

CHRISTIAN LEADER

THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

JULY / AUGUST 2024



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not the hour

**Always alert
and awake**
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for shalom**
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We may not agree on the millennium, the rapture and how to read Revelation, but we agree on the most important truth: God wins.

The end of the story

God's story has a beginning, middle and end

When our oldest daughter was a preschooler, she liked to “preach.” Her version of preaching was standing on a small bench and retelling the stories she heard in Sunday school. Sometimes one story would flow into the next and she’d just keep talking. As her parents, my husband and I enjoyed her narrations, but we realized that others would not be as taken with her “preaching” as we were. So, we regularly explained the importance of stories having a beginning, middle and end—especially an end.

Endings are important. The beginning of a story sets up the characters, problems and plot, the middle plays out the events set in place by the beginning and the ending brings it all to a close. One writer says a story without an ending is like a sporting match without a winner—a somewhat hollow and unfulfilling experience.

A good ending—to a book or movie, summer vacation or even a job—gives a sense of closure and resolution. Endings can offer hope, a time for reflection and an occasion for celebration. In some instances, a good ending makes a good beginning possible.

The crucial role of an ending is noted by N.T. Wright in his book, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church*. The Christian worldview, unlike a Stoic, Hindu or Buddhist worldview, has shape and balance because it is a “story with a beginning, a middle and an end,” Wright says. An important element of this ending is a belief in the second coming of Jesus. “If we don’t hold to the belief in the second coming of Jesus, we have not rounded out the whole kingdom of God theology,” Wright says.

While editing this issue of CL, I came across several books and articles addressing Christ’s second coming, including Wright’s. The various viewpoints in these resources, along with the different opinions presented by the feature articles you can read in this issue, confirm that we do not agree on eschatology. In fact, after reading the feature essays in this issue, one member of the CL Review Committee noted that none of the articles capture his view of Christ’s return. So, while

the print and online feature articles represent the views of some Mennonite Brethren, they do not cover all of the views we hold.

We may not agree on the millennium, the rapture and how to read Revelation, but we agree on the most important truth: God wins. I like the way pastor and author Chuck Swindoll states this conviction: “If you like stories that end well, you’ll love Christianity. One of the great themes of our faith is triumphant hope—an unshakeable assurance that things will end right.”

Maybe you are like me and eschatology is not something about which you are particularly interested. Or maybe this is a topic about which you have thought, studied and discussed. Regardless, we know how the story ends—Christ will return and set things right.



**Connie Faber,
Editor**

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**Churches must
experience a sense
of urgency for
reaching those
who don't yet
know Jesus.**

Radically on mission

Are we committed to sharing God's good news?

This is the final column that I will write as national director. Thinking about what to write, I keep coming back to what has been my passion in ministry for 35 years and what I believe *must* be the fundamental, passionate purpose of every USMB church and believer: We must be radically on mission for Jesus.

Churches cannot simply be social clubs, focusing on themselves. Churches must experience a sense of urgency for reaching those who don't yet know Jesus. Time is of the essence. We must, right now, be radically on mission for Jesus.

Churches that consistently, frequently and fervently pray for God to use them in a powerful way for making new, committed followers of Jesus—and seeking to replicate that again and again and again—will unswervingly find themselves on fire for Jesus. If we are truly committed to Jesus and his kingdom work, we will be on our knees. We'll relish the challenges he brings to us.

We'll throw ourselves into following where God's going. We'll give up our own designs and plans and listen to his voice—calling us to action. We'll find ourselves doing things that are only possible through the power of God. We'll be radically on mission for Jesus. The people of the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches: radically on fire for Jesus. How I pray for that!

The gospel of Jesus Christ is still good news. The powerful things that we believers know about having a deep relationship with the risen Jesus is possible for those who are yet to believe. But without someone to tell them, they will perish. Without churches that are striving to teach people how to reach others, there will be multitudes of people who end up facing an eternity apart from God.

Telling someone who is lost (remember, Jesus called them "lost") how God has changed me and has adopted me as his son, has forgiven my sin and restored my relationship with him because Jesus took my place on the cross, atoning for my sins—that is my mission. That is your mission. That is the church's mission. Then, helping to disciple these new believers into becoming deeply committed followers of Jesus is also a huge part of our mission.

Dare we ask for a revival among our MB family? Dare we ask God for more? Dare we seek him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? Dare we stop squabbling among ourselves so that we can do the real work he is calling us to? Dare we stop wasting time, being so slow to act? Dare we desire to live faithfully different—being salt and light in a world that has largely rejected the light of Jesus? Dare we understand that living radically for Jesus might literally be worth being persecuted for? Dying for? Living for?

I think about the great scene depicted in Revelation 7 of "a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb." When I think about this, I also think about those whom I know right now who will not be there. Does this matter enough to me? Do I care enough to strive to help change that outcome? If not, am I truly and radically on mission for Jesus?

Don Morris
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Grace Bible Church Gettysburg, S.D.

Established: 1964
Central District Conference
Attendance: 100
Lead Pastor: Scott Crook

Our congregation in three words:
Faithful, Fun-Loving, Food-Friendly

Connect with us!
www.gracebiblesd.com

How can you pray for us?
Pray as we search for a new pastor. Pastor Crook recently announced he is leaving to be nearer to family.



Top Photo: The cast of our annual GBC/AWANA Christmas Musical, "The Secret of Snowflake County."

Middle: VBS volunteers performing a skit for our students held in May 2024.

Bottom: The past two summers we have co-hosted with another local church an "End of Summer Celebration" in the town park on an August evening. We invite the community to come enjoy a free meal and activities for all ages such as laser tag, bounce houses and axe-throwing. We conclude the evening with a broadcast movie and freshly popped popcorn.

Photos by Grace Bible Church

News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel Shafer

Aaron Box to serve as USMB national director

Aaron Box, a USMB pastor from Eugene, Ore., has been appointed as USMB national director, effective July 1, 2024.

"We are thrilled to welcome Aaron Box as our new national director," says Boris Borisov, chair of the Leadership Board search committee. "Aaron's passion for serving others, coupled with his pastoral and leadership experience, make him an ideal candidate to lead our conference forward."

Box has served as senior pastor of North Park Community Church in Eugene since 2011 and has more than 20 years of experience leading in ministry positions. He also has extensive volunteer experience, serving on the USMB Leadership Board from 2014-2022 and in various positions in his local community.

Box earned a bachelor's degree in Bible/Theology and Youth Ministry from Multnomah



University in 1999 and a Master of Business Administration with a management concentration from Bushnell University in 2022.

He and his wife, Jennifer, have two children and reside in Eugene.—USMB

Lori Taylor to retire in July

Lori Taylor, Bakersfield, Calif., will retire from her role as USMB webmaster July 31 after 16 years of service to USMB.

Taylor began serving USMB as part-time administrative assistant to executive director Ed Boschman in 2008. Upon Boschman's retirement, Taylor continued her role when Don Morris became interim national director in 2014 and national director in 2016. She concluded her administrative assistant duties in 2020 but stayed on staff as webmaster working five hours per week.

"Lori has been such a blessing

to me personally, to our USMB staff and to our USMB family," Morris says. "She provided excellent administrative expertise. She expanded her creativity by providing great work in helping to develop our current website and then staying on part-time to be our webmaster, keeping this important resource fresh and looking great."

In retirement, Taylor looks forward to spending more time with her husband, Geoff, their six grandchildren, and pursuing new hobbies and ministry opportunities.—USMB

MB Foundation marks record-setting charitable distributions in 2023

MB Foundation marks 2023 as the fourth consecutive year of record-setting charitable distributions generated by the ministry's community of donors. With a distribution total over \$16 million, donors contributed to 477 different charities, also a record. This record-setting year beat last year's mark of \$14 million and continued a trend that has been on the rise since 2020, when distributions totaled \$8 million.

In addition to a single-year record in 2023, the distribution amount also pushed total distributions since MB Foundation's beginning in 1991 to over \$100 million. Since inception, MB Foundation has facilitated distributions totaling over \$112 million.

"We praise God for this testimony of how the Lord is moving through our community of givers. Seeing this record-setting trend continue year after year is amazing," says Jon C. Wiebe, president and CEO. "We are also honored to see our total historic distributions surpass the \$100 million mark. The Lord is good."

Investment and loan growth continued in 2023. Over 900 investors reflect a 16 percent increase from the previous year. The \$132 million loan portfolio increased with 136 borrowers who are growing and strengthening their ministries. MB Foundation saw assets under management total \$333 million in 2023.

MB Foundation contributed \$268,250 toward USMB operations and its immigrant church initiative and for the financial health of MB pastors and leadership development.

Another celebration for 2023 was the completion of the building addition, which includes additional office space and a 2,079-square-foot ministry space.

Read the full 2023 Annual Report: <https://mbfoundation.com/2023annualreport/>.—MBF

Tabor celebrates commencement

The Tabor College class of 2024, including 130 undergraduates and 58 graduate and online students, was honored May 4 in two commencement ceremonies.

The events commemorated record growth in graduate programs, with enrollment hitting 100 students in Spring 2024. It was also the largest undergraduate class since Spring 2020.

David Faber, professor of philosophy and religious studies, and David Stevens, program director and associate professor of education, were keynote speakers.

Derek Hamm, associate professor of graphic design and faculty chair, awarded honor cords. President David Janzen awarded diplomas. Graduate student hoodings were conducted by program directors.—TC



Tabor College faculty applaud members of the class of 2024 as they exit the auditorium following commencement ceremonies May 4. The 130 graduates represent the largest undergraduate class since 2020. *Photo by Tabor College.*

Rolen joins USMB staff

USMB has hired Desirae Rolen as administrative assistant and webmaster, effective July 1.

Rolen has served as administrative assistant for USMB NextGen since July 2023 and will continue in that part-time role while adding 25-30 hours per week for the USMB national office.

"It's obvious that Desirae has a passion for serving Jesus in many capacities, including through administrative work and being a webmaster," says USMB national director Don Morris. "As she says, she loves detail work. I believe God orchestrated her availability for the job at just the right time for our USMB family and for her as well."

Rolen attended Newman University in Wichita, Kan., for two years and has more than six years of experience in administrative assistant roles in Wichita. From 2020-2024, she served as social media manager and offered web development and maintenance for two Prineville, Ore., restaurants.

Rolen will work from her home in Wichita. She and her husband, Brad, have one daughter and attend Ridgepoint Church, Wichita.—USMB

CDC pastors and spouses gather for retreat

Twenty-three Central District pastors and spouses gathered for a retreat at Castaway Club near Detroit Lakes, Minn., April 12-14. District Minister Daniel Rodriguez spoke about being "Rooted and Built Up," based on Colossians 2:6-7.

"Pastoral ministry can be very lonely and even more for those who do rural ministry," says Rodriguez via email after the event. "This year, we focused on being rooted in Jesus. Our personal relationship with Jesus as pastors should be a priority in ministry."

Samuel and Sara Hailemariam, pastoral couple at Grace International Church in Indianapolis, Ind., and José Guerra, pastor of Iglesia Manantial de Agua Viva in Omaha, Neb., also shared. Mike Lotvola led singing.—CDC



Central District pastors and spouses gathered for fellowship and encouragement at Castaway Club near Detroit Lakes, Minn., April 12-14. Twenty-three people attended. *Photo by CDC.*

Scott Thomas concludes service as interim church planting mobilizer

Scott Thomas, interim church planting mobilizer, has ended his contracted position with USMB, effective April 30, 2024. Thomas began in that role Feb. 1, 2024.

“Scott did a great job of connecting with our churches during his short tenure as mobilizer,” says USMB national director Don Morris. “It simply wasn’t tenable for him to continue in this position without knowing if he would be allowed to continue past the contracted period. He then determined it would be best for all concerned to step out of the contracted role and provide his services to USMB through his Church Planting Partners agency.”

Thomas will continue to serve USMB church planters as a coach and through assessments and online cohorts.

The church planting mobilizer position will not be filled until new national director Aaron Box has met with the Church Planting Council, Morris says.—USMB

FPU holds graduation May 4

Some 979 students were eligible to graduate in one of the two Fresno Pacific University commencement ceremonies May 4, with 897 confirmed to participate.

In all, 217 graduates came from traditional undergraduate programs, 345 from bachelor’s degree completion programs and 417 from graduate programs, including 32 from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary.

Matthew Dildine, CEO of the Fresno Mission as well as president of Martin Park, Inc. and board chair of Citygate Network, was the commencement speaker.

Paola Guadalupe Gonzalez Mendez received the Harold Haak Award, while Iris Bayer, Lauren Binaski, Hallie Brown and Stephanie Tebaqui each received the Highest GPA Award. Evangel Home was honored with the Seminary Service Award.

Also participating in commencement were: FPU President André Stephens; Joshua Wilson, chair of the FPU Board of Trustees; and Sherri Hughes, interim provost and senior vice president of academic affairs. The university concert choir, under the direction of Jeffrey Wilson, professor of music and director of choral activities, provided special music.—FPU



Brian Ross, associate professor of pastoral ministries at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, places a master’s hood on a graduate of the Ministry, Leadership & Culture program during commencement May 4. Photo by FPU

5 minutes with...

CHET GLANZER

Chet Glanzer got an early start on the wrestling mats. His father was a wrestling coach and two older brothers were already well into the sport, so Chet joined them when he was just 5 years old and was soon competing at state and national levels.



Chet is a member of Bethel MB Church in Huron, S.D. His love for wrestling and his love for sharing the gospel converged in a unique way six years ago when he proposed that nearby Byron Bible Camp add a wrestling camp to its summer line-up.

How common is it for kids to go to a wrestling camp?

Kids who wrestle travel all over during summer for training camps. When I was a kid, we’d go to the camp for the day and then just sit in the hotel for the evening. At Byron Bible Camp the kids get 10 hours of wrestling over four days, but they also get time for activities like zip lines, fishing and rock climbing, plus chapels and devotions.

Who attends the camp?

We can host about 80 kids on the wrestling mats we lay out in the gym. The camp does a lot of marketing, including the Dakota Grappler Facebook page, so we’ve had kids from all over the state and even other states. Sometimes five or six from a wrestling club will come together, and the club may even pay half of their fees. Most of the kids who come are unchurched.

Who leads the training?

This year our clinician is the head coach at Wheaton College who has competed twice with the U.S. Olympic Team and was U.S. National Cham-

pion three times. He’ll be our chapel speaker too. The kids think it’s pretty neat to meet an Olympic wrestler.

Why is wrestling a good sport to connect kids with the gospel?

One of our past clinicians had a T-shirt that said, “Jesus Christ is life, the rest is just wrestling.” So much of life is about wrestling with difficulties, disappointments, failures. And how do you do that? By focusing on who Jesus is and who we are in Christ. I want to teach these kids how to deal with the highs and lows in wrestling and in life and who to look toward.

What is a scripture that motivates and helps a wrestler in this sport?

When I was in high school I would go to Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” But I had the wrong mindset. It’s not that God is going to give you an advantage to win over your opponent. It’s so you can keep on going when you feel like you can’t go any harder or farther. Win or lose, Christ gives us that strength.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays

Dario Ramirez shares this story from Paraguay's German-language MB national conference that numbers 3,165 members in 22 churches. Paraguay also has a Spanish-language conference, Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas, that has 3,304 members in 56 churches.

This story begins with the vision of two young missionary couples from Canada: Peter and Hildegard Loewen and Ernst and Adina Neufeld. They had the vision that through a radio station, the work that the Mennonites in Paraguay had started could be strengthened, encouraged and extended while also being a valuable contribution to the work of all evangelical churches in the country.

We began broadcasting experimentally June 21, 1993. Everyone agreed that the name of this great vision, the first Christian FM radio station in Paraguay, should be Obedira, "obey" in English. So, the task of announcing the gospel of salvation began with the satisfaction of seeing testimonies of transformed lives. The stories became countless.

With coverage of 250 km and because our waves reach much of the eastern region of Paraguay and northeastern Argentina, we reach thousands of families. With our programs, we support different churches and ministries in spreading the gospel and serving the community.

Despite having little more than 30 years of ministerial life and developing multiple areas of communication, we feel that we still have much to give. Today, we face



new generations with different values that change the way they receive the message. We know there is a difference between the generation of 30 years ago and the current ones, but the message remains the same. We are confident we have the message and the ability to communicate it to the new generations as well.

That is why we decided to seek resources to help us venture into the world of social networks and the production of content adapted to a generation that is constantly changing and moving but needs to know about the fullness of life in Jesus. We are not alone on this path. We have found collaborators who have made it possible to transmit the message for more than 30 years. God uses them as instruments of provision and blessings. For us, it's not just about broadcasting music; it's about broadcasting life.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

- Pray for us as our media team creates content on social networks.
- Pray for our efforts to extend to locations where there is still no Christian radio station.

Did You Know?

- The geographical area of Paraguay totals around 157,057 square miles, making it slightly smaller than California.

- Paraguay is the only country to have a flag with two distinct sides. The front side shows the country's coat of arms while the back has the country's treasury seal.

- Even though it has no coastline, Paraguay is famous for being home to the world's largest navy among landlocked nations. It also has a river defense corps, a coast guard and naval aviation.

Always alert and awake

What we believe
about Christ's return

War in the Middle East always sparks a renewed interest among Christians regarding what the Bible says about the end times, what theologians call the study of eschatology. In recent generations the formation of the state of Israel, the rising threat of nuclear Armageddon, the collapse of the USSR and other massive geo-political events have spurred interest again and again. And in a way, that's a good thing.

The eagerness to know more may be for the wrong reasons: Who is the antichrist? Is the rapture about to happen? But in Scripture, Jesus calls us again and again to be alert and awake. "So you, too, must keep watch!... You also must be ready all the time" (Matt. 24:42,44); "Stay alert!" (Mark 13:33).

So, having been recently alerted and awakened, what are, in fact, the main truths regarding the end times that every believer needs to know? I am deeply indebted to David Ewert and his outstanding book, *And Then Comes the End*. I cannot commend it more highly.

Our Confession of Faith answers these questions in Article 18, Christ's Final Triumph. It starts like this: "We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ will return visibly and triumphantly at the end of the present age. The church must always be prepared to meet the Lord, living in expectation of his imminent return."

At the center of our belief, then, is the return of Jesus, a return that he speaks of frequently and that the apostles affirm again and again. In Matthew 24:30-31, Jesus says, "And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world." In 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God."

So, what do we believe about that day?

We believe that we do not know the hour of his appearing. Jesus made this clear in Mark 13:32, saying, "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows." And again, in Matthew 24:42 Jesus says, "For you don't know what day your Lord is coming."

We believe, along with each generation of believers in history, that Christ's return is imminent. We believe this because Jesus taught us to think this way and the apostles modeled this posture for us. Many Christians mistakenly think of the last days as the very last events prior to Jesus' return. But as David Ewert explains, "The New Testament . . . equates them [the last days] with the new era introduced by Christ's work of redemption accomplished at his first advent. We can say that all Christians throughout the interim have lived and are living in the last days." This is why Jesus repeatedly calls us to be alert and ready at all times.

It will be a day of resurrection. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 fills us with hope that at Jesus' return, "the believers who have died will rise from their graves." Jesus speaks of that day in John 5 as the day when "all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of the God's Son, and they will rise again." What a call that will be. What a commanding shout.

It will be a day of judgment. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 says that when Jesus appears from heaven, "he will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious

By Dave Thiessen

power." Revelation pictures a great white throne where all are judged and "anyone whose name is not found recorded in the book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15).

It will be a day of new creation. Peter speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Peter 3:13). Paul speaks of our mortal bodies being transformed into immortal bodies" (1 Cor. 15:53). John describes at length the beauty of heaven coming to earth as a city (Rev. 21).

It will be a day with Jesus.

It's important to remember that along with all of the "big picture" truths and beliefs that we affirm, there is a deeply personal facet to the return of Jesus. Remember how he speaks of it to his disciples in John 14:3, "When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am." He, too, anticipates the day when he can be with his bride.

How should we live?

Given these things that we believe, how should we then live, to borrow a phrase from Francis Schaeffer? We are taught first to be "ready all the time" (Luke 12:40) and to "keep alert at all times" (Luke 21:36). We are looking for Jesus' return and busy with the work that he has given us to do, the work of making more eager disciples. We are keeping an eye on the signs of the times and living as if today was our last day before Jesus' return. Like the wise bridesmaids we should be found ready and waiting when the shout to meet the bridegroom rings out (Luke 25:1-13).

Second, we should expect challenges, difficulties and even persecution as we go about the work of making disciples. Paul comforts the church in Thessalonica regarding Jesus' return precisely because they are suffering persecution and hardship (2 Thess. 1:5) and he

describes the time when "God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven" (2 Thess. 1:7).

The whole purpose of the book of Revelation was and is to encourage believers who were experiencing extreme hardship. And Jesus himself warns the disciples that "here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows" (John 16:33). The return of Jesus gives us an en-

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Jesus made this clear in Mark 13:32, saying, "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows."

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tirely unique and hopeful outlook on life in this world.

Finally, we are to eagerly anticipate and long for his coming. 1 Corinthians 1:7 says, "Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see also 1 Thess. 1:10). Hebrews 9:28 says, "He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him." So, are we eager?

There are few contemporary worship songs being written about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, but I'll close with some of the lyrics from a recent exception, a favorite of mine by Chris Tomlin, "Even So Come":

"Like a bride
Waiting for her groom
We'll be a church
Ready for you
Every heart longing for our King . . .
Even so, come"

"The Spirit and bride say, 'Come' . . . Amen! Come Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:17, 20).

Dave Thiessen is executive pastor at Mountain View Community Church in Fresno, Calif.



Is the end here?

Christians through the ages have predicted when Christ will return

Since prehistoric times, humans have speculated about the end of world. In the early years of this century, the attention of many people around the globe focused on a prediction based on the ancient “long count” calendar of the Mayan people group. That calendar would run out of numbers on Dec. 21, 2012, and many predicted that the world as we know it would end that day.

My wife and I spent part of that day in the air, returning from Thailand where we had visited our daughter’s family. The flight was quite normal, but as we crossed the Pacific Ocean, we also crossed the dateline. So, it was still Dec. 20 when we landed in San Francisco. We were surprised at the level of concern of those in the airport about whether the world would end the next day. We assured them that Dec. 21 had already begun quite normally for us!

Other predictions regarding the end of the world have been based on the expansion of scientific knowledge and observations. Astronomers have extended their ability to observe much deeper into the universe with space-based telescopes and deep-space spacecraft. Concerns about the earth being struck by a large asteroid have led to various “end of the world” predictions. The limited lifespan of our sun is declared a scientific certainty. And in recent decades, concerns about spreading pollution and climate change have led many to doubt the long-term survival of the human race. In the nuclear age, much has been said about a coming

doomsday that will bring about the end of the world through unrestrained nuclear warfare.

How do we respond?

How do we as Christians respond to end of the world predictions? What has God revealed through his prophets and through his Son about the future of the human race? Are we exempt from the observations of science or the threats of nuclear war?

Both the Old and New Testaments affirm that the world as we know it now will indeed come to an end. In Mark 13, Jesus outlines some of what will occur prior to the end, such as wars, earthquakes and famines. Jesus also seems to concur with the observation of the Old Testament prophets and of current science that our sun is running out of fuel: “At that time after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken” (Mark 13:24-25).

So, for Christians there is widespread agreement that the end of the world is indeed coming. And for most of us, the end is marked by the return of Jesus, the second coming. However, there is much less agreement on just when and exactly how the end will occur.

I vividly remember the revival/prophesy conferences in my childhood Krimmer Mennonite Brethren church in central California. The back wall of the platform was covered with complex and well-illustrated charts of just how the events of the “end times” would take place. But the

By Harold Ens

messages were not limited to only those future days. They also divided all human history into “dispensations,” including one for the days in which we were living. According to this approach to human history, the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount do not directly apply to our dispensation.

In the mid-1970s, I attended MB Biblical Seminary in preparation for going as a missionary to Panama. I took a New Testament course from David Ewert that opened my eyes to another way of understanding Scripture’s depiction of the end times. When the Bible speaks of the “last days,” it describes the era in which we live. This era begins with Christ’s first coming and the birth of the church at the coming of the Holy Spirit. The church is the new expression of the “people of God” and includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Ewert explained that in these “last days,” there is not a Jewish people of God and a Gentile people of God; we are one in Christ. The second coming of Christ will mark the end of these last days in which we now live. Living with this hope of Christ’s return and our transformation to eternal life with him should impel us to faithful discipleship, Ewert said. Our lives are to live out Jesus’ teachings, including those in the Sermon on the Mount as found in Matthew 5-7.

When will Christ return?

But this still leaves unanswered the question of the timing of Christ’s return. Even while Jesus is still on earth, his disciples are asking this question. When Jesus answers, he says, “Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear. However, no one knows the day or the hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. And since you don’t know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert!” (Mark 13: 31-33, NLT).

Jesus’ response to his disciples has not stopped Christians through the years from predicting the day of his return. During World War II, there were those who declared it was indeed the time for Jesus to return. When the United Nations formed the secular state of Israel in 1948, it became the basis for some scholars to set a date for the second coming. Today

some carefully follow the news reports of famines, earthquakes and more wars, and they use them to predict the end of the age. Others base their predictions of Jesus’ return on the success of the secular state of Israel in its efforts to return to its former size and glory.

My perspective on how we should live in these last days has been profoundly influenced by my over 35 years of involvement with global mission. My first exposure was in Colombia where MB mission to South America began in 1945. There I saw the living hope that comes to people when their lives are transformed by God’s Spirit. Then came four years in DR Congo and four more back in California before my wife, Helen, and I fully recognized God’s call on us to live on mission our whole lives. With this decision to surrender to his call came eight years as missionaries to Panama followed by 19 years in mission administration.

During this last assignment, I was privileged to attend the Global Consultation on World Evangelization 95 (GCOWE 95) in Seoul, South Korea, sponsored by the AD 2000 and Beyond Movement. The movement was born out of consideration of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:14: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” GCOWE 95 brought together nearly 3,400 mission leaders from some 186 nations. The stated vision was to motivate these leaders toward the goal of a church for every people group and the gospel for every person by the year 2000.

While significant progress has been made toward this end, some 24 years later the challenge remains before us. As we eagerly await the second coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, may we not forget his call to take the good news to all people. The end is coming.

Harold Ens was a MB missionary from 1977 to 1985 in Panama and served with MBMS International, now Multiply, as secretary for Latin America and Iberia for six years and as general director from 1991 to 2004. He and his wife, Helen, are members of Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.

“

Living with this hope of Christ’s return and our transformation to eternal life with him should impel us to faithful discipleship.

”

Christ's return and

When we read Bible passages through an Anabaptist lens we start with Christ's teaching

By David A. Loewen

U.S. Mennonite Brethren, as well as many other evangelicals, have been greatly influenced in their reading of Scripture, and specifically "end times" passages, by dispensationalism. Where does this way of interpreting Scripture as popularly portrayed in the "Left Behind" movie series come from? What should guide the way followers of Jesus read the biblical references to Christ's return?

The dispensational lens for reading Scripture begins with John Nelson Darby. Darby, a Plymouth Brethren pastor who lived from 1800 to 1892, instituted a two-stage return of Christ and removal of the saints from the earth before the great tribulation. Along with this, Darby developed a system of looking at different parts of Scripture as uniquely applying to different periods in history depending on God's work during those times. These periods are called dispensations.

C.E. Scofield (1843-1921) popularized Darby's concepts. Scofield, a lawyer from Atchison, Kan., was converted at a crusade by Dwight L. Moody. With his footnotes and cross-references, Scofield used Darby's dispensational system as a lens by which he viewed the entire Bible. This Bible was later popularized as the Scofield Bible.

Darby's views and Scofield's Bible eventually became popular in Mennonite Brethren churches. After churches moved away from raising up bi-vocational pastors within each congregation toward a system of finding professionally trained pastors, young men began to seek training for the pastorate by attending seminaries. Two popular schools at that time where dispensationalism was taught were Moody Bible Institute and Dallas Theological Seminary. When MB Biblical Seminary was founded in 1955, some of the professors were also trained at these schools and taught from a dispensational perspective.

The Anabaptist lens

However, not all Mennonite Brethren agreed with a dispensational reading of Scripture. One of these theologians was J.B. Toews, president of MB Biblical Seminary from 1964-1972. Toews guided the seminary in a way that was instrumental in bringing in new faculty to change the school from a dispensa-

tional approach to a more Anabaptist approach of interpreting Scripture.

During Toews' tenure as president and emeritus professor, the seminary thrived and produced many pastors who interpreted Scripture differently than dispensational theologians. These students were taught to see Jesus as the fullest representation of God and thus to place the words of Christ, especially the Sermon on the Mount, as central to their understanding of Jesus' teaching for the church.

They were taught the value of seeing all of Scripture through the lens of Christ's teaching. Therefore, the Gospels and Acts were the starting place, revealing the fullest revelation of God in Christ and the work of Christ through his Spirit in the church. This interpretive lens was then cast on the readings of the Old Testament and the Epistles. With the base of the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Epistles, the more difficult and figurative writings of the apocalyptic literature of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation were to be understood.

Here are some of the conclusions I have reached regarding Christ's return when interpreting Scripture using this Anabaptist lens.

Reading the Gospels

In Matthew 13:37-43, Jesus interprets the parable of the weeds that are sown among the good seed. This passage, along with others in the Gospels, says Christ's return will be a time of judgment when God separates those who are his followers from those who are not. Those who follow Jesus will remain and "shine like the sun" and those who do not will be cast into hell. The day of the Lord's coming is a day of separating the wheat from the chaff and the sheep from the goats.

Jesus compares the second coming judgment to the days of Noah. In Matthew 24:36-41, Jesus says the flood of Noah's lifetime was a day of judgment. This raises the question: Who is taken and who is left in the great flood? As we look at this passage in the same way that we look at the parables of Jesus, the ones who are taken are the chaff, the weeds, etc. The chaff is taken and burned and the weeds are separated from the grain and destroyed.

In Noah's day, those who were not on the ark

the Anabaptist lens



were taken by the flood. Noah and his family were left. Therefore, this Matthew passage doesn't describe the sudden disappearance of Christians. It likely describes God's judgment, meaning the unbeliever is taken in punishment, and those who believe enjoy life eternal. No one is "left behind."

Matthew 24:3-8 warns us of things that will occur as the time of Christ's return draws nearer. But the main point isn't about panic; Jesus instead says not to be alarmed. This passage calls us not to build bunkers, arming ourselves to the hilt and stashing food. Rather, this is a call for believers to do the work of the kingdom, fulfilling the great commission.

Connections in the Epistles

As we move from the Gospels to the Epistles we see further connections. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 compares Christ's coming to a thief in the night. Calamity will come to people who are thinking that

all is safe and peaceful. Unprepared people are caught off guard. In verse four Paul states, "But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief."

Believers do not know the day of the Lord's coming, but instead of experiencing it as an unpleasant surprise, they face it in anticipation of something far greater. Therefore, we are to encourage one another and build one another up as we see the time drawing near.

As we read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we cannot ignore the

idea of the rapture of the church. It is the event of Christ's return where those who have died are resurrected to join Christ, and those who are alive in Christ are changed. It is described as the exciting event of Christians being united with Christ at his return. It gives hope to the believer and provides comfort for those whose loved ones have passed.

There are three different positions as to the timing of the rapture in relation to the time of the great tribulation. Since Revelation is unclear as to its timing, we need to hold these positions with humility.

As we move from the Epistles of John to the book of Revelation, if we take the epistles as seriously as we take the figurative language of the Apocalypse of John, we see a different picture of the antichrist than is popularized in the movies. 1 John 2:18-19 teaches that there are many antichrists. These are people who were once involved in the church but left the church and became opponents of Christ. The

antichrist, if consistent with many antichrists of this scripture, may be a particularly gifted religious personality who has turned against the followers of Christ. And if this is so, he may not be recognizable as an evil political dictator as portrayed in the movies.

Concepts in Revelation

As we now move to those concepts about Christ's return that are only mentioned in the book of Revelation, we move into a discussion of concepts that have many figurative components. For many of these, there is no mention in the Old Testament, the Gospels or in the Epistles.

The great tribulation is one of these issues. The church has always suffered tribulation. Tribulation is simply the experience of misery and chaos. As God's judgment nears, Revelation teaches that the world will enter a time of great tribulation. There is much controversy as to the order of events surrounding this tribulation. Believers must not add to the present chaos over specific views of its timing. Believers should rather encourage faithfulness to Christ during difficult times and hold their views concerning the timing of the great tribulation with much humility.

Another of these issues is concerning the millennium. This concept of a thousand-year binding of Satan appears only in Revelation 20. It is described as a time when the martyred believers will reign with Christ. When the millennial reign of Christ ends, Satan will be freed to deceive the nations and then be destroyed by Christ in the lake of fire.

There are at least four different nuanced views of the timing of this reign in reference to Christ's return. I believe that these views should be held with a great deal of humility and should not be issues that divide the church.

A closing suggestion: Begin by reading and understanding Christ's final triumph from the Gospels and Epistles. In light of the truths that are found there, read the apocalyptic books and remain humble regarding positions of timing on Christ's return concerning these things. Remember, only the Father knows the day or the hour. Come Lord Jesus.

David A. Loewen is a part-time visitation pastor at Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., and will complete his term as chair of the USMB Board of Faith and Life this July.

Explore the many views of Christ's second coming

The feature articles in this issue focus on eschatology—the study of “last things,” specifically Christ's second coming. Faithful followers of Jesus hold many views about the events of his return. This diversity of opinion is why the MB Confession of Faith Commentary and Pastoral Application notes that our Confession of Faith doesn't include a particular view, specifically about the millennial reign of Christ. The articles presented in print and online reflect some of the many ways U.S. Mennonite Brethren view the details of Christ's final triumph. We encourage readers to learn together about these views, to be gracious with those with whom we disagree and to hold our own positions with humility.

Read more online:

Alert, focused and encouraged How dispensational premillennialism affects my priorities and perspective by James Suderman

Because Christ reigns Three ways amillennialism impacts my Christian life by Aaron Halvorsen

Suffering and Christ's return by Lynn Kauffman. Jesus gives his followers three commands by which to live as we wait his return. And he reminds us that suffering and mission to the lost go together.

Divine intervention

God miraculously rescues and heals

As an occupational therapist, rural drives are routine for me as I deliver services across the state of Kansas. As I drove from one nursing home to another on Jan. 27, 2020, I lost consciousness for unknown reasons. My car crossed the center line and tilted as I entered the ditch. I was alert briefly but not long enough to correct the car, which plunged 10 feet down an embankment and into a creek.

After my car hit a cement culvert, I regained consciousness, feeling cold water up to my waist. Airbags had deployed in front of me, and my right arm hung at a weird angle at my elbow, broken. I tried the driver's side door and could not open it. I could not reach the seat belt to unlock it. Trapped, I spoke a desperate plea, "Lord, please help me."

The next thing I knew, I was standing in water outside my vehicle with no idea how I had gotten out of the car. Later, I had a vague awareness of being on the side of the road with a sense that someone had helped me. But the person I thought I saw was not known by any of my rescuers. Emergency workers told me that three teenage boys had found me, and they called for an ambulance. I have no memory of them.

In the ambulance I felt colder than ever before. They took me to Wesley Medical Center in Wichita to assess my injuries.

I had sustained a brain bleed (which fortunately resolved within 24 hours), displaced sternum and multiple fractures of my humerus, spine and seven ribs, putting me at risk for lung puncture or collapse. My arm was broken in two places, one requiring surgery, and I sustained various cuts and bruises around my eyes, nose and mouth. It was a miracle that I survived.

I remained in the hospital for one week, went to rehab for one week and then came home to continue outpatient therapy. In July, I returned to work without restrictions.

I believe my rescue required divine intervention as my injuries would have prevented me from getting out of the car on my own. My heavenly Father picked me up carefully and placed me where he wanted me to be.

God is real and intervenes in the lives of people. He exchanged my weakness for his strength and is my ever-present help. Having faced death once gives me confidence to face the future. God was present for me in that difficult situation, and I believe he'll be present in the next one that comes.

At the time of the accident, my sister had just died and my husband had lost his job, leaving me grieving while trying to pick up extra work to make ends meet. But I sensed God so intimately after the accident and saw how he preserved me. He replaced my "ashes" of self-reliance, fear and anxiety for light, life, joy and peace.

After the accident, everything hit me in such big ways. Colors were

more vibrant. My emotions were bigger. I cried more. Laughed more. I experienced a huge sense of God's love, protection, provision and presence. The knowledge of these gifts carries me, and I look forward to the time when I will get to see God and be with him for eternity.

DeVona also shared her story with her nephew, Adam Suderman. To read the story as told in the months after the accident, visit our website.

He exchanged my weakness for his strength and is my ever-present help.



DeVona Roble is semi-retired after serving as an occupational therapist for more than 40 years. She and her husband, Craig, have six children and attend Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church.

Working for shalom

A church *with* its community

I believe church planting is the only form of church renewal strong enough to heal the historically dominant narratives that hinder Jesus' great commission. These four fragmenting stories include moving away from neighborhood-focused mission, emphasizing "decisions for Christ" more than discipleship, planting homogenous churches and relying on technology to foster community.

The first trend emerged around the time of Constantine in the 4th century when Christian churches moved toward political affiliation and away from localized neighborhood-focused mission. The second came about in the 15th century. With the emergence of early globalization, churches focused on "getting people saved" without a strong emphasis on biblically defined discipleship.

Since the 20th century, U.S. and Canadian churches have tended to plant churches according to homogeneous church-growth principles and business models without developing a strong mission to the neighborhoods where these churches are located. And now in the 21st century, our technology age, technocrats (those who think technology can solve societal problems) are enticing churches to use A.I. and virtual reality to create Christian community.

I think these faulty narratives are only healed when men and women filled with the Holy Spirit

plant churches. But not all churches are worth planting if they replicate the trends that got us here. Recent U.S. statistics show that only 35 percent of churches are growing and the majority are plateaued or in decline.

According to Robert Linthicum, founder of Partners in Urban Transformation, churches tend to be planted in three forms:

1. A church in its community. While they are physically located in a neighborhood, they often fixate on their own existence and largely ignore the needs of the neighbors around the church.

2. A church to its community. They provide resources to the neighborhood they are physically located in, but view themselves as the savior of the neighborhood.

3. A church with its community. This is the only type of church that leads to the rapid acceleration of the great commission in the neighborhood it represents. The church joins with neighbors to address issues in the local neighborhood and sees itself as part of the neighborhood's struggle and the primary disciple-making partner in its renewal.

Nine years ago, Neighborhood Church was planted to be a church with its community, the Jackson Neighborhood in Fresno, Calif. The Jackson Neighborhood is eight blocks by 12 blocks with 923 homes representing 3,300 residents. We see our neighborhood as a geographical area of spiritual responsibility. Whether the issues are spiritual, economic, educational, environmental, political or relational, we pursue Jesus' vision for our neighborhood and its residents.

Metric after metric shows that Jackson is vulnerable and under-

resourced. But that's not its final story. Jesus believes in underdogs! With our neighbors, we started a business that employs a handful of residents with barriers to employment. We formed a non-profit organization that meets the practical needs of hundreds of residents and runs a dozen programs such as in-class support for underperforming elementary students. We also started two weekly gatherings of neighbors dedicated to being disciples of Jesus and following his mission. We are three things working together for the flourishing of the Jackson Neighborhood—a church, a small business and a non-profit all working in coordination for Jackson's shalom.

Church planting is what happens when church renewal and neighborhood renewal coalesce—and it's the only thing strong enough to uphold Jesus' great commission.

We see our neighborhood as a geographical area of spiritual responsibility.



Joe White is lead pastor of Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif.

Who are we listening to?

Hearing from good people who don't always agree

People encounter many voices throughout the day, from musicians to preachers to politicians. Multiple studies say that the average human hears 20,000 to 30,000 words a day spoken by dozens of different people. This abundance of noise leads us to ask an important question: Who are we listening to?

Most Christians I presented this question to immediately replied that they are, or at least should be, listening to God. We can listen to God through Scripture, in times of prayerful reflection, by sensing the movement of the Holy Spirit and lots of other ways. God speaks through Jesus, and God speaks through our fellow humans.

There are good and holy things that come from hearing different people and their opinions, experiences and dreams. We are aware that not everyone intends to speak goodness into our lives. John reminds us that we will encounter those who “speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood” (1 John 4:5-6). So which voices are shaping us? Whose voices are influencing our church communities?

I spoke with ministry leaders and church attenders and explored a number of websites and social

media pages within our denomination. There is a diversity of voices in a myriad of genres that we are listening to within our USMB family. For one thing, we are listening to each other. We ponder our pastors' sermons and have good conversation with other people in our congregations. Many of us are tuning in to LEAD Pods hosted by Matt Ehresman, participating in LEAD Cohorts and reading *Christian Leader*. We hear each other and are being shaped as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We are also listening to voices from across the global church, finding goodness in different denominations and traditions. On its church website, Axiom Church in Peoria, Ariz., lists a number of authors, musicians and visual artists who are making an impact on their community, including Dallas Willard, Jan Johnson and Wild Earth. Multiply Mission Mobilizer Joanna Chapa shares some voices shaping her this season, with Bianca Juarez Olthoff, Phylicia Masonheimer and Curt Thompson among the group.

People in our communities are listening to ministry leaders Priscilla Shirer, Chip Ingram, N.T. Wright and Rich Villodas and performing artists Preston and Jackie Perry and Rend Collective. We listen to groups creating online content such as The Bible Project and The Chosen series. We are hearing from people who were alive before our time, from early Anabaptist leaders to more recent authors such as C.S. Lewis. Some voices we hear don't agree with each other on every aspect of life, like theologians Greg Boyd and John Piper, but we are taking time to hear different perspectives.

There are people that point us to God who aren't specifically connected to our Christian communities. Pastor Alex Janzen of Community Bible Church in Mountain Lake, Minn., encourages us to pay attention to “everyday voices” in our lives because “when listening to [people] who aren't overtly spiritual or even overtly relevant, we can still find truth.” Janzen has found that “we can listen to a reliable God through unreliable people as long as we check that it lines up with Scripture, with who we know God is.”

In all the noise of life, we are finding good people to listen to and hearing God in the process.

There are good and holy things that come from hearing different people and their opinions, experiences and dreams.



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

A party for Birch Bay

Birch Bay Bible Community Church hosts annual family-friendly fireworks show

Each year, more than 10,000 people flock to Birch Bay, Wash., an unincorporated community along the northwest Washington coast, to shoot fireworks on July 4.

Birch Bay is one of the only places to shoot fireworks on the beach without a permit, says Birch Bay Bible Community Church lead pastor Tim Thiessen. A county ordinance allows the legal discharging of fireworks July 3-5, and many people buy fireworks on the nearby Lummi Reservation and come to Birch Bay to shoot them off.

It's not uncommon for people to spend \$5,000 to \$10,000 on fireworks, Thiessen says.

"Birch Bay gets overwhelmed with people," he says. "It's not the most family-friendly event. There's a lot of drinking and fireworks. The whole bay is lit up for several hours."

Inspired by the fireworks on the bay, the BBBCC congregation decided to offer a family-friendly version. Since 2013, BBBCC has hosted a party, including a fireworks show, on July 3 to bless its community.

"We want to throw a party for Birch Bay, but we don't want to compete with what's going on on July 4," Thiessen says. "We want to capitalize on that culture, and we advertise it as a family-friendly event. Parents love it. It has a reputation unto its own. We barely need to advertise anymore."

One of the best shows

In summer 2012, BBBCC hosted a small July 3 fireworks show for

the church family. Seeing an opportunity, the following summer, BBBCC advertised its show as a community event, and 500-600 people came. The event is possible because a licensed pyrotechnic, Bryan Zollner, attends BBBCC, Thiessen says.

In the beginning, the event marked the end of vacation Bible school and included a large kids' carnival. But, the event required every possible volunteer after a busy week of VBS, Thiessen says, so after the COVID-19 pandemic, the congregation dropped VBS and the carnival in favor of a smaller "party on the patio" July 3 with live music, food, yard games, bounce houses and, of course, fireworks.

Today, between 1,000-1,200 come to the church on July 3 for the party and fireworks show. BBBCC uses a neighboring field for extra parking, and people come around 8 p.m. to enjoy the music and activities. The BBBCC snack bar offers nachos, ice cream bars, soda and popcorn for purchase.

Volunteer firefighters bring a firetruck, and the local sheriff typically provides traffic control. A BBBCC pastoral apprentice is a retired police officer who "brings his whistle out of retirement," Thiessen says.

The fireworks start at 10 p.m. on BBBCC's multi-purpose field.

"It's as family-friendly and as safe as we can make it," he says. "Because (of) the relationships we have, we're able to pull off a big event like that. We can do it because of the specific people we have."

At one time, the Bellingham Herald ranked BBBCC's show one of the best in the county.

"We get a lot of people saying this is one of the best," Thiessen says. "Our guy knows how to wire up a show."

All hands on deck

The event involves many volunteers. The facilities team prepares the grounds, the hospitality team serves at the welcome table, the worship team does sound and the kids' and youth ministry teams set up bounce houses. It took 52 volunteers last year, says director of church operations Vivian Wheeler.

"Pretty much every ministry team is involved," Wheeler says. "When we pull our planning together, the deacons from all those ministry teams get together and decide how we're going to make this work."

The event is self-funded by the snack bar, and the goal is to break even, Thiessen says. Zollner donates fireworks, and other generous donors contribute as well. The congregation will continue the fireworks show as long as Zollner is willing to help, Thiessen says.

Blessing its community

In the early 2000s, BBBCC made a missional change to focus on blessing its community. BBBCC serves as a community center for area municipal meetings and hosts candidate forums. The July 3 party is one of BBBCC's four main calendar events (Easter, Christmas and back-to-school) intended for its community.

Discipleship is a challenge, Thiessen says, in a place with tran-



Drone footage shows the setup for Birch Bay Bible Community Church's party on the patio and fireworks show in 2022. The event includes live music, food, yard games, bounce houses and fireworks. On average, 1,000-1,200 people attend the family-friendly event each July 3. *Photo by BBCC*

sient workers in Border Patrol or at a nearby refinery.

"Our congregation turns over almost every five years," Thiessen says.

Despite the challenges, the youth group has doubled in size from 25 to 50 in the past year, and the congregation is working with the Parks and Recreation office to make the church property into a park.

The July 3 party has drawn people to church, too. Last year, BBCC baptized someone who started coming to church because of the event. On Sunday mornings in June, Thiessen reminds the congregation why they host the party.

"This is another one of those ways that we want to be a community church," Thiessen says. "It also continues to show that we want to lean into our community as much as we want our community to come to our church and meet Jesus."—*Janae Rempel Shafer*



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An annual August anniversary assembly

Seven Nebraska couples will mark a combined 413 years of marriage this summer

When seven couples from Living Hope Church in Henderson, Neb., get together for an anniversary dinner the first Thursday of August, they will carry on a 60-year tradition.

Each couple was married in August, and they will celebrate a combined 413 years of marriage, a testament to family and friendship.

A popular wedding month

The party's origins date back to the early to mid-1960s and stems from a conversation between Nelda Thiessen and a friend at the county fair.

"It was a matter of conversation:

'It's our August anniversary. Maybe some of us should get together,'" says Thiessen, who with husband, Virg, will celebrate 68 years of marriage in August. "I assume that's what it was because it's been so long ago."

They invited anyone at Living Hope Church with an August anniversary to attend.

August, it turns out, is a popular wedding month in a farming community like Henderson. Most of the seven couples farm(ed) or come from farming families and chose August either as a slower month in the farming calendar or, for those in education, a time before school started.

"At the beginning, there were quite a few couples that (had) August anniversaries," Thiessen says. "But quite a few of those have passed away or they've moved away."

Over the years, 40-some people have been a part of the group.

Luke Haidle, lead pastor at Living Hope since 2013, says having so many long marriages in the congregation has provided stability.

"In our culture and society, healthy marriage, and long marriages, are becoming increasingly rare," Haidle says. "I moved into a church and community and years later discovered that it was a relationship diamond mine. What a blessing from the Lord and a testament to the locals. Solid marriages make for solid families, and solid families make for stable churches and communities."

Good food and fellowship

Each year, two couples plan the party, which involves eating supper at a restaurant and sometimes includes games or entertainment. For example, the couples may challenge themselves to identify photos of license plates or front doors or play Bible games. Sometimes they bring their wedding photos to share.

"It's a good time of fellowship, caring for one another, sharing with each other, laughing together (and) telling stories," Nelda says. "Just an enjoyable time."

The couples agree that good food and not having to cook is a highlight.

Elsie Goertzen recalls that for a young farmer's wife, eating out was a luxury, and the celebration provided Christian fellowship. She and her husband, Walt, are also original members and longest married at 69 years.



These seven couples from Living Hope Church in Henderson, Neb., were all married in August and get together for a meal annually to celebrate. In early June, the group gathered to take a photo and enjoy a big cookie together. The candles on the cookie represent the couples' combined 413 years of marriage. Standing (from left): John and Helen Quiring, John and Charlene Goertzen, Pat and Marv Buller, Karla and Chuck Block, Judy and LeRoy Dick. Seated (from left): Walt and Elsie Goertzen, Nelda and Virg Thiessen. *Photo by Judy Dick*

"(For) a lot of us, about the only time we could get together and have a little social time was at these meetings," Elsie says. "I got a new dress every time."

The group was always open to new people with August anniversaries, which is something Marv and Pat Buller, married 57 years, appreciate.

"Moving here from South Dakota (and) coming to a new church, being invited to the August anniversaries as young people really helped us get to know church people, young and old couples," Pat says. "For a low-income young couple, we didn't go out to eat very often. So, this was always a treat to get a babysitter and have a date."

As children came along, the couples got babysitters for their anniversary dinner out. The dinner expanded with new couples but also shrank as members died, moved or divorced. Through the years, some couples have attended the same Sunday school.

Many, like Charlene Goertzen, say the mix of ages in the group over the years has been special. She and her husband, John, will celebrate 57 years this year.

"It was fun to see the joys of newly marrieds and some of the questions or challenges that they had and some of the challenges that older couples were facing," Charlene says.

Helen Quiring agrees.

"We've gotten to know a lot of people in a special way, older people especially," says Helen, who with her husband, John, will celebrate 54 years this year. "Now of course, we're the older people. Our group now has gotten a lot smaller, but it's still good. It's something you look forward to."

For many years, Chuck and Karla Block have been the group's youngest members, married 48 years this year.

"We all age together," Chuck says.

"We're looking for recruits," Karla adds. "When anybody new comes to church, one of my first questions is when is your anniversary? I make sure our calendar is empty that day so that we can be a part of it."

Today's anniversary friends have 22 children, 48 grandchildren and 37 great-grandchildren.

"Each year, we get older and our kids grow and before we know it, they get married, and then we become grandparents and then we be-

come great grandparents," Nelda Thiessen says. Her husband, Virg, adds: "The conversation changes."

On Aug. 1, the seven couples plan to have dinner at Chances R restaurant in York. They make special note of anniversaries ending in 0 or 5, and this year will recognize LeRoy and Judy Dick, who are celebrating 60 years of marriage.

"We have a good time together," Judy says. "It's worth celebrating. God's been good to us. We appreciate that. As long as somebody's willing to be in charge, we'll do it."—*Janae Rempel Shafer*



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More than a mission trip

Lakeview Church offers mutual partnership through summer trips

Lakeview Church, with campuses in Stansbury Park and Grantsville, Utah, is a place in which to invest and be invested in. For three MB churches—Community Bible Church in Olathe, Kan., Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif., and Reedley (Calif.) MB Church—partnerships with Lakeview are more than week-long mission trips, and the mutual investment continues to grow throughout the year.

In 2018, Phil Wiebe, lead pastor at Lakeview Church, started looking for partner churches for the church he was planting in Stansbury Park, Utah, an area with a large LDS population. At the 2018 National Convention in Salt Lake City, he connected with Community Bible (CBC) leaders, and they shared ideas of how the churches could work together to reach the most people.

“Our Stansbury Park campus opened in Easter 2019, and that summer Community Bible Church came for their first trip to help us work on the building and outreach to our area as well as within our church that is composed of mainly new or young believers,” Wiebe says. “It showed us the power of mature believers speaking into the lives of younger ones and the encouragement another church can really make.”

From there, Wiebe continued to reach out to MB churches across the country, including Reedley MB Church and Mountain View Church. Soon, the two churches also began sending groups to Lakeview Church in the summer, which has helped build relationships and outreach opportunities, Wiebe says. All three churches intend to send teams to Utah in 2024.

“It seems like every year we start something different when it comes to outreach,” Wiebe says. “Every year, we have work on our buildings, which are like the battleships that take a lot during the year, but we also send teams into the community to host kids’ camp, which is like VBS, host block parties, help with a church-wide campout where we get to hear and share testimonies and serving at a nonprofit. The teams that come are always generous givers when it comes to service, and they encourage us at Lakeview to have fresh ambition to press on for another year.”

While serving at Lakeview Church, groups are welcomed and hosted in the homes of Lakeview members. Wiebe says that the diverse ages and backgrounds of those serving opens a gateway for conversations with a variety of people in the area



A team from Community Bible Church in Olathe, Kan., meets for a debrief at Lakeview Church pastoral couple Phil and Melissa Wiebe’s house in Tooele, Utah. For six years, CBC has sent a team to Utah to partner with Lakeview Church. *Photo by Russ Friesen.*

“ **The teams that come are always generous givers when it comes to service, and they encourage us at Lakeview to have fresh ambition to press on for another year.** ”

and creates a way for mature believers to speak into the lives of younger ones.

This is one of the purposes Wiebe says makes the churches' connections unique and different than a mission trip.

“From the very beginning, we started asking ourselves what it looked like to have a partnership versus a missionary-type mission trip and relationship because we wanted to partner with other MB churches and have that distinct difference,” Wiebe says. “For a mission trip, people often come, serve and see people come to Jesus by sharing the gospel, but we didn't see that as being very effective in our high LDS population. Instead, our long-term goal in the partnership is to create a place not just to send people, but a place where people can invest and be invested in.”

Wiebe says that to this day long-term friendships and discipleship goes on throughout the year among the churches because of connections made during trips to Lakeview. In addition, internships, residency programs and mentorships have developed. This has helped to strengthen Lakeview and the visiting churches.

“Starting out as a church plant, we had a lot of needs,” Wiebe says. “As we've grown and become stronger, we want to give back and invest in them in some of the ways we can with strengths that we now have whether that be hosting an internship that can help prepare a student for ministry, discipling people within other churches or giving advice and offering to go to other churches when it comes to church planting.”

CBC has sent interns to Lakeview, participated in the residency program and is now looking to Lakeview for assistance as CBC considers starting its own church plant. In the next few years, Lakeview is hoping to send its own team to CBC to return the acts of service that they have received.

“Our church is still in the beginning stages when it comes to church planting, but already has consulted Lakeview Church and will be partnering with them as we move forward to see how we can most effectively reach

our community,” says Russ Friesen, pastor at Community Bible Church.

For CBC and each church involved, such an endeavor isn't just a project but an investment.

“The partnership that each of the four churches has developed is beautiful to see as a testament of the body of Christ coming together,” Friesen says. “It's four churches coming together to give what they have to make the most impact for the Lord's Kingdom.”—*Caitlyn Decker*

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A personnel asset for USMB

J.L. Martin enjoys organization, creativity of bookkeeping and event planning

J.L. Martin has an affinity for numbers. But he paused his accounting career to serve 22 years in church ministry, most recently at Hesston (Kan.) MB Church.

When the opportunity came to assume USMB bookkeeping and event planning upon Donna Sullivan's retirement, Martin accepted, giving him the opportunity to return to numbers in a different kind of ministry.

From accounting to ministry

Raised in Yates Center, Kan., Martin says he discovered he enjoyed working with numbers in high school. He pursued a double major in business administration and accounting at Sterling (Kan.) College.

During this time, Martin sensed God's call after serving with junior high youth at a church one summer. Knowing business and accounting degrees would be helpful in the church world, he continued his degree path but decided to go to Denver Seminary after earning his bachelor's degree in 1998.

Martin kept his accounting skills sharp by serving as a staff accountant for two years while at seminary. He earned his master's degree in youth and family ministry in 2001. He served four years as a youth pastor in Colorado, four years as an associate pastor in southeast Kansas and 14 years at Hesston MB Church (HMBC), initially as associate pastor and later as pastor of children and family.

He and his wife, Bethany, have four children.

A new opportunity

In 2019, while at HMBC, Martin began serving part-time as USMB social media coordinator. When Sullivan, USMB administrative secretary,

bookkeeper and event planner, began considering retirement, she mentioned the job possibility to Martin.

"As she talked about what was included in her job, I quickly realized there's no way to do all the things that she is doing," Martin says.

Additional conversations changed the scope of the job, leading Martin to apply.

"(Bookkeeping and event planning are) two things that I have skills in," he says. "Not having to do the three parts made that very attractive."

Martin was offered the job and began working alongside Sullivan on Sept. 15, 2023. He will have worked with Sullivan for nearly a year prior to her retirement in August 2024.

Organization and creativity

Martin's daily activities balance the financial side with event planning and social media. Responsibilities include bookkeeping, depositing and receipting donations, writing checks and sending weekly financial reports to USMB leaders. Event planning depends on the time of year. Current planning involves the upcoming Gathering 2024 in Omaha, Neb.

"Donna has done a great job of training, but she's also been very



J.L. Martin is USMB's new bookkeeper and event planner, where he says he enjoys the balance of organization and creativity. Martin has worked alongside retiring bookkeeper Donna Sullivan for almost a year and will fully take over the role following Sullivan's retirement in August. *Photo by Janae Rempel Shafer.*

good at letting me do a lot of the planning for Gathering with her very involved in that," he says.

Martin says he enjoys the steadiness of bookkeeping and the creativity of event planning.

"Both of them require organization (and) administration," he says. "Administration is one of my spiritual gifts."

Following a training period in Wichita, Martin is working from his home office in Hesston.

Martin expresses gratitude for continued support of USMB.

"I'm very grateful and appreciative for the support of churches and individuals of USMB," Martin says.

"Their support allows us to continue to serve the churches in USMB well and to provide support and resources. I look forward to serving the USMB family in my role as event planner and bookkeeper."—*Janae Rempel Shafer*

Leadership Fuel offers resources at your fingertips

New webpage intended to offer training, ideas for leadership development

Leadership Fuel is a new USMB webpage designed for providing curated resources for leaders who are passionate about developing new leaders for future ministry. It's a resource that was suggested at the January 2024 vision summit in Peoria, Ariz., where 57 MB leaders gathered to talk about the current critical need for developing new leaders. Many indicated that we need just such a site, created by Mennonite Brethren for posting good, solid resources for this important need.

"In today's era, where information and resources are readily accessible, having a streamlined system to unlock our ministry's potential is incredibly beneficial," says Kyle Goings, USMB NextGen chair. "Searching for answers via Google can often be overwhelming, but Leadership Fuel offers a neatly organized solution right at my fingertips. I appreciate its dynamic nature, continually evolving with new resources and ideas, mirroring our growth as a denomination."

To Goings's point, the intent of this new webpage is that in short order it will become a very robust site where MB leaders can find a wealth of training and information about leadership development. For that to happen, leaders are being asked to submit their favorite resources, whether books, articles, videos or podcasts, to be posted on the site. The U.S. Board of Faith and Life will review all material before the resource is posted to make sure items submitted are relevant and fit Mennonite Brethren. Suggested resources can be submitted on the form on the

webpage itself and then the process begins. The USMB webmaster will make sure the webpage stays updated and fresh.

"If USMB was going to create a webpage dedicated to leadership development, it needed to be done the right way," says retiring national director Don Morris, who led the charge for the development of the site. "It took some time to get this developed by the professionals at Friesen Design, working with our webmaster Lori Taylor, so it's well done, easy to navigate and has the capacity for adding a multitude of entries."

Matt Ehresman, communications and online engagement director at Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., and USMB LEAD Pods host, says, "The internet gets bigger every day. There are tons of great leadership resources out there, but it is increasingly difficult to sort through all the noise to find content that is actually relevant and helpful. The goal of Leadership Fuel is to find and share quality, vetted and curated resources that align with our MB values. The larger our library becomes, the more helpful it will be for all of us."

Although the site has been created for leaders to find assistance as they seek and develop new leaders within their own contexts, current leaders will also find a lot of good help for their own personal leadership development on Leadership Fuel.

"I can't wait to see what all will be on this site," Morris adds. "We keep using the word, 'robust.' I think it will be a robust webpage very soon! But only if it gets used

“

There are tons of great leadership resources out there, but it is increasingly difficult to sort through all the noise to find content that is actually relevant and helpful.

”

and leaders are consistently submitting their choice suggestions."

Although there are already some early additions to Leadership Fuel, many more suggestions are needed. As Morris indicates, this is a somewhat interactive webpage where those using the site are also helping to develop the site.

"Leadership Fuel showcases curated resources pertaining to the development of new leaders," says Janae Shafer, USMB Communications. "Visit the site to see what others have recommended and add your own submissions to spark leadership development in yourself and others."

To access Leadership Fuel, go to: leadershipfuel.org— USMB

Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel Shafer

MILESTONES

Baptism/Memberships

Five people were baptized at **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, May 26.

Three people were baptized May 26 at **SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Chloe Anacker, Eldon Quiring and Jim Penner were received as members at **Butterfield (Minn.) Community Bible Church, May 26.**

Eva Holgate was baptized May 26 at **Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash.**

David Jennings and Ingunn Jennings were received as members May 26 at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.** Jessica Kyaw and Karen Rombough were baptized and received as members May 19. Vicki Prentice, Nathan Faul, Abigail Faul, Bo Kyaw, Daina Ampudia, Tigh Rombough, Jordan Pratt, Kristin Pratt, Benjamin Cardona and Eric Klanchnik were also received as members.

Erika Espindola Nava and Alex Rivera were baptized May 26 at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.** Ron Carrasco was baptized May 19. Jesse Stucky, Blake Baker, Isabel "Bella" Celaya, Victor Gonzalez Sr., Maria Gonzalez, Dulce Gonzalez and Victor Gonzalez were baptized April 21. Karen Madrid, Misty Hernandez, Freddy Parker, Dejanirra Parker, Cali Torres, Justin Griggs, Austin Griggs and Natalie Zaragoza were baptized March 31.

Addison Jost and Easton Jost were baptized and received as members at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, May 5.

Kaylee Schmidt, Nora Hein, Phoebe Moss, Quinlyn Funk and Paul Glanzer were baptized April 28 at **Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church.**

Joe Hilton and Cynthia Austin were baptized April 21 at **South Mountain Community Church, South Jordan (Utah) Campus.** Morgan Cowdell was baptized April 7. Casen Brown, Cameron Brown, Carter Brown, Maycie Winters and Kahlen Bell were baptized at **Draper (Utah) Campus**, April 14. Nathan Berkuta, Cooper Ferguson, Jaden Joiner, Calypso Grey, Drew Hale, Robert Heaps, Shayden Dyer, Breckly Quinney, Lucie Ririe, Daniel Paris, Kyler Paris, Jennifer Spires, Tyson Royer, Matthew Spires, Gianna Gonzalez and Kennedy Alves were baptized April 7. Ashley Archer, Brittney Archer, Lianna Archer, Mariah Archer, Shaun Archer, Martha Conley, Stephanie Farmer, Cynthia Fleming, Morgan Harlow, Derrian Hartman, Ben Kuntz, Daniel Kuntz, Demitria Kuntz, Kris Kuntz, Evan Pearson, Brandon Sandstrom, Brighton Sandstrom, Tara Sandstrom, Aubrey Sause, Emily Smith and Carrieann Williams were baptized April 7 at **St. George (Utah) Campus.**

Hunter Baird was baptized at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, April 7.

Teresa Busch was baptized and received as a member at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church**, March 31. Ellenoir Hawkins, Maverick Hawkins, Adeline Renney, Ella Renney, Marjorie Renney, Stephen Renney, Aylah Roberts and Prescott Roberts were also baptized. Carol Isaak was also received as a member.

Trevin Wood, Alyssa Wood, Aliya Ayers and Hailey Paul were baptized at **Hope Kingsburg (Calif.)** March 31.

Chris Caywood, TJ Carter, Brooke Carter and Andy Dahlem were baptized and received as members March 31 at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church.** Janet Carter, Ryan Bowers, Joy Bowers, Ron Wilcox and Ruby Wilcox were also received as members.

Christina Keeting was received as a member at **Martin Box Church, Marshall, Ark.**, in June 2023.

Workers

Mark Isaac concluded his service as lead pastor at **New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif.**, June 13.

Cody Meyer is serving as associate pastor of youth ministry and discipleship at **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**

Matt and Hannah Thrift began serving April 18 as lead pastoral couple at **Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan.**

Sebastian Mireles is serving as youth pastor at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.**

Deaths

Alpers, Jill Renee, Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, March 15, 1970—April 8, 2024. Parents: Willis and Thelma (Yutzy) Kauffman. Spouse: Aaron Alpers. Children: Nathan, Austin, Shayla.

Bransford, Murray Rudolph "Rudy," Jr., Wichita, Kan., member of Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Sept. 2, 1954—March 29, 2024. Parents: Murray R., Sr. and Beverly (Howe) Bransford. Spouse: Sue Ellingboe. Three children.

Connoley, Wanda Pearl, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Shafter (Calif.) MB Church, June 15, 1934—Feb. 24, 2024. Parents: Mike and Etta Lee Jackson. Spouse: Frank Borer (deceased), William Connoley (deceased). Children: Frank Borer, Beth Borer, Leanne Wohl; eight grandchildren; 13 great-grandchildren.

Eason, Vernon, Reedley, Calif., member of North Fresno (Calif.) Church, May 8, 1938—

March 21, 2024. Parents: Jake and Leona (Jantz) Eason. Spouse: Reola (Bartel) Eason. Child: Lynette; two grandchildren, one great-grandchild.

Friesen, Mary Ann, Portland, Ore., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Dec. 27, 1923—May 9, 2024. Parents: Henry and Tina (Wiens) Toews. Spouse: Wilbur Friesen (deceased). Children: Wilber Jr., Barb Buxman, Kenneth, Charles, Rodney; eight grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren, two great-great-grandchildren.

Heinrichs, JoAnn, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Hillsboro MB Church, June 26, 1936—April 5, 2024. Parents: Herman and Essie (Smith) Schmidt. Spouse: J. Max Heinrichs (deceased). Children: Max, Jenine Reimer; six grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren.

Hohm, Phillip James, Huron, S.D., member of Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D., April 26, 1945—April 24, 2024. Parents: Clarence and Ida (Hofer) Hohm. Spouse: Pamela Isackson, Norma Schnathorst (deceased), Vicki Kleinsasser (deceased). Children: Rebecca (deceased), Amy Kempf; two grandchildren.

Mierau, Pete, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Sept. 23, 1940—March 23, 2024. Parents: Jacob and Margaret (Boldt) Mierau. Spouse: Hedy Bergen-Mierau; Frieda Quiring Neufeld Mierau (deceased). Children: Connie Isaac, Carol Mierau-Frogge, Christy McDonald; eight grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Seibel, Christopher Lane, Olathe, Kan., member of Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church, Oct. 12, 1979—March 19, 2024. Parents: Clint and Ev Seibel.

Schellenberg, Richard Morris, Clovis, Calif., member of Reedley (Calif.) MB Church, Oct. 21, 1930—May 20, 2024. Parents: Menno and Helen

(Goertzen) Schellenberg. Spouse: Arlene Schellenberg (deceased). Children: Rick, Steven, Kevin, Mark (deceased), Suzanne Hoffman, Darrin; 12 grandchildren, 11 great-grandchildren.

Schmidt, Vonnie Kay, Weatherford, Okla., member of Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Aug. 5, 1957—April 18, 2024. Parents: Ralph and Carolyn (Mueller) Coy. Spouse: Rick Schmidt. Children: Mindy Evetts, Brennan; five grandchildren.

Walter, Joseph M. Jr., Hillsboro, Kan., member of Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Jan. 21, 1927—March 25, 2024. Parents: Joseph M. Sr. and Susie (Hofer) Walter. Spouse: Janette (Bergen) Walter. Children: Roland, Joseph III, Patty Den Hartog, Ruthie Anderson, Debbie Shoberg; 15 grandchildren, 20 great-grandchildren.

Wedel, Donald Gene, Meno, Okla., member of New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Sept. 2, 1945—May 18, 2024. Parents: Irvin and Hilda Wedel. Spouse: Dori Wedel. Children: Andy, Randy, Michelle Ratzlaff, Michael Kampstra; nine grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Willems, Elvina Mae, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, March 11, 1927—May 5, 2024. Parents: Peter C. and Malinda (Wiens) Epp. Spouse: Harry D. Willems (deceased). Children: Paul, James, Randy, Sandra Reimer, Connie Koop; 12 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN

Discipleship

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., offered a six-week Marriage Works class in May and June.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., held a “Taco ‘Bout Marriage” night of conversation and tacos May 3.

Fellowship

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., hosted summer “Super Sunday” parties with food, ice cream and bounce houses. Women gathered for Bunco May 22 and an annual Mother’s Day tea May 11. The men’s ministry hosted a day of fellowship, teaching, food and games April 20.

Men from **New Hopedale Mennonite Church, Meno, Okla.**, held their annual fish fry with proceeds going to Mennonite Central Committee meat canning. The congregation celebrated graduates with a carry-in dinner.

Women from **Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**, had a salad supper June 2. The congregation had a trivia night April 28.

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., held a family movie night May 22.

Corn (Okla.) MB Church held a discipleship appreciation evening May 19 with charcuterie boards and Faspas.

Prodigal Church, Fresno, Calif., gathered for a BBQ, games, competitions and inflatables May 19. The church offered a photo booth and berry spritzers for Mother’s Day.

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., held a dessert potluck May 19.

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., held a picnic May 19.

Men from **North Fresno (Calif.) Church** gathered for a barbecue May 18.

Fathers from **Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, gathered to share knowledge, encouragement, challenge and support May 28. Men gathered for a potluck and game night May 18. Women enjoyed dessert April 19.

Women from **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.**, had a breakfast picnic May 18.

Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash., held a bonfire game night June 7 and a family game night May 3. Women had a day out April 20.

Women from **Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, went out for dinner April 29.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., had a church picnic May 19. The congregation welcomed a guest speaker for Spring Missions Sunday April 28 and enjoyed a meal following the service. The Sisters group organized a women’s self-defense class at a local wellness center April 28.

Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., held a church picnic April 28.

SouthLife Church, Wichita, Kan., women had tea June 8, the start of a monthly gathering. The congregation held a family game night April 26.

Hesston (Kan.) MB Church held an end-of-year block party April 24.

Men from **Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, went on a retreat April 26-28. Women were invited to a hands-on tech workshop for help with technology April 20.

Women from **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, tied knots for blankets to bless others May 18 and had brunch April 20.

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., women enjoyed brunch May 14 and held a hobby show and tell April 20.

Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla., held a church picnic May 19.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church had a church picnic and played Bingo May 19. Women had a spring fiesta lunch May 5.

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., held its annual picnic May 19 and a community meal event April 28.

Women from **Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore.**, had a Bunco night April 19.

The M.O.M.S. group at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church** had their annual picnic May 9.

Men from **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church** held a wild game dinner April 13.

Mothers and sons from **Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz.**, gathered for “Boots and Brunch” April 13, including hiking, yard games and food.

Worship

Fairview (Okla.) MB Church held a worship night April 28.

Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash., held hymn sings May 19 and April 21.

Celebrations

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., celebrated its 30th anniversary May 5.

Classifieds

Celebrations

You are invited to join us as we celebrate Parkview MB Church's 150 years of ministry, August 16-18, 2024 in Hillsboro, Kan. Learn more at parkviewmb.com/celebrate150/



Events

Missions Conference: Empower Global Impact!

Be part of reaching the world for Jesus. Join us as we rally together at the 2024 Live the Mission Conference on October 6-8 at Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif. Featuring keynote speakers Jacque Van Bommel, founder of Reaching a Generation Africa, Friedhelm Holthuis, senior pastor of Credo-Kirche in Germany, and Oystein Gjerme, visionary leader of Exponential Europe. Secure your spot today by visiting our website to register, submit questions, and view the exciting schedule! <https://www.mountainview.org/missions/ltm-conference/>



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. Congregational 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://valleyviewbiblechurch.wordpress.com/pastoral-search/>

Youth Pastor: Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., is seeking a full-time youth pastor/campus pastor. The church began Reedyland Preschool in 1967. Today there are 300+ students on our church campus each day, from preschool through 8th grade. Primary responsibilities include: direct Junior High and High School ministries, train volunteer leaders and organize

camp 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/>

Agency

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