

CHRISTIAN LEADER

THE MAGAZINE OF U.S. MENNONITE BRETHREN

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2025



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Radical obedience

Our Anabaptist history can motivate us



Early Anabaptists gave concrete form to their desire to obey God through believers baptism, and it rocked the established order of their day.

On Dec. 8, 2024, seven young adults shared their testimony, stepped into a livestock tank on the sanctuary stage and were baptized by the associate pastor. Our congregation, including guests of those being baptized, applauded and cheered each one. Not once that morning did we fear that a government official or a leader from another church would burst into the building and take those being baptized to prison. We didn't worry they would be labeled heretics and tortured or even killed. Our baptism service was not a radical act of rebellion.

But these were the dangerous consequences our spiritual ancestors faced on Jan. 21, 1525, when a group of men rebaptized one another. The actions of the early Anabaptists challenged and frightened society, and Anabaptism quickly became an underground movement that lost virtually all its leaders in the first two years.

Historians agree that while the early Anabaptist movement was not unified by a common church order or common leaders, the Anabaptists did share common core beliefs: believers baptism, authority of Scripture, primacy of the New Testament, the discipleship of following Jesus, compassionate discipline, simple living, separation of church and state, rejecting violence and war, and accepting the way of witnessing and suffering.

Reading Anabaptist history, I am inspired by how men and women were motivated by their convictions to believe and live differently from those around them. One historian writes, "A 16th century man who did not drink to excess, curse or abuse his workmen or family could be suspected of being an Anabaptist and thus persecuted."

Many of the stories we have from this time highlight men and women who experienced hardship because their involvement in the Anabaptist movement changed them. In this issue, we begin a one-year column, "Radical Reformers," that will introduce six early Anabaptists who shaped the movement and suffered for it.

But there are hundreds of early Anabaptists who remain anonymous—men and women who were martyred without coming to the attention of those in charge of court records. One example is an unnamed 14-year-old boy who refused to recant and became one of the youngest of all Anabaptist martyrs.

I am amazed at this young man's conviction, a teen similar in age to three of the young people whose baptism I witnessed in early December. It makes me consider my own convictions. Early Anabaptists gave concrete form to their desire to obey God through believers baptism, and it rocked the established order of their day. As we begin a year during which we will commemorate our Anabaptist heritage, what radical action can we take in 2025 to demonstrate our obedience to God?



**Connie Faber,
Editor**

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...God repeatedly calls his people to remember something that seems quite difficult to forget. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." In other words, remember what God brought you out of, how God saved you and what God has now called you to.

How well do we remember?

God calls us to remember who we are in Christ

"Remember" is a repeated command throughout Scripture. Remembering what God has done, remembering what God rescued us from, and remembering who we are called to be in Christ are what we are told again and again to remember.

Often, when the people of God turned away from him, it was a result of failing to remember. In one example, Judges 3:7 summarizes their failure to remember and the associated consequences: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs."

It strikes me how frighteningly easy it is to forget or to remember something incorrectly. In Numbers 11, the people of Israel are complaining about the apparent monotony in the food God is miraculously providing. They seem to forget they were slaves living under brutal conditions in Egypt and suddenly remember slavery as the good old times. "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna" (Num. 11:4-6).

And so, God repeatedly calls his people to remember something that seems quite difficult to forget. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." In other words, remember what God brought you out of, how God saved you and what God has now called you to.

We forget so easily, so quickly. This is why anniversaries carry value. This is why in a few months we will pause to remember 500 years of God working in, through and on behalf of our Anabaptist ancestors. There are numerous examples of faithfulness in those who came before us, and remembering their stories is part of why we mark anniversaries.

While anniversaries are helpful, they don't happen every day. In fact, anniversaries are so infrequent, we can forget to celebrate them. Perhaps the best way to remember is daily practice.

Do we remember that at the heart of the Anabaptist tradition is a deep commitment to both being and making disciples of Jesus? Or is our culture, our busyness and the things we pursue causing us to forget our calling? Remembering is more than a mental exercise; it is also carried out in our actions. Remembering and obedience go hand in hand.

Do you clearly remember your calling in Christ? Is your memory foggy, or have you perhaps forgotten altogether? Jesus gave a clear commission to his followers to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching others to obey everything Jesus commands of us. This calling is for all of us; it is who we are to be. And yet, if we look closely at many local churches, it does appear at some level this has been forgotten.

Today, will you tend to your memory by intentionally seeking Jesus as his disciple and by helping others to do the same?



Aaron Box
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Impatient reformer

Conrad Grebel: Faithful Swiss Anabaptist leader

On Jan. 21, 1525, a young Conrad Grebel scooped up a handful of water and baptized his friend, George Blaurock. Blaurock, in turn, began baptizing the men who were gathered in the home of Felix Manz on this winter's eve in Zurich, Switzerland. It was an act of Christian faithfulness that would take some of them to their death.

Grebel was the acknowledged leader of this group of young radicals who were challenging the theology and practice of the Roman Catholic Church. A group of them had begun studying the Bible together under the teaching of Ulrich Zwingli, a leader of the Reformation that was occurring not only in Zurich but in communities across Western Europe in the early years of the 16th century.

Zwingli had slowly introduced reforms through his preaching but continued working with the town council to keep their approval. Grebel and his fellow students were impatient with the pace of reform. Among other things, they wanted to abolish the mass and end the practice of infant baptism.

Leadership, and perhaps rebellion as well, came easily to Grebel. He was born into a distinguished local family and grew up accustomed to wealth and privilege. His father, Jacob Grebel, was influential in the political affairs of the city and able to provide his son with a university education. Young Grebel studied in Basel, Vienna, and later in Paris before returning to life in Zurich.

It seems he was a gifted but also temperamental young man. By the time Grebel returned to Zurich his health was poor, his funds depleted and his reputation damaged by a student brawl. In an act that further antagonized his father, he married and began a family. In the face of these challenges, Grebel became an enthusiastic supporter of Zwingli and the evangelical cause.

In 1523 and again in 1524, the Zurich city council heard arguments for and against the reform efforts. One issue had to do with mandatory tithes. This was a kind of taxation on the poor that supported the institutions of the church. Grebel and others argued against it as unbiblical. A second issue was the mass, which they also viewed as unbiblical. There was no need to keep sacrificing Christ. The work on the cross was sufficient.

Grebel, Manz and others pleaded with Zwingli to separate himself from the influence of the council and set up a church of true believers, committed to following Christ in everyday life. Zwingli, however, was unwilling to join them. It was too hard to imagine a church that was organized apart from the state.

By spring of 1524 some were beginning to refuse the baptism of infants as well. After all, how could infants repent of sin? Surely this, too, was unbiblical.

The break with Zwingli and the city council was complete.

In the months after Grebel and his friends baptized themselves in what they viewed as their first true baptism, a growing band of converts met regularly to share a simple Lord's Supper and affirm their commitment to Christian fellowship. And despite threats and even imprisonment, the movement kept growing.

Sadly, many of these early leaders were put to death as heretics. Grebel, banished from Zurich, succumbed to the plague. Manz was executed by drowning. Blaurock was chased out of the city but was eventually burned at the stake. Each refused to recant or to compromise what they understood to be the call of Christ on their lives.

Historian Valerie Rempel, director of accreditation for the Association of Theological Schools, was a member of the Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary faculty from 1996 to 2021.



Conrad Grebel (ca. 1498 – 1526)
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Mennonite Church Center (DBA:
Laurelville Retreat Center)

News in Brief

Compiled by Janae Rempel Shafer

Leadership Board sets 2025 USMB budget

USMB boards convened Oct. 9-12, 2024, in Phoenix, Ariz. The Board of Faith and Life met Oct. 9, the National Strategy Team gathered Oct. 10 and the Leadership Board and Council Oct. 11. The Leadership Board met the morning of Oct. 12.

The Leadership Board approved the 2025 USMB budget of \$892,725, a decrease of 15 percent from the 2024 budget. In presenting the budget, treasurer Gaven Banik noted that a portion of the First Fruits gift from MB Foundation is designated for a fund to be used by district ministers to assist pastors in their districts. District ministers were encouraged to use this fund.

The approved budget includes a decrease in the MB Historical Commission subsidy for 2025 from \$12,000 to \$5,000, at the commission's request. The International Community of Mennonite Brethren will continue to receive 2 percent of the USMB annual budget.

The Leadership Council discussed concerns raised by delegates at the 2024 National Convention regarding revisions to Article IV, Section 1 of USMB by-laws concerning the reversion clause. Delegates did not approve the recommended revisions. Per the minutes, the council concluded that while the revision was not "fundamentally flawed," wording would be adjusted, the proposed revisions would be widely circulated prior to the 2026 convention and that time will be given at Gathering 2026 for delegates to discuss the proposed revision in a workshop.

The Leadership Council affirmed a request from Multiply, the North American MB mission agency, to create a task force to develop an effective bi-national structure for Multiply. The task force will look at staffing and structure to provide better U.S. engagement and U.S.-based training opportunities. USMB national director Aaron Box and Canadian national director Cam Stewart will be part of the task force as will Bruce Enns, Multiply general director, and two additional Americans and one Canadian.

Box reported on staff activities related to the USMB three core commitments (discipleship, leadership development and church multiplication), fundraising and communication.



Four new members joined the USMB Leadership Board for its October 2024 meeting: Samuel Hailemariam, Indianapolis, Ind.; Amy Jackson-Kincaid, Morganton, N.C.; Moises Tagle, Sullivan City, Texas; and Jason Quiring, Saratoga Springs, Utah.

The council heard an update on Gathering 2026; an emerging partnership with Tabor College in the CDC and SDC; and plans to pause the Church Planting Council for six months to assess how best to move forward in national church planting efforts. The group also discussed making USMB resources available in all languages used by the conference and incorporating non-English speakers into planning events.

In his update to the Leadership Council, Board of Faith and Life chair Jesse Swiers reported on the board's ongoing work developing a document on transgender issues, discussions about ordination and licensing procedures for pastors and church staff, a new process for adding Leadership Fuel resources and plans for the March 2025 National Pastors' Orientation to be held in San Diego, Calif.—*Connie Faber*

New LEAD Cohorts begin soon

A new lineup of LEAD Cohorts is starting in January and February. New topics include loving your neighbor, everyday spiritual practices, and a cohort for church staff members. Back by popular demand is a cohort about Anabaptist essentials as Anabaptism commemorates its 500th anniversary in 2025.

LEAD Cohorts are free online meeting places to learn about specific topics. The only cost is for books as recommended by the cohort leader. Cohorts meet online via Zoom for about an hour every two weeks over a three-month span. Sign up at www.usmb.org/lead-cohorts/ —*USMB*

Donors support USMB on Giving Tuesday

Initial donations to USMB on Giving Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2024, totaled \$8,430, helping fund church planting, CORD and leadership development.

"Thank you to each person who generously gave support for USMB this Giving Tuesday," says USMB National Director Aaron Box. "Your support will help us plant new churches, partner with immigrant churches and develop leaders. My deepest gratitude for your continued partnership in our work of sharing the gospel and making disciples of Jesus."

Giving Tuesday is a global day dedicated to generosity that falls on the first Tuesday after Thanksgiving. In the 11 years USMB has been part of Giving Tuesday, donors have contributed \$262,673.—USMB

Eastern District Relief Fund reaches goal

MB Foundation established the Eastern District Relief Fund to help meet needs in North Carolina, where two Mennonite Brethren church buildings sustained flooding in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The Eastern District fundraising goal of \$40,000 was reached as of Oct. 28, 2024. Just over \$42,500 was raised in the first 10 days after the fund was established.—MB Foundation

Central District holds annual convention

The Central District Conference gathered for its 114th annual convention Nov. 7-9, 2024, in Sioux Falls, S.D. Sixty-four delegates represented 26 churches. An additional 45 guests brought the total convention attendance to 109.

Delegates approved the 2024-25 budget of \$398,622, a slight increase over the 2023-24 budget of \$394,000; affirmed the slate of nominees and approved changes to five articles in the CDC bylaws. Delegates also heard reports from the treasurer, district committees and staff.

In addition to two business sessions, the schedule included three worship sessions with Ron Klassen, director emeritus of Rural Home Missionary Association. He addressed the convention theme of "Renewal," focusing his messages on the word "new." A fourth worship session featured Aaron Box, USMB national director, who spoke about the importance of disciple-making. Worship sessions included reports and updates from MB Foundation, Tabor College, Multiply, *Christian Leader* and Mennonite Central Committee.

Friday afternoon workshops and the annual church planting and renewal banquet that evening rounded out the schedule. Bethel Fellowship Church, an Ethiopian congregation in Sioux Falls, and Grace Tabernacle Ministries were introduced as two new churches to receive CDC financial support.

Saturday morning, Peggy Goertzen, director of the Center for MB Studies at Tabor College, gave a brief history of the Mennonite Brethren coming to the United States 150 years ago.

The closing session included a prayer commissioning incoming and continuing CDC committee and board members and a



As part of its efforts to train new leaders, the Central District Conference has initiated a mentorship program. District Minister Daniel Rodriguez (center) introduced Natinael Ayalew (left) and Logan Pikop (second from right), as new mentees.

blessing offered by USMB national director Aaron Box for CDC pastors and spouses. Pastor Turner of Christ Community Church led the closing communion service.

The 2025 CDC convention will be hosted by Bethesda Church in Huron, S.D.—CL

CL receives Best in Class award

The *Christian Leader* received a fifth-place award in the Evangelical Press Association Best in Class contest in the 3,001 to 9,000 circulation category. EPA announced the 2024 award winners Oct. 16, 2024.

In the Best in Class contest, EPA member publications are grouped by circulation and are invited to enter one issue of their publication to be judged in six areas, including de-

sign, use and quality of images, strength of writing and titling and "overall editorial punch." The *Christian Leader* was judged on the May/June 2024 issue.

Christian Leader has received an award in the Best in Class contest every year since the contest was introduced in 2020.—CL

| Read longer versions of these and other articles at christianleadermag.com |

ASCENT dates, theme announced

USMB NextGen has announced “Anchored” as the theme for ASCENT, USMB’s annual summer camp for high school youth. ASCENT will take place at Camp W.O.W. in Stuart, Okla., June 7-11, 2025.

ASCENT is an annual five-day gathering including worship sessions, activities and interactive tracks. Registration opens in January at a cost of \$345 per student and \$200 per adult.—*USMB NextGen*

Tabor, FPU report fall enrollment

Tabor College reports 495 undergraduate students on campus in fall 2024. With 82 students enrolled in graduate and online courses and 44 in dual credit, the college totaled 621 students across all programs. A year ago, Tabor reported a total fall enrollment of 664 students, with 531 students on campus, 83 students in graduate and online courses and 50 in dual credit.

Fresno Pacific University reports fall 2024 enrollment of 2,889. The number of graduate students (GRAD) is 1,342 (including 101 in Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary), while 791 students are in traditional undergraduate (TUG) programs (including 42 part-time) and 756 are in bachelor’s degree completion (DC) programs. Last year, the total was 2,919, with 1,305 in GRAD (110 seminary), 827 in TUG and 787 in DC.—*TC, FPU*

Districts hold youth conferences

The Southern and Central Districts held fall youth events the fourth weekend in November.

Nearly 350 people, including 256 students from 16 churches, attended the Southern District Youth Conference in Hillsboro, Kan., Nov. 22-24. The theme was “Anchored” based on Hebrews 6:19. Speaker Wendell Loewen, Tabor College professor, gave messages based on stories from the Gospels.

The schedule featured three sessions, two workshops, a youth group break-out, free time and late-night activities. An offering of \$952.35 was collected for a Multiply worker preparing to serve in a restricted country.

Attendees celebrated District Youth Minister Russ Claassen’s 30 years in youth ministry, including 25 years licensed with USMB, with a video and T-shirt quilt.

Meanwhile, 105 high school youth and 25 volunteers representing 11 churches gathered at Cedar Canyon Camp in Rapid City, S.D., Nov. 21-24, for the Central District’s Fall Youth Conference.

Alex Janzen, pastor of Community Bible Church in Mountain Lake, Minn., spoke on “God’s Big Story.” Youth served the community through Love Inc., participated in activities and competed in the CD Youth Olympics.

Members of the Tabor College band For His Glory led singing at both conferences.—*CL*

5 minutes with...

DAN STRUTZ

Checking the sky at dawn, a resident of Huron, S.D., might be surprised to see a colorful hot air balloon floating by. The balloon’s pilot, Dan Strutz of Bethesda Church, recently earned his FAA private pilot’s license with a rating for hot air balloons. As he transitioned from a pastoral role (Community Bible Church in Mountain Lake, Minn.) to joining the team on wife Susanna’s family farm, he also decided South Dakota was a perfect place to pursue this 20-year-old dream. Susanna is Dan’s leading chase crew member.



How did you earn your license?

There aren’t many hot air balloon pilots licensed to train, but I found a guy in Sioux Falls. To get the required 10 flight hours as a student, it was a lot of getting up at 3:30 a.m. to drive the two hours for a dawn flight. A lot of it is learning about the weather, not just what is on the ground, but up to thousands of feet where it affects how the balloon is going to fly.

How do you control the balloon?

With ballooning, where the wind goes is where you’re going. We just have good control up and down, burning and venting hot air. Usually there’s different wind directions at different elevations. To “steer” you navigate the balloon between those layers. Occasionally, we may even use an unusual tool to detect the winds beneath us—our spit out the side of the basket.

So how do you know where you’ll land?

I try to pick a landing spot and then reverse engineer to decide where to take off based off the winds. You can land almost anywhere – in someone’s backyard, on a dirt road, in an open field. The goal is to find a safe

landing spot that is easy for your chase crew to get to and pack up the balloon and get home. A flight usually lasts about an hour.

Is it scary to be so high?

I actually don’t love heights, but when I’m up in the basket, it’s a peaceful experience. You don’t feel the wind so it doesn’t feel like you’re high. It just feels like everything is very small down below.

How do people react to seeing you up there?

There’s something about a balloon floating in the sky that’s almost magical. We’ll be flying and I’ll have two or three cars just following along—like a little parade. Or we might land in a road in front of someone’s house and everyone comes running out, sometimes still in their pajamas. To bring other people into this joy is fun.

How does your hobby give you a chance to share faith?

Balloonists are not necessarily a very spiritual community, yet there’s an appreciation for the calm, peacefulness of seeing God’s creation below. It’s a community that has this hint of spirituality and needs to know the Creator.

Interview by Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

Lifehouse Community Church of Uganda

Lifehouse Community Church of Uganda, the national MB conference in Uganda, traces its beginning to 2005 when Pastor Robert and Esther Mponye began a church in their home in Mityana. A month later they moved to a rented room and since 2006 they have helped to start many other churches. LCCU joined the International Community of Mennonite Brethren in 2024.

One LCCU congregation is in Bukoma. Robert Mponye, LCC representative to ICOMB, shares this church's story.

Planted in 2020, LCC Bukoma has become a testament to the power of community transformation by the grace of God. Bukoma is a little village in Mityana Municipality. Known for stone quarries, witchcraft, alcoholism and drug addiction, this village was not a place any sane person would desire to live.

In 2020, after losing her husband to a horrible motor accident, Hadijah Nakyanzi heard the call to serve her God through pastoral ministry. We prayerfully planted LCC Bukoma. The resistance she experiences has been proven oftentimes when she's had to fight spiritual battles, especially with the spiritual darkness of overt witchcraft. A number of witches have been touched by the saving grace of God. Others could not stand the power of God, so they had to relocate.



Hadijah Nakyanzi helped to plant a LCCU Church in her village. She also serves her community's educational efforts.

To date, God has made this church into a beacon of fullness of the life that Jesus came to give. Men and women, young and old regularly come to church for prayer and moral support. Lives have been transformed by God because this one woman refused to be taken down by her dire circumstances but rose up to the call. Many are being disciplined and becoming disciple makers.

Hadijah has big development pursuits for this community, including a transformational education program through a Christian school and a skill development vocational training center. Your prayer support is greatly appreciated.

This is typical of many LCCU churches in various communities. Over the past 15 years, Lifehouse Community Church of Uganda has planted over 120 churches. Most of these church plants have been done in partnership with other ministries and church families. However, to date, LCCU directly oversees 41 churches around the country. Our vision is "Healthy Churches for Healthy Communities."

Did You Know?

- Uganda has one of the youngest populations in the world, with about 48 percent being children below 15 years of age.
- Uganda is the source of the world's longest river. Jinja, where the Nile flows out of Lake Victoria, is a popular spot for adventure tourism, including white-water rafting and kayaking.
- Uganda, one of only three countries to still have mountain gorillas, is home to half of the total population of these rare primates left in the world.

EVERYDAY discipleship

Living out the Anabaptist vision
of following Jesus

Whoever

By Dustin Maddox

In the last month of my senior year in high school, I went with my church-going friends on a mission trip to Mexico. We spent the mornings hosting a vacation Bible school for children and the evenings studying the Sermon on the Mount. I became so enthralled with Jesus' vision of life in the kingdom of God—which simultaneously challenged and completed my picture of the world—that I decided to give my life to following Jesus and becoming like him by grace through faith.

A few years later, as an undergrad at Fresno Pacific University, I learned about the early Anabaptists. To my surprise, they had rediscovered Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. They took seriously and literally Jesus' call to follow him as his disciples as they attempted to live in their everyday lives what they read in Scripture. The first Anabaptists discovered the cost and received the benefits of following Jesus by obeying his words and imitating his practices.

I was hooked because I desperately wanted to do the same, and I

have been attempting to flesh out this vision of discipleship in my own life ever since.

So, what did Jesus teach in the first century that the first Anabaptists grabbed hold of in the 16th century that can help us in the 21st century?

Jesus' most direct teaching on the nature of discipleship is found in Matthew 16:24-26. There are three dimensions of discipleship contained within this exchange that he invites us to consider with the utmost sincerity.

Following

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me," Jesus says in verse 24.

The Greek word for a disciple can also be translated as follower, student or apprentice, my personal favorite. In the first century, a Jewish rabbi would train a group of students under the rabbi's "yoke"—their interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. A disciple had three goals in apprenticing under their rabbi: to be with them at all times,

to become like their rabbi in all ways, and to know how to do what their rabbi would do in their unique daily circumstances.

Jesus, as a first-century rabbi, follows this model by choosing and training 12 disciples. Jesus is more than a rabbi, as his first followers soon realize. Eventually, his disciples confess Jesus as the Son of God (Matt. 16:13-20). But this was—and still is—his sovereignly chosen method of teaching his heart to his people.

The challenge, however, is that Jesus tells his disciples that he will be betrayed and crucified. For his disciples, this prediction undermines Jesus' messianic status and is deeply distressing to those who imitate his example. Does this mean that the same fate will befall them? So, Jesus clarifies. To be his disciple means picking up and carrying one's cross daily, imitating him.

The cross isn't only Jesus' end; it is his means. Taking up his cross is how Jesus lives every moment of every day in loving obedience to his heavenly Father and in self-sacrificial love for his neighbor. This,

however, ultimately leads to his death on a cross because of the threat it poses to the religious and cultural elite.

The early Anabaptists saw that following Jesus in their context meant following not merely the pattern of his life—as important as this is—but also the manner of his death. Faithfulness to Jesus amidst cultural or relational pressures that

strategies for self-preservation. For Jesus, however, the path to eternal life is the way of self-denial and self-sacrifice, seen most clearly and climactically in Jesus' crucifixion.

And yet, this cost of discipleship is easily outweighed by the cause: "Whoever loses their life for me will find it." In other words, in return for surrendering our lives—ourselves—in discipleship to Jesus,

world's riches are rendered ineffective to regain one's life in the face of death. Discipleship means forfeiting the good life and gaining eternal life.

My high school basketball team once won a game without ever playing. Our opponents had to forfeit because they didn't have enough players. Paradoxically, discipleship works to our advantage

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

drifted from and conflicted with scriptural revelation resulted in their rejection and persecution. Discipleship includes taking the injustice, unrighteousness and unfaithfulness of others on ourselves, even to the point of death.

While following Jesus in our cultural moment may not require martyrdom, it does require us to bear witness to the way of self-denial in an age of self-gratification, self-righteousness and self-obsession. Bearing our cross daily means our relationships—especially with those who don't share our faith—are defined by forgiveness, reconciliation and mercy in a world increasingly removed from the values of Jesus.

Finding

Jesus asserts in verse 25: "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it." Jesus understands that a fundamental human need is preserving life. So, he paradoxically says that in his upside-down kingdom, real, eternal life is found by giving it away, often at great personal expense.

Interestingly, the Greek word for "life" can be paraphrased as "inner self." While it is impossible to save oneself, we do have many

we receive Jesus himself—being with him and becoming like him.

The early Anabaptists found that the value of community required self-sacrificial expression. Consider the story of Dirk Willems. While escaping from prison, Willems stops and turns back to save the life of his pursuing captor who has fallen through the ice, only to be taken back to prison, tortured and killed. Willems' story is a shining example of someone who had surrendered their self-preserving impulses to Jesus and was graciously given a different, cross-shaped way of living.

Forfeiting

Finally, in verse 26, Jesus asks rhetorically: "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" Here, emphasizing the word "will," Jesus relativizes present comfort in light of future judgment.

The pleasures and promises of this world lose all value in God's upside-down and coming kingdom, especially when the cost of these fleeting glimpses of the good life is one's soul. Put the other way around, Jesus says all of the

at Jesus' expense. When we forfeit control and comfort in life, by grace through faith, we receive victory over sin and eternal security. The value of the exchange, like the pearl of great price, is worth surrendering all that we have and all that we are to gain more than we could ever ask for or imagine.

The legacy of Anabaptism is that it rejects the world's ways and values while remaining present to the world in self-sacrificial service, Spirit-led evangelism and a cross-shaped global mission for the life of the world that God so loves.

As we celebrate 500 years of Anabaptism this year, what might be possible if we took the call to and cost of discipleship seriously in our day? How might our lives, families, churches, cities and the world itself be transformed if we stopped settling for cultural Christianity and instead pursued biblical discipleship?

May we follow Jesus, find our lives in him, and forsake all else to live with him in his kingdom, beginning today and continuing forever.

Dustin Maddox is lead pastor at North Fresno Church in Fresno, Calif.

The unkillable Anabaptist spirit

By Ryan Loewen



What characterized Anabaptists 500 years ago, and how can we regain that spirit today?

“You belong to the accursed Anabaptists, who originate strange sects, opinions, errors and contention among the people!” It was 1544 and John Claesz and Lucas Lambertz van Beveren stood before four judges in Amsterdam, listening to the charges against them.

Although everyone in Christendom was baptized as infants, these two men renounced that event and repeated the ritual as adults. As a result, they found themselves arraigned on charges of being Anabaptist.

What does it mean to be Anabaptist? Looking at heroes like Claesz and Lambertz from five centuries ago, we might be tempted to think the spirit of Anabaptism is a willingness to sacrifice ourselves for our faith. However, their courage was a symptom of the Anabaptist spirit, and by tracing their courage back to its source, we can retrieve that same spirit for our context today.

An alternative

In the eyes of their judges, Claesz and Lambertz represented a social, political and spiritual cancer. During the 16th century, Anabaptists were feared and suppressed for several reasons. They were considered social deviants who arranged secret meetings for malicious purposes. By attracting new converts, they were thought to be persuasive heretics leading people to hell. They were allegedly covert militant extremists, in-

tent on infiltrating and overthrowing the God-ordained Christian government.

In a sense, the court was correct. Claesz and Lambertz had abandoned their loyalty to the church and government and were actively persuading others to join them in an alternative way of life. In the eyes of the majority, Anabaptists threatened those structures. But in the face of death, Claesz and Lambertz believed they were on the narrow road that leads to life. Their conviction ran so deep that they would rather fall to the executioner's axe than turn back.

The two men attempted to persuade the court that they did not pose a threat but were merely following the Word of God. Nevertheless, both were found guilty of the capital crime of being Anabaptists and were promptly beheaded. Their bodies were left for the birds, and their heads were put on stakes as a warning to all who might challenge the political and religious institutions of the day.

Definition difficulties

Even though we have a rich history of blood-stained, stake-charred martyrdom stories, defining Anabaptism today is no simple matter. Anabaptist scholars have long debated what constituted the core of 16th century Anabaptism, and this causes confusion for how the movement should see itself today. Before summarizing the Anabaptist spirit, let's consider why defining Anabaptism is difficult.

Anabaptism is not based on a single Reformation figure. There was no preeminent theological architect like their contemporaries. While Martin Luther and John Calvin wrote theological tomes that guided future generations, Anabaptism arose through short-lived theological and political protests by various figures across Central Europe over the better part of a century. The Anabaptist spirit cannot be reduced to the

enduring spirit of Conrad Grebel, Jakob Hutter or even Menno Simons.

Anabaptism is not uniform. Defining Anabaptism is difficult because of the theological diversity among those who consider themselves Anabaptists. Even among the first-generation Anabaptists there were heated disagreements and schisms. Some were pacifists and some were not. Some baptized by immersion, some through affusion (pouring). Some simply dipped their fingers in water and made the sign of the cross on the recipient's forehead. Likewise, we can't expect Anabaptism to look the same everywhere today.

Anabaptism is not relative. Though it might look different today, if being an Anabaptist still means something, it must retain its defining features or spirit. For example, though baptismal practices are not uniform, Anabaptists are baptized as believers. In contrast, Anabaptism cannot be defined by martyrdom because not all Anabaptists die as martyrs. If there is continuity between the early Anabaptists and today, it must be enduring and identifiable.

Undying devotion to Jesus

What, then, is the underlying source that animated the early Anabaptists for us to identify and adopt today? Being an Anabaptist means having a fearless, undying devotion to Jesus Christ. Just as first-generation Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier included in his tagline, "Truth is unkillable," so too was the spirit that propelled Anabaptism as it was being systematically suppressed.

This fundamental but renewed Christian fervor led to common Anabaptist distinctives such as baptism, pacifism and separatism. However, these practices were never ends in themselves, nor can they be transposed to every context in the same manner. They were the result of Anabaptists reforming their convictions, practices and communities according to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Three German words, *gelassenheit*, *nachfolge* and *gemeindechristentum*, summarize the Anabaptist approach. They capture three dimensions that characterized the early Anabaptists and provide a template for reviving that spirit today.

Yielded. Above and beyond surrendering to the authorities who might lock them away, Anabaptists had already surrendered themselves to another Lord.

Gelassenheit, meaning "yieldedness," was used by the first-generation Anabaptists to refer to their submission to the Word of God. Some believed God spoke only through the Bible since it reveals God in Christ. Yet others considered the Holy Spirit's transformative work through conversion to be evidence that the Word of God is spoken directly to the human heart.

In both cases, the Anabaptist spirit insisted that Christians yield to Christ's example. Menno Simons often quoted 1 Corinthians 3:11, "For no one can lay any

foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." Instead of explaining away Jesus' commands, being Anabaptist meant surrendering oneself to Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

Radical followers. Through their counter-cultural ceremony of believer's baptism, people became radicalized Jesus followers (*nachfolge*). By submitting to baptism, the newly initiated denounced their allegiance to the powerful state church that baptized them as infants. Baptism, then, marked the first step of forsaking their former life in exchange for a new life of following Christ.

This kind of following certainly required an inner conviction, but through baptism, those with an Anabaptist spirit outwardly took the first of many steps that associated them with Christ, even if it meant a death sentence from the world. In radical conformity to Jesus, being Anabaptist meant following him into the baptismal waters, along the narrow path he pioneered and even to the cross.

Community. Though many Anabaptists were uneducated, lower-class citizens, they belonged to a Christ-minded community (*gemeindechristentum*). While the powers that be abused and mocked them, Anabaptists believed that their congregations were a royal priesthood built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ.

Anabaptist communities held no distinction between clergy and laity because all were equally given the priestly duty to minister inside and outside the church. All were equally called to the high bar of priestly discipline. All were to exercise church discipline and restoration, and all were called to discern sound doctrine and proper interpretation of Scripture. The community of lowly Anabaptists no longer considered themselves last but first. In Christ, these peasants became priests and the commoners, kings.

Many Anabaptist communities refused to use violence against those who threatened them. They believed Jesus was serious when he said, "do not resist an evil person," and "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:39, 44). Anabaptist communities then and today have suffered dearly at the hands of others. Still, if we suffer because our community is attempting to embody Christ, we must remember that our King, upon whom we fix our eyes, also suffered at the hands of sinners (Heb. 12:2-3). Although it is painful, it is royal and Christlike to suffer like and for Jesus.

The spirit of Anabaptism can still shape us today. Though we may not face death like Claesz and Lambertsz, we carry forward the spirit of the movement when we yield to the authority of Christ, the revelation of God, who is above every other authority; follow the narrow way of Jesus no matter the personal cost; and carry out our royal and priestly responsibilities in our local congregation. This is the unkillable Anabaptist spirit worth embodying.

Ryan Loewen is assistant professor of theology at Tabor College.

Remember, review and renew

500th anniversary is a time to be
aware of constants and changes

Who doesn't enjoy a milestone birthday party? The year 2025 is one of those "big" birthdays for Mennonite Brethren. It is the 500th anniversary of our larger faith family, the Anabaptist movement, and I hope we can both celebrate like children and remember like seniors.

Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). The prayer is not only to look back, remembering our mortality, but to look forward with greater insight and faithfulness.

The MB Church, as one heir to the Anabaptist movement, would do well to review some of the relevant changes for USMB and our global MB Church, to realize who and where we are today, and to spur each other on as we face the challenges and opportunities before us.

Yesterday: 1860-1990

Why these dates? 1860 was the year the MB Church was born. 1990 was the year the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) was born as a global family of national MB conferences.

Mennonite Brethren emerged as a renewal movement in a context of German evangelical pietism sweeping through Europe in the mid-19th century. Their Document of Secession in relation to the historic Mennonite Church clarified their motives: 1) a yearning for holiness in the midst of moral decadence, 2) water baptism following faith-inspired conversion, 3) Holy Communion taken reverently with true believers, 4) foot washing as a blessing to practice, 5) church workers called according to the Scriptures and 6) church discipline practiced biblically as a restorative measure.

By Victor Wiens

They cited Scriptures as the basis for their convictions. References to the 16th century Anabaptist reformer Menno Simons reveal an alignment with the Anabaptist intention of restoring a New Testament experience of discipleship and church life.

The document was signed on Jan. 6, 1860, by 50 charter members. These original Mennonite Brethren lived in rural villages in South Russia (today's Ukraine) and spoke Low German at home, High German at church and school, and Russian with outsiders. They were mostly of Dutch-German-Prussian ethnicities.

Yet even among this isolated and monocultural people, there were soon signs of a wider multicultural and missional engagement. As with the believers in Acts 4:20, the early Mennonite Brethren could not stop speaking about their newfound faith and assurance of salvation, both with nominal Mennonites and Russian Orthodox people.

They continued relationships with Mennonites back in Prussia (today's Poland) and soon established MB churches there. Teachers, preachers and missionaries were trained in Germany. Within three decades this young conference had sent their first missionaries to India.

Fast forward to 1988. At the first MB World Mission Conference in Brazil, 805 mission-minded delegates gathered from all over to consult on internationalization of MB mission work. By

this time MB workers were serving in 27 countries, MB churches were planted in 15 and organized MB conferences were present in at least 12. Worldwide membership approached 150,000. The tiny seed that had been planted in a rural village in south Russia had become a fruitful tree with many branches and many colors.

Today: 1990-2025

The gathering in 1988 to globalize mission work led to a conversation between the leaders of existing MB conferences about also globalizing church-to-church relations. Further conversations in 1990 at the Mennonite World Conference gathering in Winnipeg, Canada, led to the birth of ICOMB. Issues of common concern included the MB Confession of Faith, pastoral and leadership training, church polity, ethics, Christian education and missions.

Since 1992, delegates from national MB conferences have gathered almost every year for a summit, rotating continents and countries. Since the Thailand 2017 Consultation, a growing number of emerging networks and conferences participate. They too are looking for family.

The global MB family today is wonderfully diverse. Were you to come to an ICOMB summit, you would note a diversity of dress, from brilliant Angolan shirts to Brazilian soccer jerseys. You would be challenged by a Babel of languages. Translation is supplied in meetings for the major European languages, but during the breaks you may hear Telegu, Thai or Tagalog. However, diversity goes deeper than first impressions.

Some delegates come from contexts of isolation or persecution. They are overjoyed to be experiencing fellowship with a large family and sharing openly their struggles and opportunities. Many church leaders are bi-vocational, shepherding their church flocks while putting rice (or tortillas or cassava porridge) on the table and working as farmers (Malawi), artisans (Panama) or drivers (India).

At the same time, a deep spiritual unity is always present. We equip each other from core biblical convictions expressed in our ICOMB Confession of Faith, containing both a story and a list of core MB values. We share and pray for heartfelt conversions to Christ and spur each other to a follow-after-Jesus discipleship. We covenant with each other to communicate, teach and pray.

We express worship diversely yet to our same great God, and we always end with the Lord's Supper and foot washing, complete with blessings, tears and hugs.

The overall flavor is one of mission, expressed through stories of new life, new churches, new people groups and renewed vision for the lost.

The global MB Church has undergone major shifts. It is now mostly a Global South church. Sixteen of 24 member conferences are from the Southern Hemisphere, as is 82 percent of MB membership, now near half a million. The top 15 emerging conferences and networks are from the Global South.

MB mission work is going on in over 70 countries and many more people groups. It is no longer unidirectional ("from the West to the rest") but multidirectional ("from everywhere to everyone"). The number of languages we speak approaches 100. We still call ourselves "Brethren," but brotherhood language has been replaced by family.

With all our expansions, adoptions and integrations of multiple streams into our blended theological river, are we still Anabaptist and evangelical? At the global level, there is substantial overlap among these two multi-flavored movements.

Both are centered around the core four: Christ, canon, conversion and commission.

As Anabaptists, Mennonite Brethren continue to promote and practice believers' baptism, discipleship beyond conversion, churches collaborating as an interdependent community, plural and character-filled leadership,

interpreting the Scriptures together, peacemaking and loyalty to God's kingdom above all else. We are on a journey, yet these core convictions remain as our maps.

Tomorrow: 2025 forward

As both Anabaptists and evangelicals, we can expect many current global trends to continue. Christ's church will continue to expand by sent missionaries and by spontaneous migrations because of wars and persecutions, as in Ukraine or Myanmar. The global MB mission force will increasingly be international; a third of Multiply workers are non-North American.

We will increasingly be led by brothers and sisters from the Global South. Our most recent ICOMB director is originally from Brazil; the Mennonite World Conference director is from Colombia. The makeup of the global MB Church will become more diverse in terms of location, language and ethnicity.

As with other Anabaptists, Mennonite Brethren will carefully welcome newcomers who bring new flavors such as warm culture relations or charismatic worship and ministry. Centers of educational influence will shift to majority world urban centers like Asunción, Kinshasa and Hyderabad.



While we continue to embrace our internal MB story, convictions and identity, our external names are increasingly diverse. In addition to Mennonite Brethren, we also call ourselves Free Churches (Austria, Germany and Lithuania), United Evangelical Church (Panama), Christian Peace Church (Mexico), Khmu Mission (Laos) and Lifehouse Community Church (Uganda).

Amid these inevitable shifts, there are also constants. Biblical convictions as rediscovered and applied by evangelical Anabaptists and Anabaptist evangelicals remain constant. The circle of interpreting and applying the Scriptures to today's global challenges has grown wider, yet remains a circle of Christ-centered and Spirit-illuminated leaders and followers, as in Acts 15.

Aware of both changes and constants, we must also be aware of future challenges that present themselves even now. MB elders alert us to the challenge of church fragmentation in societies that are evermore individualistic and nationalistic, as opposed to a covenant community that is interdependent.

We are facing theological challenges, even within our core commitment to mission. Will we embrace a universalist posture toward other religions or an indifference toward the destiny of the unevangelized? Will our Anabaptist values of peace and justice retain peace with God and personal holiness at their center?

In our missional practice, will we waver in our historical commitment to bring the gospel of Christ to the still unreached people groups of 7,000-plus on all continents? Do we have a missional debt remaining in coun-

tries where we were planted, yet today little if any of our witness remains, as in Poland, Russia, China, and Spain?

A global church

The Bible opens and closes with a global perspective. We journey with faith, hope and love to the joyous heavenly scene: an uncountable multitude "from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). As smaller movements within this glorious story, Anabaptists and Mennonite Brethren began as mustard seeds. By God's amazing grace we are growing into fruitful and colorful trees.

Victor Wall, a Paraguayan and the first ICOMB director, reflected at our 150th MB anniversary: "Early Anabaptism, as well as the renewal movement in 1860 that gave birth to the MB Church, was a Jesus movement, a church movement, a movement of the Holy Spirit and a mission movement. It was local, but always had an international, transcultural and global orientation."

As we Mennonite Brethren celebrate this big birthday of our larger Anabaptist family, we do well to remember, review and renew. We are a movement of renewal and mission that has gone global. However, we are not yet done and not yet home.

Victor Wiens volunteers as the ICOMB equipping coordinator and recently retired from 40 years of ministry with Multiply.

Read more: Reformers and radicals

This year believers around the world are commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. The birth of this revival movement was marked by sacrifice, as by one estimate, 4,000 Anabaptists were martyred during the early to middle part of the 16th century. To learn more about why believers baptism was so radical, read these online essays.

Read online at www.christianleadermag.com

It all started with a baptism by Tony Petersen

The history of the Anabaptist movement begins with a baptism held 500 years ago in Switzerland. Today this movement spans the globe, with the majority of those baptized into Anabaptist-rooted churches coming from Africa, Asia and Latin America. And it all started with a baptism on Jan. 21, 1525, in Felix Manz's home when a group of men baptized one another. Why was this so radical?

What "believers church" means by Aaron Garza

Today, the idea that someone could be killed over what seems like a squabble over baptismal practice may seem extreme. But that's what was happening 500 years ago as Anabaptist radicals were willing to die for their baptismal convictions. It is important to remember why believers baptism was so important for these radicals and why it ought to continue to be important for us today.

Extending welcome

God gives opportunities to care for the vulnerable

Over the last 10 years or so, I have felt the Holy Spirit nudging me to enter into space with vulnerable people. I live just outside of Garden City, Kan., where we have a large immigrant and refugee population. There are many opportunities to engage, but I tended to stand in the fray and pray that God would make an opportunity so big I couldn't miss it.

On New Year's Eve 2018, I read Isaiah 58 during my Bible study and felt a distinct call on my heart, especially in verses 6-10: "If you do away with the yoke of oppression... and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (9b-10).

In August 2019, God provided the opportunity I had been praying for when I met a beautiful refugee family from Myanmar and learned how much proximity matters. As I sat long enough in the awkwardness of broken language conversations, I started to see people as image bearers and friends, rather than political rhetoric and something to be feared.

I dove into learning about the plight of refugees and immigrants and God's heart for them. Through a podcast, I learned about Women of Welcome, a community dedicated to studying Scripture to under-

stand God's heart for immigrants and refugees. I began engaging regularly with the group, and my passion for caring for vulnerable people grew.

In April 2024, I visited the southern border at El Paso/Ciudad Juarez with 16 other Women of Welcome community members from 15 states. I wanted to see firsthand what was happening at the U.S./Mexico border.

The whirlwind three days included educational sessions about topics such as the basics of immigration and asylum seeking and what the Bible says about immigration, as well as immersion experiences that included visiting a shelter for women and children in Juarez and one of the largest migrant shelters in El Paso. We spent time on both sides of the border wall and spoke with current and past border patrol officers.

Here is what I learned: It is not always what you see on the news. There were no chaotic scenes on either side of the border wall. The shelters were clean and dignified places, and I did not expect to feel such a tension between the sorrow of these asylum seekers' situations and the tangible joy as they became community within the shelters. All image bearers that we met had fled for their lives, for better opportunities for their families, for hopes of a future. They have names and faces and stories.

I often tell God that I do not want to forget the people, sights, sounds and feelings of that trip, and I pray

for opportunities to extend welcome in my own community—to the Haitian family walking down the street carrying their grocery bags on their heads, to the girls in hijabs at my schools and to the man from Central America leaving Catholic Charities with a folder of information under his arm. I used to spend much of my day not "seeing" these people but now feel more confident and called to make sure they know that someone does see and love them.

**Here is what I learned:
It is not always what
you see on the news.**



Tatum Parker is an occupational therapist for a school district and attends Garden Valley Church in Garden City, Kan. She and her husband, Tim, are parents to two teenagers.

Lessons from the aged

A reflection on life with Jesus

As a kid, I was fascinated by the *Guinness Book of World Records*. It was available in cheap, paperback form on the book order forms that we received annually at my elementary school.

The category “Oldest Living Thing,” or something of that sort, listed the ancient bristlecone pine, a rare tree that can live up to almost 5,000 years. I read with fascination that bristlecone pine are found high in the White Mountains of eastern California, and I always thought it would be so cool to see one in person.

Finally, last year, some 50 years after I first heard about the tree, I finally saw an ancient bristlecone pine with my very own eyes. It's pretty amazing to see trees that were alive when Abraham sojourned in Canaan.

I won't call it a spiritual experience, because that's an over-used phrase. But I will say that seeing these ancient trees prompted me to reflect on life with Jesus.

The first connection the Holy Spirit made for me was between the unique conditions in which bristlecone pines thrive and our unique position in Christ. These trees live above 9,000 feet and prefer a dry climate with relatively acidic soil conditions. This explains their relative rarity, as they simply don't survive in what we

would consider “normal” conditions.

In a similar way, as believers, we thrive in only one special place—in Christ. Colossians 3:3 puts it this way, “For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.” We can try to live on our own, but we'll only end up dead, like “white-washed tombs,” as Jesus put it (Matt. 23:27).

A second connection I observed is the parallel between the extremely slow growth of bristlecones and the growth of a Jesus follower. The trees understandably reproduce paper-thin rings, adding only a miniscule amount of girth each year. They aren't especially tall like Redwoods or thick like Sequoias, but over an impossibly long period of time these trees grow—and last.

Similarly, we grow—for the most part—slowly, miraculously becoming more and more Christ-like. We may measure our gains more in years and decades than days and months, but we know that godliness will last for eternity.

Finally, these are not the most beautiful trees in the world. “Gnarled” is a generous descriptor. As followers of Jesus we, too, forsake the skin-deep beauty of the world, opting instead for the longer lasting, inner beauty of

godly character (1 Peter 3:4).

We aren't *trying* to be ugly, but ultimately, we know that physical beauty just isn't worth all that much. Instead, we invest in eternity—which is a whole lot longer than 5,000 years.

Colossians 3:3 puts it this way, “For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.”



Dave Thiessen is executive pastor at Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif. He serves as chair of the USMB Leadership Board.

Hospitable congregations

How do we welcome guests?

Across generations, locations and cultures, people desire to welcome others well. The art of hospitality is examined thoroughly in groups, and there is a myriad of ideas for how to receive guests and invite them into an experience. Christian communities join in asking, "How do we welcome people to our church?"

I typed this question into an AI software to see what response I would get. AI generated advice that included greetings such as "hello" or "welcome aboard," making eye contact, giving a handshake, offering refreshments. While these standard responses can be helpful, they lack in the depth and creativity most of us seek for our church communities.

USMB church leaders I talked with agree that welcoming people begins with the overall mission of the church. Scripture reminds us of our call to share the gospel and to "keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (Heb. 13:1-2). The reason we welcome guests well is because God loves all people and wants us to be in community with God and each other.

Dave Thiessen, executive pastor at Mountain View Church in Fresno, Calif., believes that we are all called to be mission-minded and to reach out to people who

are spiritually lost. Following God's call to create "a culture of hospitality is deeper than 'Let's be friendly.' Instead, we are connecting people with Jesus."

In some churches, the point of connection happens before people enter the building. Jana Hildebrandt works with guest engagement for Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., to "connect people to people, not just to ministries." Her team realized that the majority of visitors participate online before visiting in person, so they set up their website and texting service to include information a first-time guest would need. Church staff of large and small communities are fine-tuning their online presence to provide a warm welcome whether people physically gather with them or join their livestream.

Most church congregations are prayerfully considering how to welcome people when they come to gather in person, too. Mountain View Church developed a Guest Hub where visitors are encouraged to connect with extroverted volunteers after Sunday morning services. This provides a safe space for people to ask questions about the church as well as leave their connection cards with personal information. Thiessen says by making their community "more accessible," people are willing to share their needs and form relationships.

A number of churches are fol-

lowing up with guests during the week by sending a personal video from the pastoral team or texting about upcoming events. Some churches try to do a home visit, while others leave information and an invitation via card, letter or inspirational coffee mug.

Hildebrandt reminds us that "none of us are experts" when it comes to the logistics of welcoming people, but the Spirit teaches us all to invite others to "come be seen and known, as you sit with us you will learn who God is."

Scripture reminds us of our call to share the gospel and to "keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters."



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 quincentenary commemoration

Mennonite Brethren to join hundreds in Zurich for Anabaptism@500

In May, Mennonite Brethren will join guests from around the world in Zurich, Switzerland, to commemorate 500 years of the Anabaptist movement.

A day-long celebration, “The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500” hosted by Mennonite World Conference (MWC), is planned for May 29, in Zurich’s Old Town. The schedule includes workshops, concerts, a panel discussion, self-guided historical walking tours and a worship service at Grossmünster Cathedral.

“The commemoration is an opportunity to nurture our identity, reflect on our history and project ourselves toward the future with a spirit of hope and mission,” says MWC general secretary César García.

MWC is preparing for hundreds of guests from the five regions it serves: Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia and North America.

Tim Geddert, U.S. Board of Faith and Life member from Fresno, Calif., is one of several Mennonite Brethren planning to attend.

“I’ve read about our history as Anabaptists, even taught about it,” says Geddert, who served as professor of New Testament at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary prior to his retirement in May 2023. “The stories are inspiring, especially the courageous steps taken by the first people who risked their lives to follow Jesus faithfully. To be able to celebrate all that God has brought about as a result with hundreds or thousands of others—and to do it on location where it all began—well that is just too good an opportunity to miss.”

A renewal movement

The Anabaptist movement began as part of a renewal movement within the Catholic Church in Europe and was shaped by Martin Luther and the Reformation movement. On Jan. 21, 1525, a small group of Christians gathered in Zurich. Rejecting infant baptism, they agreed to baptize each other as adults. Anabaptists—meaning re-baptizers—faced persecution and death for practicing believers baptism, which was considered an act of treason against the state and the church. Some early Anabaptists were drowned in the river in which they had been baptized. Others were burned at the stake.

According to Geddert, unique Anabaptist emphases highlight the life and teaching of Jesus in addition to his death and resurrection; the importance of community in

church decision-making, Bible interpretation and mission; and peace-making and reconciliation.

Today, the Anabaptist movement has more than 2 million members in more than 80 countries and includes groups like the Amish, Hutterites, Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren.

“Some of the important emphases in early Anabaptism have become shared convictions of many Christians around the world, especially of other evangelicals,” Geddert says. “Believers baptism, a strong focus on evangelism, separation of church and state, a call for committed discipleship—these were uniquely Anabaptist emphases back then. They are core values of many other groups today.”

A commemorative event

Events in Zurich on May 29 are slated to start in the morning. Registration is not required, and a schedule may be viewed online. (www.anabaptism500.ch).

USMB National Director Aaron Box will attend the anniversary events in Zurich.

“To stand along the banks of the Limmat River and to be in some of the places the Anabaptist story began will be a real joy for me, as a first-generation Mennonite Brethren, deepening my own connection with our history and the legacy of those who went before us,” Box says. “This is an incredible opportunity to meet Mennonite Brethren from around the world, and I look forward to making new connections and seeing first-hand the breadth of our family of faith.”

Sebastian Mireles, youth pastor at Bethesda Church in Huron, S.D., will attend the 500th anniversary events in Zurich, then serve as a USMB delegate at the MWC Global Youth Summit in Germany.

“I am excited to be with believers from around the world and celebrate God’s faithfulness and goodness,” Mireles says. “I am grateful for the opportunity to represent USMB in these events and learn more about how we can shepherd the youth that we have under our care.”

The final worship service will include participation from Lutheran World Federation, World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. MWC’s intent, according to Zurich 2025 project coordinator John D. Roth, is to both acknowledge the pain of the past and move forward with a shared witness. The serv-

ice, conducted in English and translated into French, Spanish and German, will mention steps taken toward reconciliation with these churches and will be live streamed.

Other activities will be filmed and sharing online after the event.

Gerald Hildebrand, MWC North American regional representative, is excited to gather with the global faith family.

"I am coming to realize that our spiritual well-being is inextricably tied to the well-being of Christ's body everywhere," Hildebrand says. "We suffer and rejoice together. We need the witness of our global sisters and brothers to help us better understand what it means to be a devoted follower of Jesus."

Historical tours are being planned in conjunction with the anniversary, as are other regional events worldwide. Visit christianleadermag.com for a list of MB commemorative events, including Fresno Pacific University and Biblical Seminary and Tabor College events and a USMB LEAD Cohort about Anabaptist essentials.—*Janae Rempel Shafer*



Listen to LEAD Pods Episode 111 to hear host Matt Ehresman's conversation with César García and Tim Geddert about the 500th anniversary.



Grossmünster Cathedral will be the site for a 500th anniversary service.

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LAMB district revives youth gatherings as an investment in developing leaders

When LAMB District youth gathered in August, it revived an effort to bring youth together for fellowship and teaching and is leading to leadership opportunities.

Moises Tagle, planning committee member, remembers when the district held monthly youth gatherings. As a young adult, Tagle was on the planning committee for these gatherings at locations around the district. But over time, as students became busier with school and extracurricular activities, attendance dropped, and the gatherings became quarterly and eventually stopped, he says.

Now, there is interest in starting them again.

“There’s been a lot of talk now about the next generation and wanting to start developing some more leaders,” Tagle says. “This is one of the ways that we want to do this.”



Joanna Chapa, Multiply Mission Mobilizer, was the youth gathering speaker. Her message from Mark 1:16-20 shared what it means to follow Jesus. Photo: GracePoint Church.

Connecting points

GracePoint Church, La Grulla, Texas, hosted the 40 youth from three churches.

District minister Aaron Hernandez, who pastors GracePoint Church, is encouraged to see district leaders investing in the next generation. “These kids are noticeably hungry for something different than what this culture is offering,” he says. “The message we communicate is clear: only Jesus gives life.”

The Aug. 25 event included “Minute to Win It” games, singing led by the GracePoint worship team, a message and pizza.

Joanna Chapa, Multiply mission mobilizer, spoke from Mark 1:16-20 about what it means to follow Jesus. Using the analogy of a sponge, Chapa demonstrated that we absorb what our lives are “soaked” in, and this is what will come out when life “squeezes” us.

“What excites me about reviving the south Texas MB churches youth gatherings is that it gives these young people a taste of what they were created for: witness,” Chapa says. “It was quite special to see the excitement in the adult leaders as they saw the different youth groups mingling and connecting with each other.”

Developing leaders

To involve as many churches as possible, organizers opened the event to a wide age range. Participants ranged in age from middle school to college.

Initial feedback from youth leaders has been positive, Tagle says.

The hope is to meet three or four times per year, with participation from even more churches, Tagle says. The next meeting is set for January. Current planning team members in addition to Tagle and Chapa are Elizabeth Tagle, Mirta Cantu and Joaquin Gutierrez.

“Our goal is to bring in some younger leaders from the different churches to become the official planning committee,” Tagle says. “Hopefully, that will both bring in new leaders as well as help promote amongst their own churches.”

Another result of the gathering has been an effort to identify and develop youth leaders. While some LAMB churches have organized youth groups with youth leaders, others do not meet apart from Sunday, Tagle says.

The planning team is encouraging pastors to identify potential youth leaders, and Tagle hopes to meet with these leaders in January to encourage, develop and resource them.

For Tagle, the hope is to provide today’s youth with fellowship opportunities.

“When I was young, that’s how we got to know people from other churches,” Tagle says. “I met (people) that I would later be working with. Those are the kinds of experiences that we want our kids to have.”—*Janae Rempel Shafer*

Building a faith that endures

Multi-generational class brings fellowship, discipleship to Shafter MB Church

In June 2021, the Shafer (Calif.) MB Church congregation sought a stronger sense of unity, fellowship and discipleship. As a result, Facets of Faith was born, a Sunday school class that today draws generations from fifth grade to senior adults.

"Originally, the goal of the class was to bring everyone together in unity with respect," says Nancy Neufeld, a member of the class's leadership team. "We were looking for a class that could be a place to live out our faith through different events, classes and generations. It does not replace a traditional Sunday school class, but it is a supplement for people who like to be in the action of faith. We are all at different places at different times in our faith journey, and we want Facets of Faith to be a working space, available to all on Sundays."

Over the years, the class has grown in ideas, size and structure, with attendance ranging from 12 to 50 people, says Susanne Franz, another leadership team member.

"We don't have a set leader but have a leadership team that take turns with each member being in charge of each Sunday," Franz says. "I coordinate with the church office to put information in the bulletins."

The class has no set age limit and rotates weekly between four themes: Linger Longer, Resource Sunday, Speaker and Service Sunday.

Linger Longer is dedicated to fellowship, a time that the class comes together for food and games. Following that is

Resource Sunday, which involves a class member sharing a helpful resource—like a book, article or podcast—to encourage growth in knowledge. The third Sunday is set aside to bring in speakers to engage the class by sharing testimonies. The fourth Sunday is Service Sunday, where the class serves in projects such as cleaning local parks, organizing and cleaning the sanctuary or making cards for local nursing home residents.

"We enjoy the different Sundays as a way to become more united, as we'd hoped for when we began the class," Franz says. "It's especially encouraging seeing our young people feel included and involved."

With so many ways to serve, class members have many favorite parts of Facets of Faith.

"The things I appreciate the most are the multi-generational opportunities and the opportunity to participate, whether through service or discussion," says Sharon Wiebe, leadership team member, who also appreciates the fellowship.

John Wiebe, another leadership team member, says the ability for participants to come and go each week depending on their schedules but still feel included is a highlight. It's a reimagining of traditional Sunday school where different points of view are encouraged so people grow together as a church and closer to Jesus.

An additional element of the class is including and engaging younger generations so they also feel part of the church. Katie Wiebe, a leadership team member, says her kids are engaged with each weekly format as they hear and see personal faith in action.

"As a parent, I just want my kids to feel connected to their church family in meaningful ways, and I think this class has really made that happen for our family," she says. "I hope that this class will help my boys develop a faith that endures."—Caitlyn Decker



Aiyang Zhang (second from right), with help from his father, Yi Zhang, shares his painting during the Facets of Faith Kids' Talents and Interests presentation as moderators Kate Frantz and Charlie Wiebe observe. *Photo: Susanne Franz.*

A gift that keeps on giving

Henderson congregation multiplies \$1,000 during generosity exercise

At the conclusion of a sermon series on stewardship and finances, Living Hope Church pastor Luke Haidle distributed at random 10 envelopes each containing \$100. Recipients couldn't keep the money; Haidle asked them to give it away as a practical exercise of generosity.

A month later, envelope recipients told Haidle what they had done with the money, and Haidle shared with his Henderson, Neb., congregation the impact in the community, across the country and around the world.

"The stories have been really cool," Haidle says. "It tapped into the idea of, 'You're being entrusted with something that's not yours. Now, multiply it or 'kingdom spend' it.'"

Stewards, not owners

Haidle says the series emphasized the shift that happens when a person realizes that finances belong to God, and people are stewards, not owners.

"Generosity is: 'Lord, where do you want your resources allocated?'" Haidle says.

Haidle's wife, Joanne, had the idea for the generosity exercise, and Haidle split \$1,000 from an anonymous donor 10 ways and distributed the envelopes in early September. Like the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, individuals were entrusted with money and asked to do something with it, in this case, either "kingdom spending" or multiplying it.

"Kingdom spending" meant giving the money to someone in need outside of the church. Multiplying the money meant either investing it in a project that would make more money to "kingdom spend," or doubling it out of one's own pocket and passing it on to someone else to distribute.

A chain reaction

During the Oct. 27 Sunday morning service, the congregation celebrated the impact of the exercise, with Haidle sharing a handout listing what the anonymous recipients did with the \$100.

Several people chose to help with basic expenses, like one retired man who gave \$50 each to two young families with children he and his wife encountered at a used clothing store and Wal-Mart. The retiree says he enjoys striking up conversations with people, so it was natural to initiate a greeting.

"I was so happy that I could share (the money)," he says. "I'll be doing more of that on my own. I've never done it before, but I thought that was a really good idea.



Six youth from Living Hope Church in Henderson, Neb., used their \$100 to purchase supplies to make root beer floats, then sold the floats at a club football game and sent the proceeds to North Carolina for hurricane relief. Pictured (from left): Beckett Siebert, Ryker Stebbing and Micah Haidle. Not pictured: Ashlyn Friesen, Sydney Rempel and Kate Haidle. Photo: Luke Haidle.

You meet people. They're so appreciative."

A farming family with three children split the money three ways. First, they purchased diapers and wipes for a pregnancy center. Then their teenage daughter suggested buying a meal for the next car at a drive-thru. They gave the rest to a missionary. The mother says the exercise provided a good way to model compassion for her children.

"I don't think the church needs to supply \$1,000 every time we do this, but it's very cool to see how people give," she says. "When you give, you're just happy, and you know that you helped make somebody's day better."

“ **When you give, you’re just happy, and you know that you helped make somebody’s day better.** ”

Some doubled the money and gave it toward an elementary school’s Family Night or added money to students’ lunch accounts so they could get second helpings of food like their peers. Others gave generous tips for restaurant wait staff or purchased a walker for an aging parent.

Often one generous act produced a chain reaction.

For example, one person bought New Testaments to distribute and ingredients to make baked goods to sell. The sale made \$200, which they passed to another church family, who gave the money to two local families experiencing financial stress.

In another case, an adult in her 80’s sent the \$100 to her grandson involved in campus ministry, along with Bibles to distribute. Her grandson used the money to purchase toys to give to a child with a brain tumor, she says, adding that she sent another \$100 of her own money to a friend, who doubled it and gave some to a friend’s daughter to renew her nursing license, some to parents to help with groceries and some to a waiter.

“I don’t think a thousand dollars ever generated more curiosity, excitement and love than that thousand dollars,” the woman says.

Others broadened the scope, such as the person who sent money to a single mother in Kenya, and the group of six children, including two of Haidle’s, who purchased supplies to sell root beer floats at a club football game. They sent the \$400 they earned to The Life Center, an MB church in Lenoir, N.C., for hurricane relief.

“What this taught me about being generous is that sometimes it takes stepping

out of your comfort zone,” says Micah Haidle. “We had to set it up with one of my football coaches, (and) I don’t know if he really goes to church that much. Since this was a church event, I didn’t know if that was going to make things awkward.”

His sister, Kate, adds: “My favorite part was getting to spend time with my friends while doing something meaningful.”

Luke Haidle admits he was a little nervous initially, not knowing how the experiment would turn out.

“I knew it had great potential,” he says. “It worked really great as a wrap-up to the series.”—*Janae Rempel Shafer*



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Making an impact at college

Two USMB college students receive Multiply's Impact Award

Two young adults from USMB churches have received Impact Awards from Multiply, the North American MB global mission agency. Recipients Natalie Hamilton, Bethel MB Church in Yale, S.D., and Sarah Hanson, Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., have been sent to their college campuses as missionaries.

The Impact Award program began in Canada in 2021, thanks to a generous donor who desired to see churches send their young people into ministry settings at college. The initiative provides \$2,000 in funding to churches, intended as a stipend for students for campus ministry activity during their first year at college. This support encourages students to engage in discipleship and evangelism, fostering spiritual growth within academic communities.

Hamilton and Hanson exemplify the program's mission.

Hamilton is a freshman at the University of Sioux Falls, where she is actively involved in campus ministry with InterVarsity by attending weekly Bible studies and worship nights led by students on campus.

Reflecting on her experience so far, Hamilton says, "I have appreciated the fact that although USF is a Christian university, not everyone is a Christian, which gives me an opportunity to show Jesus' love to people who have never known it before while also having a Christian community backing me up. God has blessed me with a good group of friends at the university, and I am so thankful for that."

Meanwhile, Hanson is attending Hesston (Kan.) College and has used the award to attend a missionary home church that is heavily involved with the community and service projects.

She says about a Bible class she's taking: "It has been great because now I know the Bible so much more than before and am even more confident in my ability to share the

gospel and what the Bible means."

Youth leaders who have mentored these students also recognize the program's value.

"This award not only helps students with some financial assistance, but more importantly by helping them get connected with campus ministries and have clear steps to serve and learn ministry skills," says Sebastian Mireles, youth pastor at Bethesda Church in Huron, S.D., where Hamilton attended Sunday evening activities. "The local church also benefits by having a clear way to not just have a student leave for college, but rather to send that student to the mission field of that college. This helps the church with knowing how to support and lift that student up in prayer."

From a mission mobilization perspective, Multiply East of the Rockies leader Stephen Humber emphasizes the program's broader impact: "The Impact Award not only supports individual students but also strengthens the relationship between local churches and the student they have sent to the campus. It's a vital investment in the next generation of Christian leaders."

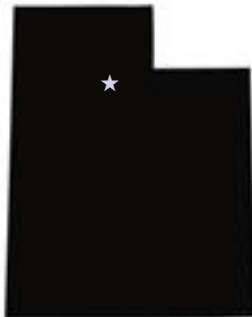
By investing in young adults through the Impact Award, Multiply and USMB seek to inspire, equip and encourage the body of Christ to multiply healthy disciples and

churches, fostering spiritual growth and community engagement across multiple campuses.

Churches and youth leaders interested in sending a student missionary to a university campus may apply for the Fall 2025 semester before the June 30 deadline. Early applications are encouraged to ensure timely processing and support for prospective student missionaries. Detailed information about the application process and eligibility criteria can be found at multiply.net/impact-award.—*Stephen Humber*



Sarah Hanson (second from right) is pictured with friends she's made at Hesston (Kan.) College. *Photo: Sarah Hanson.*



South Mountain Community Church

One church, five locations: Draper, Lehi, West Jordan, South Jordan and St. George, Utah

Established: 1998

Attendance: 4,000

Lead Pastor: Eric Nelson

Our congregation in three words:

Devoted, Delighted, Engaged

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How can you pray for us?

Pray that we would experience the gospel together as we take our next steps toward our 2030 vision (smccutah.org/2030-vision)



Top Photo: SMCC is reaching the next generation of disenfranchised LDS people in Utah. People are experiencing meaningful life-change, with over 1,500 baptisms since its beginning 27 years ago.

Middle: SMCC hosted their Trunk or Treat party Oct. 28 on the Draper campus. In addition to candy, there were games, crafts and food.

Bottom: SMCC exists to "help as many people as possible take their next step towards becoming fully devoted and fully delighted followers of Jesus Christ." One of their goals is to equip 1,500 people by 2030 through SMCC's discipleship pathway.

Church Life

Compiled by Janae Rempel Shafer

MILESTONES

Baptism/Memberships

Two people were baptized at **Mountain View Church, Sunnyside Campus, Fresno, Calif.**

Hope Anderson was baptized at **Renewal MB Church, Rapid City, S.D.**, Nov. 24. Nathan Austin and Kendra Austin were baptized Nov. 17.

Sawyer Nelson, Anna Arhart, Heather Schultz, Diane Totton and Oliver Stansfield were baptized and received as members Nov. 17 at **Bethesda Church, Huron, S.D.** Dan Strutz, Susanna Strutz, Carter Drain, Liz Drain, Maxim Glanzer and Kolby Glanzer were also received as members. Kolby Glanzer was baptized Oct. 27.

Kael Janzen and Ty Turner were baptized Nov. 17 at **Hesston (Kan.) MB Church.**

Tyana Patterson was baptized Nov. 10 at **Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**

Louis Chase, Fenpeng Chen, Dorothy Marshall, Leslie Martinez, Donglin Yang and Skylar Zimprich were baptized Nov. 10 at **South Mountain Community Church, St. George (Utah) Campus.** Wyatt Woodard, Ryan Baker, Jason Shay, Ashlyn Trost, Jaden Borceguin and Amelie Sletten were baptized at **Draper (Utah) Campus**, Oct. 13. Lucy Overholt and Eden Overholt were also baptized. Jeremy Hogue, Benjamin Wride, Chris LaCourse, Penny Brandenstein, Shyloh Smith, Mariah Evans, Ferdinand Perez and Suzie Perez were baptized Sept. 29 at **South Jordan (Utah) Campus.** Kira Naylor and Rowan Gray were baptized at **Lehi (Utah) Campus**, Aug. 11. Sara Willis, Jack Nelson, Chloe Courtney, Haley Cooper, Nathan Cooper and Hannah Cooper were baptized June 30.

Philip Jansz and Elliott McCann were received as members at **Faith Bible Church, Omaha, Neb.**, Nov. 10.

Craig Bartel, Chaera Bartel, Kasey Kelley, Tree Kelley, Dawson Bowers, Tammy Bowers and Tara Neufeld were received Dec. 1 as members at **Fairview (Okla.) MB Church.** Brooke Carter, TJ Carter, Chris Caywood and Andy Dahlem were baptized and received as members March 31, 2024. Ryan Bowers, Joy Bowers, Janet Carter, Byron Neufeld, Lucy Neufeld, Ron Wilcox and Ruby Wilcox were also received as members.

Hunter Regier and Berni Reimer were baptized and received as members Nov. 10 at **Reedley (Calif.) MB Church.** Lainey Heinrichs, Allison Tos, Karissa Tos, Hudson Pfeifer, Ellie Fast and Gavin Fast were also baptized. Tom Espino, Pam Espino, Les Felland, Lorry Felland, Jose Ramos, Yulma Espinoza and Pablo Castillo were also received as members.

Seven people were baptized Nov. 3 at **House of the Gospel, Fresno, Calif.**

Lucy Chipman, Meghan Harms, Owen Harms, Evan Hatfield, Case Keasler, Jenna Leven, Everett Lindamood, Coen Lindamood, Scout Miller, Reed Perkins, Lance Schrock, Rick Adams, Carter Richardson and Silas Richardson were baptized at **Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla.**, Nov. 3.

Aaron Barnes and Deedee Barnes were received as members Oct. 27 at **Corn (Okla.) MB Church.**

Cayla Record was baptized at **Ridgepoint Church, Wichita, Kan.**, Sept. 29.

Stephen Cossey, Kelli Cossey, Theron Carlson and Ashleigh Carlson were received as members June 2 at **Cross Timbers Church, Edmond, Okla.**

Workers

Brad Isaak concluded his service as associate pastor for youth and family ministries at **North Fresno (Calif.) Church**, Dec. 29. Pierra Ford began serving with childcare.

Jim Aiken retired Dec. 31 after serving 44 years as an MB pastor, most

recently at **Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif.** Annett Aiken retired from her service as administrative assistant. Chris Eide began serving as lead pastor, Jan. 1.

Wyatt Dickinson is serving as music minister at **Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan.**

Lexi Milne began serving as children's ministry director at **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**

James and Mhinie Mather are serving as pastoral couple at **Valleyview Bible Church, Cimarron, Kan.**, Oct. 27.

Josh Gelatt, pastor of **North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan.**, earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Studies from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in December 2024. His dissertation was "Isaiah's Justice in Matthew's Messiah: An Intertextual Reading."

Connie Nicholson began serving as pastor of the Faith Community congregation at **Butler Church, Fresno, Calif.**, Oct. 14.

Deaths

Bartel, Willard Glen, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, April 14, 1929—Jan. 31, 2024. Parents: Pete and Bienna (Kliwer) Bartel. Spouse: Doris June Cornelsen. Children: Patty Harvey, Larry, Randy; six grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, six great-great-grandchildren.

Franz, Timothy Wayne, Corn, Okla., member of Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., Oct. 25, 1949—Oct. 5, 2024. Parents: Archie and Genevieve Franz. Spouse: Suzanne Leisher. Children: Michael, Todd, Amy Hoffman; eight grandchildren.

Froese, Susan Delaine, Newton, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, March 14, 1952—Oct. 25, 2024. Parents: Henry and Anna Loewen. Spouse: David Froese. Children: Seth, Joshua, Andrew, Luke; 12 grandchildren.

Janzen, Lillian Lorene, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, March 6, 1933—Feb. 18, 2024. Parents: Frank and Anna Wichert. Spouse: Eugene Janzen (deceased). Children: Lynette Lucas, Susan Morris, Steven, Ann Yarrow, Lois Enomoto; 11 grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren.

Jones, Barbara, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, May 31, 1942—Sept. 25, 2024. Parents: Oscar and Anna Fay (Quiring) Collins. Children: Steven, Jenell Barnes; two grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

Jones, Cindy, Bakersfield, Calif., member of Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Nov. 2, 1951—Aug. 29, 2024. Spouse: Roger Jones.

LaRue, Florence, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Feb. 17, 1936—Oct. 2, 2024. Parents: Paul and Louise (Gassman) Myers. Spouse: Micheal LaRue. Children: Kurt, Kelley Coughlin; five grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Loewen, Albert F., Hesston, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., Nov. 2, 1925—Nov. 19, 2024. Parents: Abraham S. and Elizabeth (Fast) Loewen. Spouse: Martha Thiessen (deceased). Children: Lois Snyder, James, Duane; 13 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

Loewen, Martha Jane, Hesston, Kan., member of Koerner Heights Church, Newton, Kan., March 11, 1929—Nov. 1, 2024. Parents: John E. and Anna (Siebert) Thiessen. Spouse: Albert Loewen. Children: Lois Snyder, James, Duane; 13 grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren.

Peters, Becky, San Francisco, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, Dec. 9, 1988—Oct. 7, 2024. Parents: David and Jennifer (Derfelt) Wiens. Spouse: Brian Peters.

Seibel, Ervin Jr., Harvey, N.D., member of Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, March 14, 1931—Aug. 24, 2024. Parents: Ervin and Ruby (Bich) Seibel.

Spouse: Marilyn Heitmann. Children: Rick, Laurie, Steve; six grandchildren, eight great-grandchildren, one great-great-grandchild.

Shewey, Marcia Anne, Fairview, Okla., member of Fairview MB Church, Aug. 31, 1940—Oct. 21, 2024. Parents: Herb and Inez (Martens) Kliever. Spouse: John Richard 'Dick' Shewey (deceased). Children: Andy, Stan, Dale; six grandchildren, six great-grandchildren.

Siebert, Doris, Reedley, Calif., member of New Life Community, Dinuba, Calif., Nov. 23, 1935—Nov. 15, 2024. Parents: Ernest and Louise Suderman. Spouse: Abraham H. Isaak (deceased), Lee Siebert (deceased). Children: Michael, Mary LaBotz, Martha Sawatzky, Abe Jr.; six grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Thiesen, Lorene, Reedley, Calif., member of Reedley MB Church, July 27, 1922—Sept. 23, 2024. Parents: Jacob and Minnie Cornelsen. Spouse: Erven Thiesen (deceased). Children: Robert, Gerald (deceased), Elaine Mings; eight grandchildren, 12 great-grandchildren.

Wiebe, Esther Eunice, Hillsboro, Kan., member of Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, July 5, 1928—Oct. 24, 2024. Parents: John and Viola (Bergthold) Wiebe. Children: Shiela, Kavitha, Melanie.

Wiens, Harry A., Mountain Lake, Minn., member of Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Dec. 24, 1928—Oct. 14, 2024. Parents: Claus and Anna Wiens.

Wollman, Karen Jean, Mound, Minn., attender of Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., May 20, 1937—Oct. 31, 2024. Parents: John M. and Mary (Hofer) Tschetter. Spouse: Simon Aaron Wollman (deceased). Children: Craig, Nancy Heilman, Nathan; four grandchildren, two great-grandchildren.

REACHING IN

Discipleship

North Fresno (Calif.) Church

hosted a lecture by worship pastor David Tatum Dec. 1.

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., hosted Bible boot camp Nov. 2.

Bible Fellowship Church, Minot, N.D., hosted a "Strengthening the Church" conference, Nov. 2.

Fellowship

North Fresno (Calif.) Church families visited the West Coast MCC Reedley office Nov. 26. Men held a barbecue Oct. 19.

Greenhouse Community Church, Saratoga Springs, Utah, had a Friendsgiving event.

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., 8-Tracks had a Friendsgiving potluck Nov. 24.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church women shared testimonies Nov. 23 and Oct. 26, played bunco Nov. 14 and tied quilts Oct. 17.

Copper Hills Church, Peoria, Ariz., held a car show Nov. 16. Fathers and sons had a "camp in" Oct. 11.

Bethany Church, Fresno, Calif., women had a waffle brunch Oct. 26.

North Oak Community Church, Hays, Kan., women had a fall refresh conference Oct. 26.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., hosted a volleyball tournament Oct. 16. Women had dessert Oct. 11.

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., participated in a turkey trot Nov. 28. Women held a fall event Nov. 15. Singles had tea Oct. 22. Dads and kids watched a movie Oct. 11.

Good News Fellowship, Ferndale, Wash., held a family game night Nov. 22. Women had a potluck and games Nov. 9.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church widows had dinner Nov. 18. Mothers had a home business boutique Nov. 14.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., women had a taco salad supper Nov. 11 and pizza and bunco Oct. 13.

Salem MB Church, Freeman, S.D., women held a white elephant gift exchange Nov. 10.

Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., had a trivia night Nov. 3.

Buhler (Kan.) MB Church men held an outdoor event with games and food Nov. 2.

Herold Mennonite Church, Bessie, Okla., women gathered for fellowship Oct. 27.

Neighborhood Church, Visalia, Calif., threw a costume party Oct. 27.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church men had breakfast Oct. 26. Mothers had a craft day Oct. 24.

Kingwood Bible Church, Salem, Ore., men had breakfast Oct. 26. Women had a game night Oct. 25.

Butler Church, Fresno, Calif., men had breakfast Oct. 20.

Hope Kingsburg (Calif.) held a free line dancing event Oct. 19.

Hillsboro (Kan.) MB Church men hosted a Meet, Eat and Skeet event Oct. 13.

Stony Brook Church, Omaha, Neb., women heard a guest speaker Oct. 12.

Living Hope Church, Henderson, Neb., women watched Nebraska volleyball Oct. 12.

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., held a country gospel night Nov. 10. Deacons hosted a park picnic Oct. 6.

Corn (Okla.) MB Church women shared a meal Oct. 3.

Worship

Omaha MB church youth gathered at Iglesia Agua Viva for bilingual worship, Nov. 1.

Celebrations

The Life Center, Lenoir, N.C., celebrated its 92nd birthday Oct. 13.

REACHING OUT

Locally

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., collected 170 boxes of stuffing and more for an outreach project.

Mountain View Church, Fresno, Calif., held a free children's sports camp Nov. 26.

Reedley (Calif.) MB Church hosted a respite event Nov. 23 to serve families affected by disability.

Community Bible Church, Olathe, Kan., provided cookies for voters Nov. 5.

Community Bible Church, Mountain Lake, Minn., invited visitors to "Small Church Sunday" Oct. 27.

Axiom Church, Peoria, Ariz., women held a community baby shower, Oct. 26.

Shafter (Calif.) MB Church gave \$1,856.86 for the Bakersfield Pregnancy Center.

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

Greenhouse Community Church, Saratoga Springs, Utah, announced a campaign to purchase land for a multi-use facility.

Pine Acres Church, Weatherford, Okla., served hot chocolate at a Chamber event Oct. 26.

Heritage Bible Church, Bakersfield, Calif., women made blankets and distributed them to nursing home.

Globally

Churches packed Operation Christmas Child boxes: **Bethel MB Church, Yale, S.D.**, 61; **North Oak Community Church, Hays,**

Kan., 777; **Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan.**, 435.

Parkview MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., volunteers helped process 13,000 cans of chicken with MCC.

Zoar MB Church, Inman, Kan., sent 37 people to help at the Operation Christmas Child processing center in Dallas Nov. 29-Dec. 1.

Neighborhood Church, Fresno, Calif., provided breakfast for elementary school staff Oct. 14.

Churches assembled MCC school kits: **Cornerstone Community Church, Harvey, N.D.**, (144),

North Fresno (Calif.) Church youth (35), Shafter (Calif.) MB Church (150).

Classifieds

LOCAL CHURCH

Senior Pastor: Grace Bible Church in Gettysburg, S.D. is seeking a senior, expository pastor. Regular responsibilities include overseeing worship service, delivering sermons, visiting church members, providing counseling, performing weddings and funerals, working with deacons and committees, attending business meetings, representing church on community, district, and national levels; and serving as chief administrator to paid staff. Applicant must meet biblical standards in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, agree with our Statement of Faith, and work with all age groups. A Bible degree is required; Master of Divinity degree and pastoral experience preferred. More information can be found at www.gracebiblesd.com

Lead Pastor: Ebenfeld MB Church, Hillsboro, Kan., is seeking a full-time teaching pastor who will be responsible for providing sound biblical teaching, leading and equipping the congregation in its mission to "Gather, Grow, Go," with a relational and engaging spirit through personal connections with the congregation. His role and responsibilities also include pastoral care of members and attendees and active involvement in the local community. Ebenfeld is committed to an Anabaptist-evangelical theology as articulated in the MB Confession of Faith. <https://usmb.org/confession-of-faith-4/> For more information or to submit resume, email to ebenfeldsearch@gmail.com

Associate Pastor: Hope Kingsburg, a family-oriented church located in Kingsburg, Calif., between Fresno and Visalia, is seeking a full-time associate pastor of worship and discipleship. In addition to overseeing worship for our Sunday morning worship gatherings, this role will support the lead pastor in strategic development and implementation for next gen and adult discipleship ministries of Hope Kingsburg. For a job description, more information or to apply, email pastorsearch@hopekingsburg.org

Youth Pastor: North Fresno Church, Fresno, Calif., is seeking a youth pastor to oversee the spiritual development and discipleship of youth, including youth group gatherings, midweek programs and outreach to the broader community. A bachelor's degree in ministry, education, social sciences or a related field is preferred. For a detailed job description, please visit our website <https://www.northfresnochurch.org> If you want to

join our team, please send your resume to Church-Staffing.com. For further inquiries, email ypsearch@northfresnochurch.org.

Worship Director: Ridgepoint Church in Wichita, Kan., is seeking a full-time worship director to oversee its worship ministry, primarily providing leadership to our contemporary services. Ridgepoint is a mid-size church (1,000 in attendance) with three Sunday morning services. Experience as a worship leader is a requirement. Visit ridgepointwchita.com/employment for more information or to apply.

AGENCY

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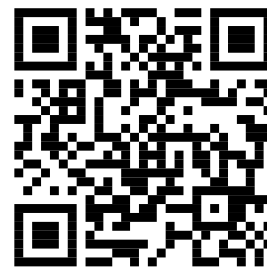
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