of the gospel."

Ready to serve

The opportunity to serve alongside GFC to bring the gospel to the reservation and community intrigued members of Mosaic when they first heard of it in 2019. Andrews says COVID-19 postponed initial plans, but in 2023, a group of 13 adults and children from Mosaic arrived in the town of 2,500 ready to serve.

The group helped paint a local daycare, touched up the parsonage, fixed and served sack lunches to people experiencing homelessness on the reservation and shared conversations about the gospel and served approximately 100 kids on the reservation in grades one to five at VBA.

"It truly is a collaborative effort," Andrews says. "The two churches really have almost all hands-on deck planning the projects to be done, physically setting up VBA and fixing and serving meals to those who are coming from so far to serve. It is unique seeing so many gifts and talents together and so special to see the Church with a capital C come together in that way."

While in Wolf Point, Mosaic members are split between staying in people's homes, Airbnbs and the local hotel but come together for meals served by GFC either at the church or wherever the team is serving. Andrews says having the Mosaic group allows GFC to offer more one-on-one time to children who attend VBA than the Wolf Point congregation could do themselves.

Mutually beneficial

The 2023 mission trip, Andrews says, felt like a home run for GFC, which 2023 Mosaic group leaders



Gospel Fellowship Church hosts Vacation Bible Adventure in Wolf Point, Mont., with the assistance of a team from Mosaic Church in Littleton, Colo. A similar collaborative event is being planned for July 2024. Photo by Diane Andrews

“ **The two churches really have almost all hands-on deck planning the projects to be done, physically setting up VBA and fixing and serving meals to those who are coming from so far to serve.** ”

Brian and Abby Blaskovich say was mutual for their team as well.

“Seeing God work in and through the people who served, as much as the people we were serving, was an amazing opportunity,” says Abby Blaskovich. “It was eye-opening for us as a church and individuals to see some of the harsh realities kids and adults face and made us grateful and eager to serve to help.”

Brian Blaskovich says that the members from Mosaic were touched on a personal level as well.

“It’s beautiful seeing the church truly unified,” he says. “Coming together to be an example of the Church and getting away from the busyness of our own lives and just having the time to truly personally be in the Word, filled with the Spirit and being the hands and feet of Jesus.”

Planning for 2024

Two 2023 participants, Martha Cercy and Sandee Mogle, are preparing to lead another group from Mosaic to serve at Wolf Point, July 20-27, 2024.

“We are so excited and looking forward to leading the mission trip and helping with another year of VBA,” Cercy says. “For us, the highlight really is building the connections with people and hoping to build those further in this year’s mission trip.”

In the planning stage, Cercy says Mosaic members will visit with members of GFC to brainstorm ideas for

VBA, arrange lodging logistics and discuss service projects that could be most helpful to the reservation and community while using the skill set of participants from Mosaic.

Although the specific VBA theme and service projects for 2024 have not yet been decided, Cercy says that a growing number of adults, seniors

and even families with young children are signing up and brainstorming ways to use their skills to serve.

“We want it to be all about Jesus and point to him,” Mogle says.

“That’s why we travel so far, go to some of the hard places and seek to serve.” —Caitlyn Decker

How do we work *together* on God's Mission?

See our Global Mission Report
multiply.net/report

together that the world may know *Jesus* multiply

Reedley seamstresses use sewing skills to serve

FPU graduate delivers hand-sewn dresses to Ethiopia

A single dress may not seem life changing to most of us in the United States, but for many girls around the world, it is a symbol of the love of Christ and his church.

In 2021, Judy Isaak of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church heard about Dress A Girl through a woman in her Bible study. Dress A Girl is a non-profit that organizes volunteers across the country and even internationally to sew dresses for girls in need around the world.

Meanwhile, a group of women at Palm Village Retirement Community in Reedley had been getting together to sew dresses under the leadership of Marilyn Chappell, a resident there. They sent completed dresses with missionaries to other countries.

When Chappell's health made it difficult for her to continue organizing the effort, Isaak felt God calling her to step in.

"God always prepares you, and I've always made clothes for myself since I was a kid," Isaak says. "The ladies at Palm Village instructed me on all the details, what came first, what came second, how all the measurements worked and so on. I learned from them and took on the leadership of it."

From kits to dresses

Isaak began collecting donations of fabric, elastic, buttons, lace and other supplies in her home.

Each Monday, a small group of women meets at Isaak's home to prepare dress making kits using Dress A Girl patterns. Isaak says the dresses require intermediate sewing skills, and each kit includes instructions.

She takes the kits to Reedley MB and leaves them in a designated basket for volunteers to pick up when they are able. Completed dresses

are then returned to the church, labeled and stored until they can be taken to their final destination.

"My job is not really to make dresses; I do, but I don't make as many as the other ladies do," Isaak says. "My job is to move things through this process. And it's a blessing."

Isaak estimates they have sent about 400 dresses since 2021.

In 2023, through a contact at Mennonite Central Committee, Isaak was introduced to Elsa Asrat. Asrat is the founder of Loving and Leading Others, a ministry to women and girls in Ethiopia. The Reedley sewers decided to send their completed dresses with Asrat on her annual trips to Ethiopia.

"When I first met Elsa, it was like sisters meeting," Isaak says. "It was that rich and real."



Women meet at the home of Judy Isaak (far right) weekly to put together dress kits, including (from left): Sandi Bennett, Lorene Doster and Norma Warkentin. Photo by Judy Isaak

“ It gives them hope—someone from America prays for them, thinks of them. ”

Serving moms and children

Asrat is herself a former refugee from Ethiopia who emigrated to Canada as a young girl.

“In every turn when life really became difficult, not knowing the culture or language and everything, there were certain women that really stood out in my life and took me under their wing,” Asrat says.

Asrat was pursuing a nursing degree in Canada when she decided to pivot in a new direction. After a trip to Fresno to visit her parents, she felt called to attend Fresno Pacific University. She graduated with degrees in communications and biblical studies, and shortly after graduation returned to Ethiopia to visit.

“I saw poverty from a different lens,” Asrat says of her trip. “I was devastated to see women and girls living on the streets and not knowing their identity.”

Asrat connected with a clinic for HIV positive children in Ethiopia and decided she wanted to do something to help their mothers as well. She founded Loving and Leading Others with the mission of “restoring identity and inspiring opportunities for women.”

“We got together with the ladies twice a week and I got to learn more about their situation, how they’re marginalized from society,” Asrat says. “I was thinking that I had to deal with the basic needs, but I learned the internal needs beyond the surface. Regardless of their background, they’re worthy in the eyes of God and created bearing the image of God.”

The organization partners with local entrepreneurial groups to provide various skills trainings such as

sewing and working with leather goods.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Asrat has been living in the U.S. full time with her young family, but she takes annual trips to Ethiopia during which she distributes as many dresses as have been created by the women in Reedley since the previous trip.

While a dress meets a practical, physical need for the women and girls in Ethiopia, Asrat says it is also so much more.

“For them to get a beautiful, colorful dress, they have become someone; it’s dignity,” Asrat says. “It gives them hope—someone from America prays for them, thinks of them.”

Isaak says they include a pocket insert in each dress that says, “Jesus loves you, so I made you this dress” along with the first name of the woman who sewed the dress.

“In our little group, we are trying to extend the love of Jesus around the world through these dresses,” she says.—*Jessica Vix Allen*



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Harris returns to pastoral role

As district minister, Harris is the pastors' pastor

Brian Harris left the pastorate in August 2022 to serve as USMB's church planting mobilizer and in the process gained clarity about his call to ministry. Now, as newly appointed Southern District Conference minister, Harris has returned to a pastoral role.

"I'm actually feeling like I'm a pastor again," he says. "It's just that my congregation is the pastors."

Identity shift

Soon after Harris began as church planting mobilizer, he realized a disparity between planting in theory and practice and found a leadership shortage impacting denominations nationwide. So, he visited pastors to cast vision for church planting and the intentional discovery and development of young leaders.

As he did, conversations often veered to deeper issues such as discouragement, depression or church conflict, he says. Recognizing that healthy pastors lead to healthy churches ready to plant, Harris welcomed those conversations.

"I would find myself quickly going, 'Let's set (the church planting conversation) aside,'" he says. "I would start to interact on whatever the issue was."

Reflecting on these conversations, Harris, who had previously served nearly 18 years as pastor at Pine Acres Church in Weatherford, Okla., recognized the identity shift the church planting role had created.

"I still think of myself as a pastor," Harris says. "That got lost in the church planting mobilizer position."

So, when SDC minister Tim Sullivan announced his intention to retire, Harris applied, thinking the job fit with his gifts and passion, and already knowing many district pastors

from the church planting networks he had established.

Development, encouragement

Harris was offered the job, and he accepted, officially beginning Jan. 1, 2024.

"The core qualities the district minister search team looked for was a pastoral leader who loved Jesus and his church," says Dave Froese, of Newton, Kan., who facilitated the search. "Brian has been a visionary leader in the Southern District for 20 years and has come to appreciate evangelical Anabaptism. His connection for serving the district is real and heartfelt."

Harris began by conducting visits with pastors on road trips from his home base in Owasso, Okla., and organizing regional in-person gatherings, a carryover from the networks he facilitated on Zoom.

He will also join district and national boards, including the Southern District Board of Faith and Life and the Tabor College board, as well as the USMB Leadership Council, National Strategy Team and U.S. Board of Faith and Life.

"I love the Southern District," Harris says. "There's a fit here. It's really good."

Harris' goals for the SDC are twofold.

First, he intends to aid the development of a robust developmental pipeline to discover and deploy harvest workers. Harris is part of an ongoing discussion about education stemming from the January 2024 vision summit on leadership development. He envisions interviewing pastors to gauge need and build trust, then working to eliminate organizational silos to draw people and programs together, he says.



Southern District minister Brian Harris preaches Feb. 25, 2024, during an MB unity service held at Tabor College with participating Hillsboro, Kan., churches Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro MB Church and Parkview MB Church. Harris began as SDC minister Jan. 1, 2024. Photo by Michael Klaassen.

Second, Harris intends to encourage, advocate for and come alongside pastors dealing with issues such as depression, discouragement, frustration or pornography.

"Personal pastoral health is a real important area to me," he says. "The statistics are super scary about how many are thinking about quitting ministry, in depression (or) battling all kinds of things. One of my tasks is how do I truly pastor the pastors in the healthiest way I can?" —*Janae Rempel Shafer*

LEAD Pods offer “the best of us to the rest of us”

USMB podcasts encourage listeners to wrestle with important issues

“Podcasting is a unique and intimate way to connect with your audience,” says podcaster Tim Ferriss. The content of Ferriss’ business and lifestyle podcast may not resonate with you and me, but what he says about podcasts is sound.

USMB launched LEAD Pods in 2020 with the goal of providing a regularly released podcast that focuses on the leadership development and communication needs of our USMB family—connecting with our USMB audience as “the best of us to the rest of us.”

Recent *Christian Leader* online articles report that 100 episodes have been produced so far. That number is now slightly higher. That over 100 episodes have been generated strongly indicates the value recognized by the many who listen—an average of about 105 downloads per episode.

“When we began LEAD Pods, I was hoping for maybe 30 to 40 downloads,” says Don Morris, USMB national director. “I thought the real value would be in having an archive of various topics where someone could find some beneficial dialogue about that topic. And that is a continuing value. But it’s obvious that people enjoy listening as episodes are released. That’s been very affirming.”

Matt Ehresman, LEAD Pods host, says, “To me one of the biggest benefits of the platform is the ability to communicate quickly. I love that we can communicate to our national audience (and even to some friends serving around the world) relatively quickly whenever new topics or important events warrant a response. When AI en-

tered our culture and when the war in Ukraine broke out, I love that our MB family had a place to turn to learn together and wrestle through important, pressing issues. I hope that continues in the episodes ahead.”

USMB staff hope that more people will begin listening to LEAD Pods, recognizing it as a valuable MB-oriented resource. People are listening in their car, while exercising or walking or even when doing the dishes. You can virtually listen anywhere and at any time. New episodes drop every two weeks and listeners can find LEAD Pods on Apple, Google and Spotify.

“We can speak into contemporary issues from a MB perspective,” says J.L. Martin, LEAD Pods coordinator, about the value of the podcasts. “There are many great leaders in our USMB family, and we can share what they are doing with the rest of the family. Through podcasts, we provide leadership development on a biweekly basis rather than having to wait until that next conference or seminar.”

In addition to Ehresman, LEAD Pods feature Katie Goings, an experienced radio host from Ridgepoint Church, who voices the advertisements about USMB activities and from LEAD Pods sponsors. Sponsors include Fresno Pacific University, Tabor College, MB Foundation, Multiply and Mennonite Central Committee.

From the very beginning the push was to provide a top-notch podcast, not simply one thrown together. That level of quality has been evident throughout the past 100+ installments.

“

I love that we can communicate to our national audience (and even to some friends serving around the world) relatively quickly whenever new topics or important events warrant a response.

”

“I’ve learned so much, both about day-to-day church leadership and Christian living, as well as elements of MB history and culture that I’m not sure how I would have learned otherwise,” says Ehresman. “I’ve been surprised that we have so much to talk about! We’re 100+ episodes and 14,000 downloads in, but it kind of feels like we’re just getting started. Church leadership is always changing and evolving, so there are always new ideas to discuss as well as old stories to tell. I look forward to continuing to learn along with all the listeners over the next 100.”—USMB

Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel Shafer

MILESTONES

Baptism/Memberships

Ellie Mack, Michael Kay, Kristina Kiersek, Taryn Walsh and Sue Britt were baptized at **Redemption Church, Owatonna, Minn.**, March 31. Abby Jorgenson, Rashia Jorgenson, Joseph Cruz and Angel were baptized March 10.

Thirty-seven people were baptized March 31 at the **Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Mia Alvarez, Peyton Bridges, Boston Denesha, Bronx Denesha, London Denesha, Kinley Harkey, Colin Hayes, Charis Hiebert, Jackson Hiebert, Matthias Gonzales, Jasmine Ramirez, Elizabeth Solis, Robert Solis, Bennie Wooley and Ryan Wooley were baptized March 31 at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.**

Two people were baptized at **Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.**, March 31.

Leticia DeLeon, Virginia Longoria, Cindy A. Pitts, Gaylene Woods, Martha Garcia, Jessica Reed, Amerous Lafoga, Kelli Myrassamy, Joseph Rios and Giovanni Campechano were baptized and received as members March 24 at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**

Nola N., Genevieve N., Josiah M., Elijah L. and Catherine K. were baptized at **Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan.**, March 24.

Nicole Kelley, Sarah Greenwood and Levi Householder were baptized at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus**, March 24. Nikki Gilbreth was baptized March 17. Isaiah Roy was baptized Jan. 28. Heather Cassidy and Allison Stuart were baptized March 17 at the Draper

(Utah) Campus. Brooklyn Loomis was baptized March 10; Colt Lewin and Giselle Sullivan, March 3; Jack Keenan, Austin Turpin, Kevin Kupcho and Melanie Haws, Feb. 25; Rebecca Franklin and Chris Avery, Feb. 18; Tyler Hender and Leslie Barron, Feb. 11; and Tyler Thompson and Georgia Morgan, Feb. 4. Nevaeh Cervantes, Teresa Josephsen, Harrison Lee, Makayla Skelly, Garrett Smith, Lynette Taylor and Kyson Warby were baptized March 10 at the St. George (Utah) Campus. Joseph Schmit and Steve Schmit were baptized Feb. 25 at the Lehi (Utah) Campus.

Rebecca Lipford, Madison Hagan, Aleyah Hood and Aidyn Elleby were baptized at **The Life Center, Lenoir, N.C.**, March 17. Kilynn Audrey, Brilyn Audrey, Jailan Dula, Shadavia Rutherford, Noah Carpenter, Josie Herman and Tina Vines were baptized Jan. 28. Jalex Corpening, Anthony Lee, Kristian Witherspoon, Jameson Witherspoon, Janiyah Nelson, Nahla Webster, Paxton Webster, Levi Jones, Elijah Jones, Robin Scott and Alycia Vaught were baptized Dec. 10, 2023.

Jayden Willams and Connor Adamson were baptized Feb. 25 at **Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Tom McFarland was baptized at **Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash.**, Feb. 18.

Pearl Brown was baptized Feb. 4 at **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**

Shelby VandenHoek was baptized and received as a member at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**, Jan. 21. Brent Decker, Jodene Decker, Jay Cobb, Kim Cobb, Jay Wipf, Rachel Wipf, Gwendolyn Bousman and Andrea Chapman were also received as members.

Workers

Jennifer Davis is serving as children's pastor at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**.

Bruce Porter is serving as community care pastor at **Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif.**

David Dreyfus began serving as associate pastor at **Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash.**, Jan. 28.

Julie Bengston concluded her service as children's ministry director at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**

Deaths

Boyd, Lea Michelle, Newton, Kan., attendee of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, July 17, 1974—March 6, 2024. Parents: Steven and Cora (McGee) Boyd.

DeBuhr, Lauren, Topeka, Kan., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Sept. 9, 1942—Feb. 11, 2024. Parents: Lavere and Marion (Kostalek) DeBuhr. Spouse: Melody McFarland. Children: Eric, Wendy Katsbulas; five grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Dickie, Betty Jo, Clovis, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, April 11, 1936—Jan. 16, 2024. Parents: Vernon and Sue Christian. Spouse: Dave Dickie (deceased). Children: Susan Dickie George, David, Paul; eight grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Enns, Harold, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 13, 1938—Feb. 17, 2024. Parents: Jacob W. and Elsie (Unruh) Enns. Spouse: Pat. Children: Sandra Long, Judi Szpor, Sharol DeGroot; seven grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Flaming, Sara Ann, Fairbury, Neb., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., Oct. 5, 1931—Feb. 2, 2024. Parents: Cornelius F. and Sara (Bergmann) Reimer. Spouse: Victor A. Flaming Sr., Bob A. Flaming Sr. Children: Rachel, Saralyn, Victor Jr., Bob Jr.; eight grandchildren, three great-grandchildren.

Friesen, Anne Miriam, Reedley, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, Jan. 18, 1923—March 21, 2024. Parents: David P. and Susanna Schultz. Spouse: John E. Friesen. Children: James, Steven, Lois Fruin; six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Gaede, Helen Marie, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, March 29, 1940—Feb. 17, 2024. Parents: Andrew and Helen Pankratz. Spouse: Dennis Gaede (deceased). Children: Randall (deceased), Rhonda.

Garcia, Pamela Kay, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, Jan. 8, 1952—Feb. 29, 2024. Parents: John E. and Marjorie Dell Siemens. Spouse: Americo "Med" Garcia. Children: Stacy Giles, Daniel; seven grandchildren; two great-grandchildren.

Gutierrez, Moriah, Mission, Texas, of Grace Point Church, La Grulla, Texas, Aug. 26, 1998—Feb. 10, 2024. Parents: Joaquin and Melissa Trevino Gutierrez.

Isaak, Gene, Visalia, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Oct. 11, 1954—Feb. 18, 2024. Parents: Pete P. and Roberta "Betty" (Wiest) Isaak. Spouse: Sandra. Children: Kate, Megan Tos, Michael, Bethany Wiens, Samuel; six grandchildren.

Jost, Victor, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, March 5, 1934—April 6, 2024. Parents: Frank R. and Marie (Loewen) Jost. Spouse:

Myrna Eitzen (deceased). Children: Connie Faber, Nancy Rogers; seven grandchildren; five great-grandchildren.

Karber, Linda, Bakersfield, Calif., member of The Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Aug. 27, 1944—Jan. 25, 2024. Spouse: Lance Karber. Child: Lisa.

Koslowsky, Carla Jean, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, March 5, 1949—March 25, 2024. Parents: Eli and Edna (Koop) Suderman. Spouse: Kenneth A. Koslowsky. Child: Diana Moore.

Pauls, Frances L., Inman, Kan., member of Zoar MB Church, Inman, Jan. 6, 1926—May 7, 2023. Parents: Isaac D. and Marie (Janzen) Dirks. Spouse: John R. Pauls (deceased). Children: Judy Gallagher, Mark, Lorene Hunt (deceased), Keith (deceased); eight grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

Penner, Elva, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, June 18, 1933—March 29, 2024. Parents: John J. and Eva (Pankratz) Funk. Spouse: Lynn Penner (deceased). Children: Linda Ewert, Gary, Diane Jost; seven grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren.

Peters, Martha, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, June 22, 1933—Feb. 7, 2024. Parents: Frank and Sarah (Zielke) Penner. Spouse: Clarence Peters. Children: Carolyn, Cheryl Woody, Les, Frank, Loren (deceased); 11 grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Regier, Marciel, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 12, 1934—

Feb. 11, 2024. Parents: Cornelius and Anna (Neufeld) Reimer. Spouse: Marvin Regier. Children: Michael, Cindy Schuil, Monte; five grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Smith, Zoe Ann, Shafter, Calif., member of Shafter MB Church, July 18, 1938—Feb. 3, 2024. Parents: Willard and Helen (Ratzlaff) Janzen. Spouse: Bob Smith (deceased). Children: Kevin Groves, Jeff Groves, Bryan, Nita Crist; three grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Suderman, Harriet Joan, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, Sept. 21, 1936—March 27, 2024. Parents: David D. and Frieda Faye (Prieb) Klaassen. Spouse: Arthur Suderman (deceased). Children: Glenn, Debi, Lori, David, Roxi; 13 grandchildren, 18 great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren.

Wiens, Melissa, Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgpoint Church, Wichita, June 11, 1957—Feb. 29, 2024. Parents: Norman and Rita (Schlarp) Martin. Spouse: Glenn. Children: Dustin, Ashton, Shanna.

Willems, Jerald "Joe" Dwain, Salem, Ore., member of Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, June 24, 1944—March 6, 2024. Parents: Waldo and Grace Willems. Spouse: Judy. Children: Timothy, Scott, Steven.

REACHING IN

Discipleship

North Fresno (Calif.) Church hosted a lecture presented by Tim Gedder and lunch March 23 as part of the Janzen Lectureship in Biblical Studies.

Bridge Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a Marriage Matters conference March 1-2.

Fairview (Okla.) MB Church hosted a Marriage Seminar Feb. 2-3.

Fellowship

The Buhler (Kan.) MB Church congregation organized an outing to Faith and Family night at a hockey game March 9. The WOW group held a "soup swap" Feb. 17.

Women from **Greenhouse Community Church, Saratoga Springs, Utah**, held a cookie exchange March 23.

Women from **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, had a baking day March 23.

Salem MB Church, Bridgewater, S.D., hosted a spring Easter fest March 23.

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., women held a Taste and See event March 23. The congregation hosted a Senior Soirée with a potato bar March 9.

Corn (Okla.) MB Church deacons hosted a senior singles dinner March 3.

Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan., held a game night March 3.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church held a senior appreciation lunch March 3. The women's ministry held a Coffee and Canvas painting event Feb. 23.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., hosted the Restore women's conference March 2 and its annual Tailgate Sunday Feb. 11.

Good News Fellowship Church, Ferndale, Wash., held a family game night March 1. Women had games and snacks Feb. 17 and made gift bags for women at Agape House.

Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., held a chili cook-off Feb. 25.

Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb., held a friendship banquet Feb. 25.

Churches held Galentine's events for women, including **SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan.**, **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.**, and **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**

Churches planned Valentine's Day events: a **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, 8-Tracks party and baked potato bar Feb. 25; a **Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, banquet Feb. 17; a **Ridgpoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, PrimeTimers dinner and musical program Feb. 15; a **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**, meal Feb. 14; a **Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb.**, family supper Feb. 14 with activities; and **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church's** annual Extravaganza Feb. 10.

Women from **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, held a soup and salad supper Feb. 19.

The Fully Alive group at **Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan.**, held a game night Feb. 16.

Men from **Stony Brook Church**, and **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.** gathered for a retreat Feb. 16-18.

Church Life continued

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., celebrated Fat Tuesday with a BBQ meal Feb. 13.

Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz., held a daddy-daughter dance Feb. 13.

Worship

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a "spring sing" March 24.

Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash., held a hymn sing March 17.

Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb., and **Iglesia Manantial de Agua Viva, Omaha,** held a joint Good Friday Service March 29.

Celebrations

SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan., celebrated its first birthday April 7.

Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif., celebrated its eighth birthday Jan. 28.

REACHING OUT

Locally

People from **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.,** volunteered at a community Easter festival March 30.

Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted a Jackson Neighborhood Easter Celebration March 30.

Lincoln Glen Church, San Jose, Calif., held its annual community egg hunt March 30.

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., partnered with Summer Park Apartments for a spring community Easter event March 29.

SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan., held a community pancake feed and egg hunt

March 23. The congregation broke ground on a community garden.

Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan., offered community sports and activities in its new gym.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., collected diapers and wipes for YoungLives of Tulare County. People donated more than 1,860 toys to an annual pop-up Christmas Store.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., hosted an Operation Christmas Child project workshop putting together sewing kits, fishing kits and school supply kits Feb. 25.

Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., collected soup for the Topeka Rescue Mission in February.

Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz., held its WestWing Classic car show Feb. 24.

Volunteers from **Bible MB Church, Cordell, Okla.,** and **Herold Mennonite Church, Bessie, Okla.,** served a meal to the Cordell football team Sept. 21, 2023.

Globally

Cornerstone Community Church, Topeka, Kan., contributed to a My Coins Count offering for Mennonite Central Committee.

The women's ministry service at **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.,** coordinated the purchase of supplies for 36 health kits for Mennonite Central Committee.

Classifieds

Celebrations

You are invited to join us as we celebrate Parkview MB Church's 150th year of ministry, Aug. 15-17, 2024, in Hillsboro, Kan. Learn more at <https://parkviewmb.com/celebrate150/>

Local Church

Pastor: Faith Bible Church of Lawton, Okla., is seeking a pastor. More information may be found at Lancastersearch.com Resumes may be sent to Jason@No-FeePastorSearch.com. or by contacting Ed Jensen, pulpit committee chair, at jensen54149@yahoo.com.

Pastor: Faith Community Congregation, one of two English-language congregations of the four multi-cultural congregations that comprise Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., seeks a pastor. Responsibilities include preaching, pastoral care, planning and participating in corporate worship, enhancing effective outreach and service and collaborating with other Butler congregations. Congregant volunteers lead the various parts of the worship service (which is livestreamed) and outreach programs, with regular involvement of students and staff of Fresno Pacific University whose campus is adjacent to the Butler Church facilities. The responsibilities can be adjusted for full or part time. Request the full set of pastoral search documents by email to the chair of the Search Team: Richard Kriegbaum, president emeritus, Fresno Pacific University rkriegbaum@comcast.net

Lead Pastor: Valleyview Bible Church in Cimarron, Kan., is searching for a lead pastor. Please find more information at <https://valleyview-biblechurch.wordpress.com/pastoral-search/>

Youth 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 eighth 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.

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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