

The Messenger

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Carl Heppner addresses
common barriers
to reaching our
communities (see p. 4)

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The Messenger is the publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 440 Main Street, Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5. Its purpose is to inform concerning events and activities in the denomination, to instruct in godliness and victorious living, and to inspire to earnestly contend for the faith.

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Editor's Note

The rhythm of rest

IT'S THE TIME of year when churches shift into summer mode. In Manitoba, that means getting outdoors whenever possible: lounging in the sun's warmth, visiting a provincial park, swatting mosquitoes, cooking a meal on the barbecue, and taking in as much green as possible before the snow returns.

This also means that churches experience a decrease in attendance. Fewer people warm the seats of the sanctuary. Volunteers are scarce. Pastoral staff use the bulk of their holidays. It's as if summer is low tide for the church—the water recedes, not because the ocean is gone, but because that is the rhythm. Low tide reveals what is often hidden—rest, family, prayer, and quieter faithfulness.

The slower pace of summer can feel ordinary, even obvious. But perhaps it is also an invitation. Maybe embracing the rhythms of the seasons is a way to recalibrate our lives to experience rest. After a ministry year, summer becomes a purposeful exhale—a season reminding us that God sustains the church as we slow down.

A mentor of mine would often say, “Sometimes you need to slow down in order to speed up.” At the time, unfortunately, I didn't understand his logic. Back then, I had always presumed life's goal was to do more with better results at an increasing rate. What I failed to understand was that avoiding rest comes with consequences. Seasons of work need to be followed by moments of rest.

I am reminded of a quote that we read at the May EMC Encourage retreat from Brenda Jank: “Rest is not a reward. You can't earn it. You don't deserve it. It will never be convenient. Rest is a rhythm ordained by God and a responsibility for those committed to God's best” (*Run Hard Rest Well*). I like the forthright manner of this quote. Rest is not our invention; it's God's design.

On the seventh day, God rested—not because he needed a break, but to reveal a pattern woven into the fabric of creation.

Jesus reminds his disciples in Mark's Gospel, “The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren't made to serve the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27 MSG). Rest is not an interruption to faithful living; it is part of our God-given design. On the seventh day, God rested—not because he needed a break, but to reveal a pattern woven into the fabric of creation. As I age, I come to understand God's wisdom of rest in new ways.

It is our prayer that as you read this issue, you will make new discoveries about the art of slowing down. Carl Heppner, the EMC director of Canadian outreach, reminds us of the value of pausing, listening and clarifying where God may be leading. Reflecting on the EMC Encourage retreat, Mo Friesen speaks about the significance of pausing to receive prayer and the power of transparency with God. Sheila Ginter, professor of counselling at Steinbach Bible College, reflects on joy amid trials, offering another way of understanding rest in impossible situations.

I hope you receive these reflections as an invitation. May you notice the gift of a slower pace, the presence of God in less hurried days, and the quiet faithfulness that continues even when the church calendar thins.

— Scott Marble

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IF THEY WANTED TO, THEY WOULD: REFLECTIONS ON REACHING OUT INTO OUR COMMUNITIES

By Carl Heppner





ISTOCK

AS WE CONSIDER the current context of ministry in Canada, there are many reasons to be encouraged. In a recent survey called the *Reigniting Hope Report* (2024), ministry leaders across Canada report increased openness to talking about spiritual life from their community members. Openness to the gospel itself is higher than ever, and willingness to accept an invitation to church is way up. At the same time, we are seeing the next generation of young adults (Gen Z—born 1997–2012) engaging deeply in matters of faith and spirituality and showing strong commitment to faith communities where they have become involved.

Looking around our communities, we see people from all over the world coming to our doors. Where we once needed to send missionaries to far-off places to proclaim the good news, these same people from different cultures and faith traditions are now our neighbours and open to meaningful connection and relationship.

All of this means that there are tremendous opportunities for us to engage in sharing the good news of Jesus with our communities!

Adding to this encouraging picture, we have clear evidence that churches and believers who are actively engaged in outreach are healthier and more vibrant in their ministries. Not only are they more likely to be growing in numbers, they are—more importantly—growing in the maturity of their members. On the flip side, we also know from studying the lifecycle of churches that there is a corresponding decline in health as ministries become more inwardly focused. (See Thom S. Rainer, “Five Warning Signs of Declining Church Health,” *The Christian Post*, September 30, 2009.)

In short, as churches and as individuals, we know that we should be involved in outreach and evangelism. All the relevant data tells us that it’s good for our spiritual health and vitality. And in a spiritual sense we know that the Holy Spirit goes ahead of us to open doors and change hearts. So why then, do so many of our churches and leaders say they are struggling to actually commit to outreach in our communities?

A LACK OF VISION AND LEADERSHIP

At a recent ministerial meeting, I held a straw poll regarding perceived barriers to church planting in our churches. I was curious as to why we have not seen any new EMC ministry startups in the last few years. As I considered the responses, it became clear that neither a lack of financial capacity nor a lack of ministry resources and support were the biggest barriers. Rather, the top two answers were a lack of vision for reaching the community and a lack of leaders who were willing to go out.

As part of my ministry development work with our EMC churches, I subscribe to all kinds of blogs, podcasts, online newsletters, and resource networks and continually come across articles like: “10 Reasons Your Church Isn’t Growing,” “Five Steps to Improving Your Community Impact,” “Three Ways to Inspire Your Team.” The simple truth is that all the resources we could possibly want or imagine to help us have thriving, healthy ministries are available with a quick internet search. And yet, we often don’t take even that simple step. And so, we continue to struggle with outreach. Why is that?

One of the first answers that comes to mind is the simple phrase, “If they wanted to, they would.” Some of you may recognize this as social media’s version of pop psychology for those seeking help with their struggling relationships. It’s the ubiquitous answer to every question: “Why doesn’t my partner tell me how they really feel?” “Why have they stopped being romantic like they used to?” or the ever-popular “Why hasn’t he proposed yet?”

The harsh reality of the response “If they wanted to, they would” is that it’s a simplistic answer to what is often in reality a fairly complicated question. However, I wonder if

it might give us a starting point to consider the question of why we might struggle with outward-facing ministries and church-planting efforts. Perhaps this phrase can help us bring this issue into focus—both in how it might ring true and in how it fails to address the deeper realities.

WHAT’S TRUE ABOUT “IF THEY WANTED TO, THEY WOULD”?

There are at least two ways in which “If they wanted to, they would” contains some truth.

The first point is simply that our actions do, in fact, speak louder than all our fine words or best intentions. Might we pause for a moment to let that reality sink in? Is it possible that we are comfortable with things as they are and are reluctant to introduce change that may disrupt? Or might there be a ring of truth in suggesting there is a lack of vision for reaching the lost, no burden for sharing the good news with our neighbours? And if so, can we be bold enough to call it out and insist on assessing the true picture of our church’s ministries?

Secondly, this phrase reminds us that our priorities reflect the choices we are making. In short, we are responsible for the choices that led us to this situation. As we think about the ministries of our church and community, do we have a sense of clarity around our vision? Do we know to what extent our ministries and investment of resources serve that vision? If not, what is it that we do value or show that we value through our choices? What is the balance between ministering to insiders and reaching out to our wider community?

I truly believe, however, that our churches and congregations want to fulfill the Great Commission to reach our neighbours with the good news of Jesus. Rather than simply being a matter of having other



What is the balance between ministering to insiders and reaching out to our wider community?

priorities, perhaps there are elements that are keeping us from fulfilling that desire. I see that there are also at least three ways in which “If they wanted to, they would” fails because nothing is ever quite as simple as it seems on the surface.

HOW “IF THEY WANTED TO, THEY WOULD” FAILS

One reason we struggle in spite of our desire for outreach is a lack of capacity. Sometimes there are very real barriers as to why we are unable to effectively carry out the vision that we have discerned as a church. For example, a common issue affecting capacity may include our dated leadership and ministry structures. Perhaps our ministries and committees were designed for another time, another context decades past.

A second barrier to effective ministry engagement is unaddressed relational issues just beneath the surface

of congregational life. Where there are unresolved conflicts and dysfunction, it is nearly impossible for anything healthy to grow, either relationally or in terms of a unifying vision for ministry. As communities called to reconciliation, we absolutely must identify and address these relational fractures if we expect our testimony to have integrity. Another form of unhealthy relationship can be our relationship with the past. Whether due to past struggles or, more often, golden days of long ago, when our current ministries are not grounded firmly in the realities of our current context, we will struggle to see success.

Third, our good intentions for ministry and outreach can simply be undermined by a lack of understanding. In terms of a marriage relationship, when we have not articulated our needs or expectations, we should not be surprised when our spouse does not meet them. In the same way, when we have not repeatedly communicated the

What will it take for us to become the welcoming, relevant, thoughtful, contextual, impactful, and faithful churches that we desire to be?

vision and ministry goals of the church, we should not be surprised when we see a lack of engagement and poor results. More specifically, when there is no clear strategic plan, and our congregations have not been equipped to understand their gifts, there will be a corresponding lack of understanding as to where and how each person can contribute to the greater vision.

“If they wanted to, they would,” while helpful in reminding us that actions speak louder than words, is simply inadequate to describe the challenges we face in reaching out to our communities. At the same time, it does raise some uncomfortable questions that are essential for us to address. I truly believe we want to have healthy growing churches with vibrant ministries that are reaching our neighbours. Would you agree? In that case, what will it take for us to become the welcoming, relevant, thoughtful, contextual, impactful, and faithful churches that we desire to be? What will it take for us to have effective ministries meeting the needs of our communities, filled with people longing for an authentic encounter with God, connection and belonging, and a place to contribute meaningfully with their own gifts?

I think the beginning of an answer is remarkably simple. It requires the very

same things we see as essential in every real relationship. It takes intentionally setting our priorities. It takes investing quality time. It will require sustained and focused effort. The question that lingers is, “Do we want to, and will we?”

THINKING ABOUT NEXT STEPS

- How can I help my church to be healthier?
- Which ideas in this article resonate with the context of my church?
- What is the conversation that the leadership of our church needs to have?
- How can we invite our Conference to help us?

Carl Heppner is EMC’s director of Canadian outreach. He is married to Kathy and they have four children. Check out the adjacent page for ways Carl can assist your church in engaging your community.



EMC RESOURCES FOR CHURCHES TO DIRECT OUTREACH EFFORTS

#1 Leading with Vision

Leading with Vision is designed to empower and encourage church leaders at all levels to pursue God's call to serve with greater courage and confidence. This equipping workshop is typically delivered over a weekend of interactive training sessions using a simple framework that clearly outlines the principles and best practices of effective leadership.

Through Leading with Vision, your leaders will gain practical insights about:

- how their God-given DiSC style shapes their approach to leadership
- personal strengths and challenges within key areas of leadership practice
- the current dynamics, challenges and opportunities within your ministry teams
- the process of leading ministries through effective change and renewal
- identifying tangible action steps to move from vision to desired outcomes

Before the workshop, all participants complete an online Everything DiSC assessment. Then during the training sessions each member of your team will receive their own personalized Everything DiSC Profile results and a resource package of materials for our training time together.

Through these profiles we explore how each person's God-given gifts and personality contribute to the larger picture of leadership strengths and challenges in your church. We then turn to learning practical and effective skills in three essential aspects of effective leadership, which are Crafting Vision, Building Alignment, and Championing Execution.

These Leading with Vision sessions are highly interactive, allowing individuals to learn from each other while also identifying actual concerns and growth needs within your team. Investing this time in equipping leaders at all levels is a great step in moving churches toward healthy dialogue, ministry discernment, and effective action in carrying out God's kingdom vision.



Carl Heppner directs a Leading with Vision workshop at Taber Evangelical Church earlier in 2026.

#2 Church Health Assessment

How would you describe the health of your church in each of the following six areas of ministry?

1. Spiritual Life and Discipleship
2. Worship and Experience of God
3. Belonging and Relationships
4. Engagement and Service
5. Mission and Outreach
6. Leadership and Vision

How would you rate them from strongest to weakest?

What should be the next step for your church?

Which of these is an area of growth for you personally?

(A Church Health Assessment survey is available from the EMC office upon request at info@emconference.ca)

Joy in the struggle

Is joy in trial
possible?

By Sheila Ginter





IT WAS SUPPOSED to be the best day of the young mother's life, yet the hot tears that were sliding down her cheeks suggested anything but that. As she held her limp child in her arms and kissed her lifeless cheek one last time, she felt utter despair.

It is beyond the scope of humanity's emotional capacity to expect the mother in that situation to possess a hint of happiness. Yet, it is entirely expected to label this event a trial. Encouraging her to "consider it joy ..." (James 1:2) seems contemptible in this mother's presence. Other than being downright cruel and inappropriate, it doesn't seem plausible. How can an empathic believer look at the countenance of this young woman who is grieving the loss of her precious and most beloved child and expect her to consider joy in this suffering?

Perhaps we need to dive into the context and application before spouting trite phrases at our fellow believers in any given trial.

Understanding joy?

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, joy is defined by such words as bliss, great pleasure, happiness, or delight. Without a doubt, joy can contain elements of these emotions because we have experienced them in certain situations in varying degrees. None of these words are contrary to how the Bible would define joy; however, this seems too simplistic and temporary compared to the biblical view of joy.

A glance at two often-quoted Scripture passages where joy is mentioned alongside trials should help us wrestle with a scriptural definition. James 1:2-3 (NLT here and following), "Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow." Or Romans 5:3, "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance." According to this translation, the trials will bring about endurance and that is all that matters, right? If we stop here, there is not much by way of hope or encouragement except to say that at the very least we will be

able to endure hardship. Give the young mother a couple of weeks to grieve and then build her up with a healthy dose of, “at least you will be able to endure this hardship as long as you do not give up your faith.” There. Dust off hands and carry on.

But—pain persists. Addictions and mental illness persist. Aging persists. Grief persists.

Humanity experiences endless challenge in this life yet Scripture tells us to rejoice always. How can this simplistic directive be possible if we are in constant trial?



LIGHTSTOCK

Humanity experiences endless challenge in this life yet Scripture tells us to rejoice always (Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16). How can this simplistic directive be possible if we are in constant trial? Our definition and interpretation will need to be convincing compared to Merriam-Webster's if we have any hope of encouraging our young, Christian mother.

Biblical joy

It would be derelict of us to simply look at the biblical definition of joy in relation to trial while ignoring the multitude of other references to joy throughout Scripture. While it is impossible to parse out all the passages related to joy, let us look at a few examples.

First Samuel 4:5 describes rambunctious joy, “When all the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD coming into the camp, their shout of joy was so loud it made the ground shake!” Yet, when you read this verse in context, the Israelites were being defeated by the Philistines, and they assumed the presence of the ark of the covenant would bring them victory. It did not.

Ezra 6:16 says, “The Temple of God was then dedicated with great joy by the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the people who had returned from exile.” God’s chosen people were exiled for 70 years and came home to a completely rebuilt temple where they could once again worship, sacrifice, and experience the presence of God. However, just over two generations of the Jewish people were hampered in their capacity to worship in their own space.

Many of the psalms also refer to rejoicing or joy. For example, in Psalm 5:11, “But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them sing joyful praises forever. Spread your protection over them, that all who love your name may be filled with joy.” At first glance, this appears to be a solidly positive declaration of pure joy but, upon closer inspection, the joy is possible because protection and refuge are available to the faithful followers of God. Refuge from what?

New Testament writers continue the teaching on joy. Paul repeatedly says that he experiences joy when he thinks about or prays for all the people

who are following and worshipping God. What was Paul's life like? Although he did experience joy, it occurred while he also endured imprisonment, exile, and persecution in a variety of ways. Philippians is often referred to as the book of joy due to the frequency with which joy is mentioned and expected as an integral part of the believer's experience of faith. This epistle closely links the command to rejoice with life's trials that we must cope with daily.

Obviously, these barely scratch the surface of all the references we could highlight, but it gives us a glimpse of how joy is rarely an emotion or experience that humanity has without trial as part of the story. What we know so far is that joy can and should be cultivated alongside or in spite of struggle.

What are the possible outcomes?

The reality we live in is that trial, chaos, pain, and the like are always a part of the human experience, and we are still called to choose joy in its midst. The biblical definition of joy, therefore, cannot mean that it is merely an emotional response to good. "The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving" (Psalm 28:7). "Joyful are people of integrity, who follow the instructions of the Lord" (Psalm 119:1). "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!" (Habakkuk 3:17-18). From these few verses we can see that joy is a choice rather than just a feeling.

One could say that happiness is a temporary feeling or emotion that happens to you, and joy is a state of being or a cultivation of deep emotion over time; therefore, you are choosing a way of being.

Let us return to our original text in James where he encourages folks to consider joy as a viable response to trials. There are several

translations we can look at to gain insight into what it is we are choosing. The NIV says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (1:2). We have a part to play in whether we will have joy. Again, if we just stop there, we are missing out on what the joy is connected to. Does joy come automatically from having trials? Surely not! Only a vindictive god would expect such an erroneous response to trial.

Thankfully, both Paul and James keep writing. James 1:3-4, "Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Paul completes it in this way, "Because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5 NIV).

Faith produces perseverance which leads to maturity and completion by the end of the race. Life is a marathon from conception to final breath comprised of many trials and victories which are meant to build character and mature one's mind and heart to bear the fruits of the Spirit. Faith continues to grow as we mature and apply the lessons that are consistently taught through trial. Perseverance is a muscle that is being trained. Every trial is another workout that pushes us to the limit of our strength but as we recover between workouts, the muscle strengthens and adapts to its new way of being with the anticipation of another workout. Does this analogy hold up under trials that do not appear to have an end

**Does joy come
automatically
from having trials?
Surely not!**

date such as chronic pain? I would suggest that it does.

Psychology and brain science show that the human mind and body are remarkably capable of coping and adapting to pain and change. Dr. Dan Siegel, a leading thinker in psychology, suggests that mindful awareness is a key factor that promotes interconnection in brain functions, leading to psychological well-being and resilience. (See Dan J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2020.) Mindful awareness comes from exercising

the verses above, hope refers to eternal glory. In James's passage, he talks about completion and not lacking anything in perfection that is ours in heaven. We can have hope that all the trials we face, endure, encounter, fall into, will lead us to our eternal state of joy. As also described in Revelation 21:4 (ESV), "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Additionally, Paul states that our hope for our eternal salvation wipes the slate clean of shame because God sees fit to fill us with his presence and love. Hope exists because Jesus bore our shame on the cross and dealt with it once and for all. We are then gifted with the Holy Spirit to assist us daily in dealing with our sinful natures that desperately want to bring us back to a place of shame. Oftentimes, our trials *appear* to be results of our sinful choices or, at the very least, this is what Satan attempts to convince us of, but Paul tells us to take our thoughts captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) and live in the knowledge that we have hope.

What are we choosing?

When we consider it pure joy to face many kinds of trials, we are choosing to keep on keeping on. We are choosing to see the opportunities presented before us positively regardless of the evident negativity. We are choosing to focus on the outcome as motivation while living through the present circumstances.

The joy is not the trial; the joy is the outcome.

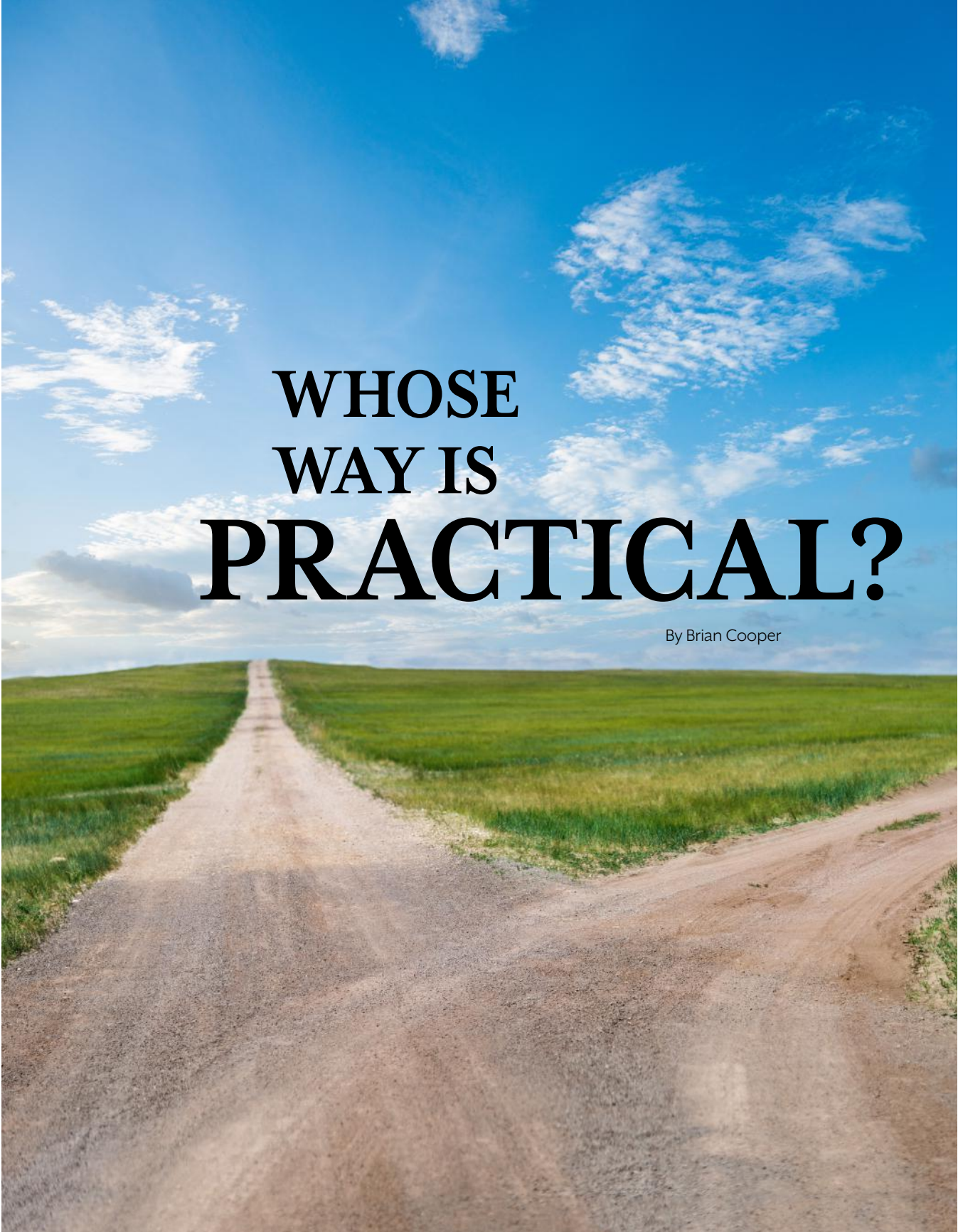
Sheila Ginter is the professor of counselling at Steinbach Bible College and has a private practice in therapy and is the Equine Assisted Psychotherapist at Cloud 9 Ranch. She has been married to Alfred for 30 years and together they attend Calvary Church in Steinbach.



What makes hope a true motivator is what we have hope in. Believers intuitively know that in the verses above, hope refers to eternal glory.

our minds, enabling us to balance our emotions, strengthen our attention, feel better in our bodies and open our minds to living in more creatively and fulfilling ways. This sounds a lot like a state of being in harmony with the daily tasks of caring for one's heart and mind. Our consistent mindfulness, especially regarding faith, affects our state of being as well as our ability to cope with the trials we face, whether they are temporary or chronic.

And we cannot ignore Paul's assertion that hope is an equally important outcome that fuels our potential joy. Time and again, we may say to one another, "Even just a glimmer of hope is enough to keep you going" or "As long as there is breath there is hope." There is truth in these phrases because hope is the last thing we lose. What makes hope a true motivator is what we have hope in. Believers intuitively know that in

A photograph of a dirt road stretching into the distance, flanked by green fields, under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The road starts wide in the foreground and narrows as it recedes. A smaller dirt path branches off to the right in the middle ground.

WHOSE WAY IS PRACTICAL?

By Brian Cooper

I NEVER WANTED to be an Anabaptist. Growing up in Winnipeg, I grew up a Baptist pastor's kid who went to seminary and became a Baptist pastor. I never experienced a crisis of faith, probably because my parents were excellent role models. Their integrity convinced me that what I was being raised to learn was right, and I have retained much of what they taught me.

I knew that Anabaptists were related to Mennonites. And what I knew about Mennonites I knew largely because my mother was Mennonite, from a small town in southern Manitoba. But my own interaction with Mennonites was sporadic, and at a distance. The exception was my interactions at family gatherings, which were often not pleasant.

I was told that Mennonites were pacifists, which seemed ironic to me. My cousins did not seem to be very pacifist. And later, the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church teams in the interchurch hockey league in Winnipeg were known as the most violent ones, something that people from our Baptist church found terribly amusing at the time.

I don't think I can recall the challenge of non-violence or peacemaking in the biblical sense ever arising during my years in seminary. Christians were called to be people of peace, but certain situations dictated that a peaceful response was not practical. Yes, there would be peace eventually, but not now. The question of how things would change from the present, when peace is not completely practical, to then, when peace would reign, was not clear.

When I was applying to graduate studies after several years as a youth pastor, people asked me what I wanted the focus of my studies to be. And, to my chagrin, I didn't have a favourite area of study or a theologian at whose feet I wanted to sit. But I did have a half-formed idea rolling around in my head. It had to do with how I might connect the doctrine I had learned, and which I believed, with the rest of my life so that I might connect it to the way I acted and talked around non-Christians.

One might say that I wanted to figure out how to make my theology practical—or, perhaps more

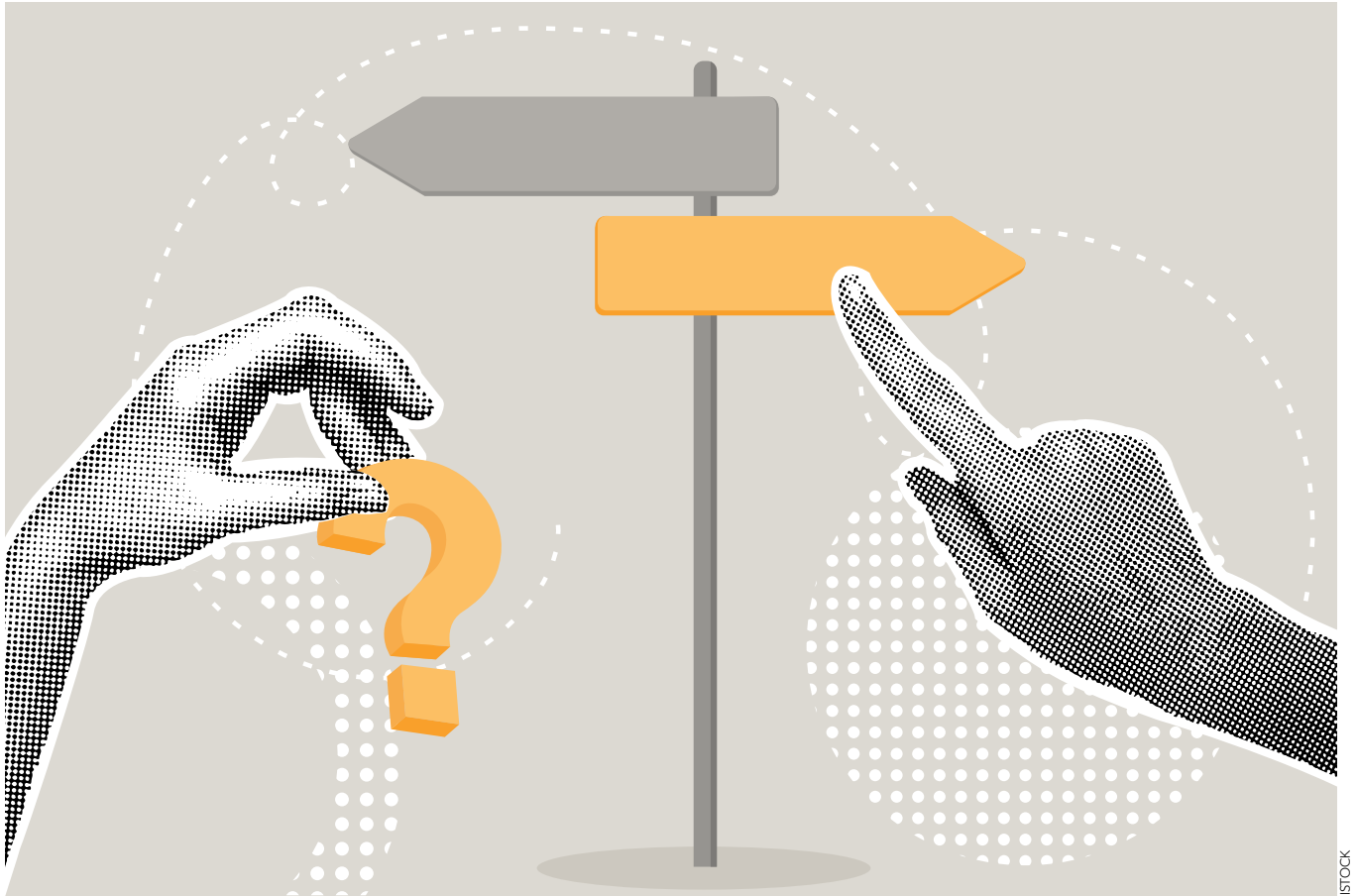
practical. I now think more in terms of the need for theological integration, meaning that Christians don't really believe what we say we do unless we put it to practical application in our lives. That has become a recurring motif in my life and my thinking.

When I began my doctoral program in theology, I had a bit of a problem. I needed some focus for my vague research ideas. In what I think now was a moment of inspiration, I seized upon an idea. I had researched Baptists, so why not research the people from whom Baptists descended? I knew a bit about Anabaptists and thought they might provide me with interesting and fruitful material for a thesis.

WHEN I BEGAN to read the writings of Anabaptist leaders like Conrad Grebel, Pilgram Marpeck, Balthasar Hubmaier, and Menno Simons, I was struck by their clear-headedness and awareness of the forces arrayed against them. They were not the naive idealists I imagined them to be. They were putting their lives on the line for what they believed. The distinguishing factor in their stories was that they were unwilling to kill those who differed with them. This, of course, is what made them noteworthy.

The other insight that began to dawn on me with increasing weight was that their rejection of violence did not stem from some abstract commitment to peace. Rather, it came from their observation that the words and deeds of Jesus, being the example that Christians are called to follow, did not permit a theology of sanctified violence by Christians. Christians who called for violence were taking liberties with what Jesus taught and deviating from faithfulness, not fulfilling it.

Suddenly, my prior objections to the practicality of nonviolence started to re-emerge. I recalled hearing voices from the past say that Jesus is God—with not only this unique identity but also a unique mission in the world—and we are not, so we cannot expect to do what he did.



Christians who
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fulfilling it.

The problem was that Scriptures that talk about what Christians are called to do, both from the mouth of Jesus and in other New Testament letters, said different. Christians are called to follow in the steps of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21), to death, if necessary (Philippians 2:5–11). Jesus laid down his life so that, among other things, we would know how to lay down our lives for others (1 John 3:16).

There was another experience that was formative for me. My Baptist father once preached at an Anabaptist church that then invited him to become their pastor. My father declined the invitation, stating that he could not, with integrity, support what he called their pacifism. I was not sure what I believed about nonviolence, but I respected his decision and took to heart its theological implications.

My father's response to the pastoral call reminded me of something else, an important ecclesiological lesson. As an individual—even one with a lot of theological education—I do not have the right or privilege to reject or minimize

a theological conviction operative in the community of faith I join. If I am not willing to subject my own theological authority to that of the family of which I am becoming a part, then I am guilty of a sort of idolatry. This sobering realization forced me to stop and seriously consider what I am representing as a member of a church community. It is something that I have noticed that many MB church leaders are unwilling to do, often under the guise of “agreeing to disagree.”

My appeal to practicality was an appeal to a standard of my own devising rather than a concept taught by Jesus.

IN 2006, I had the privilege of joining the pastoral staff of an MB church in Mission, B.C. By then, having studied the origins of Anabaptism and found them compelling, I was excited for this ministry opportunity. I wanted to be a good MB leader. I read and wrestled with the articles of the Confession of Faith. I wanted to believe them—all of them. As a member of the family, how could I do otherwise?

It was hard for me to accept that Christians are called to be people of peace who reject violence. I didn't like it. Part of me still doesn't. I wasn't sure it was practical for Christians to repay violence with Christlike love. Then I realized something.

My appeal to practicality was an appeal to a standard of my own devising rather than a concept taught by Jesus. And what I meant when I said that nonviolence was impractical was only that it was difficult. My own faithlessness wanted to reserve a certain set of circumstances where the way of Jesus does not apply so that I could choose an alternative that I might find more satisfying. I concluded that this is foolishness.

That sort of human way is not faithful to the call of Christ, and to my knowledge, it has never worked in human history. But for those who are in Christ, by faith we know that there is a better way coming, and we have the privilege of showing a watching world its power. The choice is ours. We can rely on our limited wisdom and power or trust the eternal wisdom of Almighty God revealed in Christ. Whose way is practical?

Brian Cooper began teaching for MB Seminary in 2008 as an adjunct faculty member and joined full-time in August 2011. Brian has been married to Connie for 32 years and they have three children. They are members of South Abbotsford Church in Abbotsford, B.C. This article was first published in the *MB Herald* October/November 2025 issue.



MISSIONS FELLOWSHIP

August 30, 2026 at 3 pm
Manitoba (Location TBD)

Focus on Paraguay, hear about all
EMC mission fields

RSVP at emcmissions.ca or
call 204-326-6401



Local versus global

FIRST OF ALL, there is no such thing as local versus global in kingdom work. When we're talking about the church being missional, the default mindset should be yes to all things that the Holy Spirit is leading you into. With that as our foundation, another question enters the picture: what should a local church focus on in their missional calling? Sorry to disappoint you, but I don't know. That is between the church and the Lord. What I do believe is that we are all ambassadors of Christ serving his kingdom purposes!

Growing up, the statement I often heard was that if someone wanted to respond to a cross-cultural or global missions call, the expectation was that

they should already be engaged in sharing their faith or discipling someone at home. Why would you expect to do something overseas if you weren't doing it at home?

Though the full answer is more nuanced, there is a bit of truth in this assertion. I wouldn't expect my mechanic not to have had training or hands-on practice before working on my car. So why would we send workers overseas to evangelize and church plant if they haven't been doing work here?

As most of you know, I am passionate about global missions. My wife Sandy and I have served overseas both before and after we were married. We

have had the tremendous privilege of building relationships with people engaging in spiritual conversations, sharing the gospel message, and nurturing people's faith. This is something that we believe God has called us to in Scripture and is just part of our calling as believers.

We have continued to do this for the past two decades since settling into our neighbourhood in Steinbach. We have had the joy of journeying with numerous people on our street, in the community around us, Sandy at her work, and wherever the Lord opens doors. It is an incredible joy to practice what we preach. It is a blessing to see people respond. It is a delight to witness lives change.

So, is the Lord calling you as a church to local missions? Absolutely yes! Is he calling you to global missions? Absolutely yes! The great thing is that they are not in competition with each other. They are both God's call. Depending on what spiritual gifts the Spirit has given you individually, or the opportunities he's given your church family collectively, the decision is yours to make: step out in obedience or remain seated on the sidelines.

He's anointed all of us to shine the light of Christ wherever we are. As you spend time in prayer and nurture your relationship with Jesus, he will guide you into new friendships that will be a blessing to you and them, and will bring honour to God our Saviour.

As most of you know, I am passionate about global missions. My wife Sandy and I have served overseas both before and after we were married. We have had the tremendous privilege of building relationships with people engaged in spiritual conversations, sharing the gospel message, and nurturing people's faith.



As EMC Director of Global Outreach, **Gerald Reimer** supports EMC missionaries all over the world.

Attracting people to Jesus through sports

By Albert Martens
Athletes in Action, Manitoba

HELPING PEOPLE COME closer to Jesus is what I want to do; whether it is running in the Berlin Marathon (or any other marathon) or just conversing about running (shoptalk), I want my interactions with people to lead to spiritual questions.

It is so neat to see the Lord bring people into my life through sports, where I can share my faith in him. I feel a sense of responsibility and a privilege to share God's love with others. Friendships begin and continue for many years. God created everyone; he loves them and wants them to come to know him. In a friendship, I earn the right to share the good news that brings them closer to God. I may be nervous at first, but I allow the Holy Spirit to direct me. I soon discover that everyone has needs and wants to talk. People are searching for purpose in their lives.

I am excited to be involved in many people's lives, especially spiritually. I was recently asked to give an interview about how my endurance running is related to my faith. I was not given the questions ahead of time, but so often when I have been interviewed, I realize the Lord gives me the right words to say. It was an interview with my Indigenous friend about running and helping people overcome addictions.

I am currently praying for a friend stuck at Base Camp, waiting to cross the Khumbu Falls to reach Mount Everest. The huge ice pieces are too unstable for them to cross with the "Jesus" ladders. He tells me he is religious and how much he values my prayers during this time.

Years ago, I ran across Germany. The day I seriously injured my foot near Koblenz, I happened to be billeted with a couple who owned a physiotherapy clinic. They helped me. I found out recently that the couple is separated,

and I feel called to mentor and help them.

The Polar Bear Marathon (PBM) is a unique setting where we meet runners from all over the world and bring the good news each year during a banquet. Over 200 runners have participated in the PBM over the 14 years it has existed. Last year, a fine Indigenous Christ-follower gave his testimony. The person who spoke after him was so emotionally impacted that he could not talk. Currently, we have 20-plus runners applying to the PBM from Australia, Italy, various states and provinces, and local runners. It is exciting to present these runners with God's love.

A large part of drawing people to God is achieved by reflecting his love, grace, and character through my life before words are spoken. Demonstrating genuine compassion, living authentically in faith, building trusting relationships, and praying for the Holy Spirit to work can create a curiosity in others for a relationship with him. It reminds me of James 4:8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you," and Jeremiah 29:13, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." These Scriptures encourage building a relationship through devotion, trust, and obedience.

Albert and Edna Martens are associate missionaries with Athletes in Action ministering to remote First Nation communities and to the international running community. Find out more about their ministry at www.emcmissions.ca/missionaries/albert-edna-martens.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Runners wave cheerfully during the Polar Bear Marathon near Churchill, Man.

God speaks out of the mouths of children

By Amber Dueck
TeachBeyond, Thailand

AS THE PRINCIPAL of a Christian international school in Northern Thailand, I have the privilege of seeing firsthand how God uses education to transform lives. This year, I have been especially encouraged by what he has been doing in our kindergarten classroom. The stories may seem small, but they are powerful reminders that God is at work, often through the youngest among us.

We have several students who come from devout Buddhist families. One family has been part of our school for many years and has children in high school. Despite countless prayers and opportunities to share the gospel, their hearts have remained closed to conversations about faith.

In the fall, their oldest child gave her life to Christ. This was such an answer to prayer. Then, at Christmas, the kindergarten students were given a task to write a list of what gifts they would like to receive from their classmates. Their youngest daughter wrote on her wish list that she wanted a Bible. Wow! None of us was expecting this.

In an effort to be respectful to the family, the teacher asked the parents if it would be okay to get a Bible for their child. To everyone's amazement, they said yes. While it may seem unimportant, it felt significant to us who have been praying for this family for years. God was opening a door that had appeared closed. We continue to pray that their desire to know more

about Jesus will have an impact on their family.

Another kindergarten student has also been making remarkable connections in class. He comes from a Buddhist background as well, and members of his extended family have been on our prayer lists for years. They have been resistant to hearing about God. However, this child has been making incredible connections about God's love and power over the past few months.

One example happened during a social studies lesson about wants and needs. Students were asked to write down different wants and needs. This child chose to write "Jesus" of his own volition. He made a point of showing the teacher that this was something he had included in his life as a need. After months of hearing Bible stories, participating in chapel, and learning about God's love, he had grasped a profound truth. Out of the mouths of children, God is speaking. Not only that, but we have seen a softening in some of his extended family members over the last year, and we are praying that they will see Christ through this student and decide to accept him.

Neither of these stories ends with a dramatic conversion. Yet both reveal

This child chose to write "Jesus" of his own volition. He made a point of showing the teacher that this was something he had included in his life as a need.

the quiet, transformative work of God. He is planting seeds, opening hearts, and using children to point others to himself.

As we look ahead, we are filled with hope. Pray for these students and their families, that the seeds being planted today will grow into lasting faith. God is always at work, and sometimes he chooses the smallest voices to proclaim the greatest truths.



Amber Dueck is elementary school principal of Chiang Rai International Christian School in Thailand. Find out more about her ministry at www.emcmissions.ca/missionaries/amber-dueck.

God has brought the mission field to us

Evangelical Fellowship Church
Steinbach, Manitoba

IT HAS BEEN said, “If your church wasn’t there would anyone notice? Would anyone care?” When EFC was built on its current location in the late seventies, a lot of the surrounding area was open field. Today we would say that God has brought the mission field to us.

Whitby Crescent, just north of us, has many young families and a large Filipino population. Many are blue-collar or first-time homeowners. To the west, there are nine different multi-story apartment buildings, hosting immigrants and low-income families. Included in the mix is The Bridge, a housing project seeking to transition people out of homelessness. To the

south of the church is L. A. Barkman Park, known locally as Abe’s Hill, with a walking track that extends to the soccer park to the north, and McKenzie Avenue to the south.

I have frequently said that there are other churches in Steinbach that would kill for our location. What an opportunity! How have we responded to this opportunity? With an annual event called the September Community BBQ. I’m not sure when it began, but it’s been going on for almost 20 years. We advertise to the community, and every year, more than half of the folks who attend are not regular EFC attendees. Perfect! Beyond the barbecue, we rent bouncers so that it’s family-friendly.

Two years ago we agreed that we needed to escalate. So, on October 31, we hosted an EFC candy party on our parking lot. In addition to free candy for the kids, we had coffee and hot chocolate for their parents and multiple fire pits for connecting and staying warm. Given the number of firefighters that attend EFC, we were able to get permission to bring the aerial ladder—a highlight for the kids.

We recognize that two annual events are insufficient in trying to reach or bring value to our community. So we are hoping to continue to *escalate* as we think of further ways to reach our neighbours. Part of our strategy going forward is the formation of a go-and-grow committee. The plan is to gather a small group of creative people to brainstorm new initiatives we can implement to support and advance our efforts at reaching our community.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Peter Fehr runs the barbecue for EFC’s September Community BBQ in 2025.

Finally, I should point out that God has blessed us with an increasingly diverse community of faith. Our diversity is reflected in different ethnicities, social statuses, and backgrounds. This makes it easier for someone to feel at home in our worship gatherings.

In my humble opinion, it reflects a small taste of heaven’s diversity that Revelation 5:9 talks about: “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.’” We long for your prayers and God’s direction and wisdom as we seek to be his ambassadors where he has placed us.

— Ernie Koop



Candy party attendees enjoyed the aerial ladder truck brought by Steinbach firefighters on October 31.

Rosenort EMC welcomes Sam Pauls as associate pastor of discipleship

Rosenort Evangelical Mennonite Church
Rosenort, Manitoba

IN MAY 2026, Rosenort Evangelical Church (REMC) was pleased to welcome Sam and Karenn Pauls of Blumenort to our church leadership team. Sam will be taking on the role of associate pastor of discipleship. We look forward to seeing how they enhance our church with their unique giftings.

On April 18, we hosted an outstanding event titled 7 Mile Story, with more than 200 people in attendance. Ross Breitreutz captivated the audience as he led us on a powerful journey from creation to Christ's imminent return. We highly recommend him to every EMC church.

Spring is a season of new beginnings, and many of our women had a great road trip on May 13 to Oakridge Greenhouse for some garden items, coffee, and dessert. Our monthly church potlucks continue to be well attended.

Shannon Friesen, a member of our church family, has recently dedicated a community house of prayer in the old Rosenort firehall to provide a space for groups and individuals to use. On May 5, a number of REMC members held a prayer walk that began there and branched out to most of the streets in Rosenort. It was meaningful to pray for fellow believers, churches, newcomers, businesses, schools, commuters, and individuals as they came to mind. It is our desire for the Holy Spirit to move mightily in our community and unify his people.

– Anita Peters



Rosenort EMC leaders surround Sam and Karenn Pauls as Ward Parkinson prays.

Baptism in 2025:
candidates Sandra
Hughes, Dario and
Joana Evangelista,
Jessica Derksen,
Rachel Loewen,
Emily Waldner,
and pastor Ward
Parkinson.



Women begin their fellowship on the bus ride to Oakridge Greenhouse on May 13.

Seeking to live up to our name

Evangelical Fellowship Church
Fort Frances, Ontario

“WHERE IS FORT Frances?” is a question we hear often. It’s usually followed up by, “Oh, it’s in Ontario. How far are you from Toronto?” Quite far it turns out. About a 24-hour drive. Oh, the dilemmas of living in Northwestern Ontario.

Fort Frances is a small town of about 8,000 people on the Canada-U.S. border. It is sustained primarily by logging and mining, and used to boast a large paper mill. It’s scenically beautiful, located where the Rainy River spills out of Rainy Lake, beginning its journey west to Lake of the Woods. But for all its scenic beauty, it’s broken, and desperately in need of the “on earth as it is in heaven” influence of the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:10).

The Fort Frances Evangelical Fellowship Church has been worshipping and serving in this community for around 40 years. We are one of only

a few evangelical churches in Fort Frances. With an average Sunday attendance of just over 100 people, we are the largest, which speaks to the lack of Christian influence in our community. Many mission organizations designate a country with less than two percent evangelical Christians as unreached. By that metric, we are slightly above the threshold at around three percent.

In a community filled with skeptics and backsliders, sinners and seekers, we are seeking to be the light of Jesus and the kingdom he brought. Our church family is a unique and diverse blend of ethnicities, theological backgrounds, and socioeconomic levels. But together we are committed to worshipping the King of Kings and making his name known in our town.

And praise God, his name is being made known! It seems almost every Sunday another former skeptic turned seeker walks through our doors. Sometimes it’s due to a coworker’s invite,

sometimes to a simple burning in their heart and longing for wholeness, sometimes it’s simply due to loneliness and a desire for community. For whatever reason, people are turning to the church. Jesus is being considered a legitimate option—an option we at the EFC are happy to share with everyone who walks through our doors.

This surge of newcomers has not come without its challenges. We seek to live up to our name, as a *fellowship* church. We eat supper together once a week at our well-attended Tuesday night prayer meeting. We share a potluck lunch on the last Sunday of every month and partake of the Lord’s Supper. We believe doing life around tables is important, and when we were a small church of 60–75 people, it was doable.

How do we maintain this emphasis, which we love and find important, as a church that regularly has 125 people, many of whom are not yet accustomed to contributing consistently to the flow of food and fellowship? How do we continue to value *being* together and building deep, genuine relationships, when we simply cannot know everyone in our midst? These are some of the beautiful, sacred struggles we are navigating as the Fort Frances EFC family.

Sometimes we hit the nail on the head. Sometimes we miss the mark and bruise a finger or two. But we always continue to pursue the calling to penetrate darkness with the light of Jesus. To this we are called. To this we will endeavour!

—Alain Reimer



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Worshippers gather at Evangelical Fellowship Church in Fort Frances, Ont.

Clothing fest meets community needs in Coaldale

Coaldale Mennonite Church
Coaldale, Alberta

ALMOST EVERY TOWN or city in Canada has a food bank to assist those who are unable to look after their own needs. Coaldale's community food bank was established in 1995 and continues to operate by providing 40–50 food hampers each month and significantly more during Christmas.

In 2009, a group of women from Coaldale Mennonite Church (CMC), under the leadership of Carolyn Penner-Klassen, offered to take over a program that had been initiated by the Coaldale Family and Community Support Services a few years earlier, but was to be discontinued due to a lack of venue space.

CMC's clothing fest was born out of a need to supply many of the poor and needy people in our community with appropriate seasonal clothing, especially for people on social assistance, recent immigrants, and, more recently, unhoused people and refugees.

Clothing fest is held in our gym twice a year in April and October. Leading up to the event, clothing and household goods are collected from the congregation, the community, and from estate donations. Everything is received and given away free of charge to those who come.

The week before the event, dedicated volunteers bring tables, clothing racks, bags, boxes, and totes of clothing from storage. Everything is carefully sorted, folded, and presented by gender, age group, and size on the tables in the gym. After 17 years, our team of



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Twice a year, Coaldale Mennonite Church hosts a clothing giveaway to supply Coaldale and surrounding community members in need.

a dozen ladies, led primarily by Jodi Reed and Vivian Sharp (a former CMC member), has become organized and efficient in getting the hundreds of items ready for distribution.

The event runs from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday. Recently, we had about 150 people lined up before the doors opened. Well over 200 people from Coaldale, Lethbridge, and the outlying communities were served in three hours. While many shoppers express their appreciation for all we do, we hold the event to honour God first and to serve his people. Much like Matthew 25:40 says (my paraphrase), "As much as we do this for the least of these, we do it for God."

After the doors close, many hands make quick work of sorting the leftover items and putting them away again. Often by two o'clock you cannot tell we hosted an event in the gym. After the most recent event, our 4,400-square-foot gym, piled high with clothing, was reduced to a vanload of boxes. These boxed-up items were then donated to Streets Alive Mission in Lethbridge, to be used for their homeless and rehousing projects.

Clothing fest continues to bless the Coaldale community as these volunteers use their gifts, talents, and time to bless others.

— Pieter L. van Ewijk

Pastors pastor each other at Encourage retreat

“IT WAS THE best of times, it was the worst of times,” wrote Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*. He was not talking about pastoral ministry when he penned these words. But this is a great description of pastoral ministry. There will be high highs and low lows. This experience of feeling alone can happen even when pastors are surrounded by caring congregations. So, when there is an opportunity to connect with other pastors and their spouses, it is very valuable.

The Encourage retreat was an inaugural event held at Lakeview Resort in Gimli, Man. We were excited to see 17 churches send pastors to this event. Though the weather was uncooperative, the event gave time for pastors to retreat, recharge, and connect with God and others. There were many highlights, including worship and teaching sessions, meals, watching Emily Reimer destroy her husband, Alain, at Tenzi (a fun dice game), and a dip in Lake Winnipeg with a few friends—receding ice in full view.

For me, one of the moments I will hold on to was the time set aside for participants to receive prayer. Pastors and their spouses struggle to find appropriate places to be vulnerable with their challenges, hurts, and doubts. Our sessions with speakers Jay and Sharon Guptil were focused on allowing the Holy Spirit to give rest and renewal in our ministry.

During our Tuesday evening session, prayerfully we responded to the call to invite the Holy Spirit to fill each of us anew. Jay and Sharon gave



Attendees are ready for a polar plunge in Lake Winnipeg.



Conference Pastor Andy Woodworth



Keynote speaker Sharon Guptil

an opportunity for those who needed prayer to come forward. The group laid hands on others and prayed as the Holy Spirit directed. It was beautiful to see pastors pastor each other. After ministering to each other, we celebrated what we were thankful for.

The Board of Leadership and Outreach planned this event for paid EMC pastoral staff and their spouses. A quote we read by Brenda Jank said, “Rest is not a reward. You can’t earn it. You don’t deserve it. It will never be convenient. Rest is a rhythm ordained

by God and a responsibility for those committed to God’s best” (*Run Hard Rest Well*). As pastors, we are robbing God and our churches if we run without regularly resting. While this retreat wasn’t attended by every pastor in our Conference, my prayer is that our pastors and their families would build a rhythm of rest into their lives. As churches, we need to encourage our pastors to foster these rhythms. We don’t work so that we can rest; we rest so that we can do what God has called us to do.

— Mo Friesen

The Messenger wins seven CCCA awards for work published in 2025

ON MAY 15, 2026, the Canadian Christian Communicators Association held its annual awards ceremony in Toronto, Ont. *The Messenger* placed in seven categories for work published in 2025.

FIRST PLACE: COLUMN

"Further in and higher up"
(regular column)
Author: Layton Friesen



SECOND PLACE: FRONT COVER – MAGAZINE (CIRC. UNDER 10,000)

May/June 2025

Original artwork: Jen Kornelsen
Design: Rebecca Roman



SECOND PLACE: BIBLICAL/THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

"The storms Jesus calmed"

Sept/Oct 2025

Author: Alain Reimer



SECOND PLACE: FEATURE SERIES

"The appeal of ..." series

May/June, July/Aug, Sept/Oct,
and Nov/Dec 2025

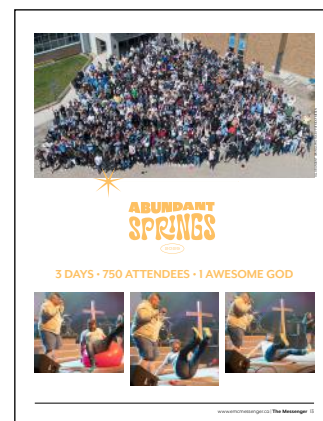
Authors: James Driedger, Morgan Fehr,
Steven Warthe, and Ruth Friesen

SECOND PLACE: PHOTO ESSAY – MAGAZINE

"Abundant Springs 2025"

July/Aug 2025

Photos: Patrick Friesen
Design: Rebecca Roman

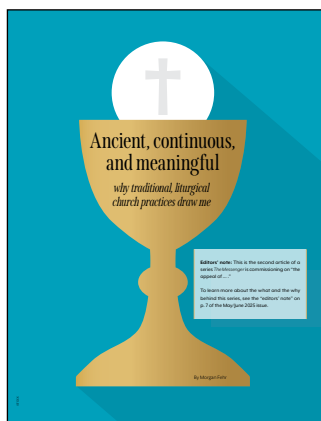


SECOND PLACE: OPINION PIECE

"Should Christians be Zionists?"

Sept/Oct 2025

Author: Michael Zwaagstra



THIRD PLACE: EDITORIAL

"Are Canadian religious charities at risk?" May/June 2025

Author: Rebecca Roman

Working toward collaboration with other Anabaptist agencies

THE COUNCIL OF International Anabaptist Ministries (CIM) is a group of agencies from across North America that meets once a year for collaboration and discussion. Each agency takes a turn hosting. This year it was the privilege of EMC Missions to host the meeting.

The 2026 meeting was held at Steinbach Bible College from May 19–21. Twenty-two guests gathered from across North America—including representatives from Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM), Be in Christ Canada Global, Brethren in Christ USA, Eastern Mennonite Missions, EMC Missions, Mennonite Central Committee USA and Canada, Mennonite Church Canada and USA, Mennonite Mission Network, Rosedale International, and Virginia Mennonite Missions.

EMC Missions was represented by Gerald Reimer (director of global outreach), Anthony Reimer (Board of Missions chair), and Ruth Konrad (executive assistant).

The theme of the last few years has been collaboration—asking why CIM exists and exploring ways we can continue to work together. This group has gathered for several years, but each year, there are a few new people, so meetings begin with a half-day of agency introductions. Each agency describes its identity, who they are, what makes them unique, who they serve, and what programs they run.

The meetings included plenary sessions with Norm Dyck (Mennonite Church Canada). He spoke on

CIM members take time to bless and commission Joe Showalter, the first CIM staff director.



metanoia—the necessary journey of transformation as we follow God in his mission and re-imagine what it means to collaborate as agencies. Collaboration sessions on specific topics such as training and resourcing, engaging youth in missions, business for transformation, breakouts on disciple-making movements, the Christian humanitarian response, and maximum impact short-term missions rounded out the week.

The week ended with a guided tour of the Mennonite Heritage Village, where we learned about the Anabaptist history of Southern Manitoba, and enjoyed a “traditional” Mennonite meal (or not-so-traditional, as the food was new to nearly all the Mennonites present).

This year’s meetings also brought two new components. John Fumana, executive coordinator for AIMM, was entering Canada to attend the CIM meetings and passed away as his plane landed in Montreal. The group took some time to share memories

of John and to grieve his passing (see announcement on p. 31).

This year also included a time of blessing and commissioning the first CIM staff director. This position was created in the last year to ensure ongoing collaboration within the CIM. Joe Showalter, former director of Rosedale International, has been hired quarter-time for this position.

It is always encouraging to gather with others in similar roles who are working to further God’s kingdom around the world.

CIM meetings have produced much fruit over the years. The 2025 meetings led to the newly finalized partnership between EMC Missions and Rosedale International in the Mediterranean, paving the way for EMC Missions to send workers to join Rosedale’s team in North Africa, and for Rosedale to send workers to join EMC’s team in southern Spain. We are excited about this partnership and look forward to where God may lead us to collaborate in the future.

– Ruth Konrad

Alberta Missions Fellowship hosted at PBMC

PICTURE BUTTE MENNONITE Church (PBMC) graciously hosted an EMC Missions Fellowship. This newly revised gathering aims at building awareness and relationships with EMC churches.

Around 100 people gathered from all over southern Alberta on May 31, 2026. After a brief introduction and history of EMC Missions, we heard a

Nancy
Friesen



report from Nancy Friesen. Nancy, whose home church is PBMC, has served in Bolivia with EMC Missions for the last 10 years. Bolivia has around 140 colonies with over 150,000 Plautdietsch (Low German) speaking Mennonites, and only five percent are estimated to be born-again believers.

Nancy's journey to Bolivia started in 2015, when she joined a work team for three weeks. After returning to Canada, she could not get Bolivia out of her mind. So in 2016 she returned to teach English for one year. Ten years later, she's still teaching. Her first few years were spent in Villa Nueva before transitioning to Amanecer. In 2023, Misión Evangélica Menonita bought land adjacent to Belice Colony and named it

Amanecer, which means sunrise or new beginnings (from Luke 1:78–79, the theme verse for the work there).

Houses were moved onto the land for Nancy and her coworkers, Benjamin and Bertha Kauenhofen (Aylmer EMMC in Ontario). Funds flowed in and the building was quickly completed. The small school started in 2025 with four students and grew to 14 students in 2026.

The program wrapped up with brief updates on each of the other EMC mission fields (Mexico, Paraguay, and Spain), and an introduction to Project Builders. To find out more about the work in Bolivia, go to www.emcmissions.ca/bolivia.

– Ruth Konrad

Come pray together!

THE MENNONITE WORLD Conference was founded 101 years ago with a desire to be in solidarity with Mennonites facing persecution. This was a time when political leaders were misusing their power and life was difficult for believers who held a peace position. My own relatives were living in a time of horror in the Soviet Union before they were sponsored to come to Canada in 1926.

Today is not much different for Anabaptists globally, although those of us who live in Canada are some of the most insulated from personal risk and persecution. Today we have many privileges and freedoms. But we are no less called to be in solidarity with

**MWC
ONLINE
PRAYER
HOUR**



our Anabaptist brothers and sisters everywhere.

Did you know that a recent bombing in Myanmar destroyed a Mennonite church that had almost completed construction of a new building? The bomb killed and injured members of the church, including a deacon, two youth leaders and the church treasurer.

Mennonite World Conference gathers the requests of its member churches from around the world (including Canada!) and invites you to join in an online prayer hour held every other month.

The next prayer hour is on Friday, September 18, 2026.

You can register to join this prayer hour from your own home and meet with our global family to bring these concerns to Jesus. The prayer hours are well organized with breakout groups in a variety of languages.

Please join by scanning the QR code or going to <https://mwc-cmm.org/en/prayers/online-prayer-hour>.

– Jen Kornelsen

SBC graduates celebrate growth, look forward to next steps

CLOSING OUT THE 2025–2026 school year was a meaningful and encouraging season for the Steinbach Bible College (SBC) community as we celebrated another group of graduates being sent out to follow Jesus, serve the church, and engage the world.

SBC recently celebrated 30 graduates, including 21 graduates at our commencement ceremony on April 25, and nine certificate graduates recognized on April 24. Among this year's graduates were four international students from Brazil, Jamaica, Nigeria, and Uganda, a reminder of the growing diversity and global reach of the SBC community.

One of the greatest joys of this season has been hearing student faith stories. Over the final weeks of the school year, students reflected on who they were when they first arrived at SBC, what they have learned, and the ways God has shaped their character,

calling, and faith during their time here.

Karen Jolly, associate professor of Indigenous studies at Providence University College and Theological Seminary, delivered this year's commencement address, encouraging graduates to remain grounded in their faith and to lean into God's faithfulness as they enter new seasons of ministry, work, and service. Mark Fortin shared the valedictory address, reflecting on the shared journey of the graduating class and encouraging his peers as they step into what comes next.

Now we are sending another group of graduates to camps, churches, workplaces, and communities around the world. This is a significant season in their lives, and we invite you to continue praying for them as they step into new opportunities over the months ahead.

At the same time, SBC is entering an important season of transition as

we prepare for the move into our new campus. We recently moved into the new office spaces, while plans continue for a transitional semester in the fall as construction progresses on classrooms and residence spaces.

We also continue to trust God for the remaining fundraising needed to complete the project. With approximately \$1.3 million left to raise toward our \$15 million goal, we are grateful for the generosity and support of so many.

Looking ahead, it is exciting to see new students already registering for next year. Every year we are reminded of the accelerated discipleship that happens within the SBC community as students learn together, serve together, and grow in their walk with Christ.

Thank you for your continued prayers, encouragement, and partnership with SBC.

– Dave Reimer, SBC president



SBC graduates: (back) Emma Arendt (BA), Adrian Penner (BA), Jesse Wiebe (BA), Trace Hiebert (BA), Mark Fortin (BA), Reuben Ascough (AA), Andrew Thiessen (BA), Andreas Warkentin (BA), Cole Murdock (BA), Denver Reimer (BA), Rachel Trites (AA), (front) Kayla Reimer (AA), Lois Shetler (BA), Amanda Plett (BA), McKenna Martens (BA), Stanley Idogun (BA), Jesse Rempel (BA), Louise Vandenberg (BA), Matthew Vogt (BA), Richardo Andrews (AA), Elijah Kawooya (BA).



Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Financial Reports

January-June 2026

	General Fund 2026	General Fund 2025
Income*	689,231	751,657
Expenses	1,041,956	1,053,364
Excess/Shortfall	(352,725)	(301,707)

Thank you for your continued prayers, encouragement, and financial support. We are grateful to serve alongside each of you and look forward to all that God will accomplish through our collective efforts.

– The Board of Trustees

**Income includes donations and transfers from other funds (e.g., estate funds).*



John Fumana

AIMM executive coordinator dies unexpectedly

IT IS WITH deep sadness and heavy hearts that we share the news of the sudden and unexpected passing of our colleague and friend,

John Fumana. John has faithfully served as the Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) executive coordinator since 2020. He passed away on May 15, 2026, as he and his wife Lucie were landing in Montreal, Canada. This was to be the beginning of a month-long trip visiting Canadian churches and supporters to talk about AIMM's ministries in Africa.

No doubt this is coming as a shock to many of you, as it is to us. We ask you to prayerfully remember John's family, friends, the AIMM community, as well as all those whose lives have been touched by John's presence and work.

The EMC office also serves as the AIMM headquarters in Canada.

– AIMM and EMC

THE EMC BOARD of Missions is pleased to announce the acceptance of two couples for service in Spain. These couples will join a team led by Antonio and Esther Pitta. They are currently participating in EMC Formations, our pre-field orientation program, with the hope of spending the summer developing partnerships and raising support. Lord willing, they will begin language learning in early 2027 to work with migrants entering Spain from North Africa. Pray that both couples would develop strong partnerships and lean into the Lord for wisdom and strength as they prepare.



Carlos and Rianna Herrera, with daughters Renee and Alina



Cole and Tanya Murdock

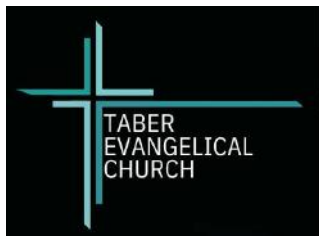
Shoulder Tapping

Please send all position ads (150 words or less), including pastoral search ads, to messenger@emconference.ca. Ads may be edited. Please advise us when it is no longer needed.

Additional EMC Openings

Often there are more churches looking for staff than are identified on this page. For information on additional openings, contact Conference Pastor Andy Woodworth (awoodworth@emconference.ca or phone 204-326-6401).

EMC Positions



Associate Pastor: Taber Evangelical Church (Taber, Alta.)

Taber Evangelical Church (EMC) is prayerfully seeking an associate pastor to join our church. This person would serve alongside our lead pastor with a specialized focus on next-generation ministries. Our congregation is comprised of many children, youth and young adults, so support in ministering to this demographic is a vital need we currently face. Character requirements of an associate pastor would correlate with what Paul prescribes for a leader in 1 Timothy 3. Additionally, somebody with a passion and heart for a team leadership approach and ministry is essential.

Taber Evangelical Church is located in Taber, Alberta, with an average attendance of over 300. Our mission is to glorify Jesus by proclaiming God's Word and making disciples who follow him.

For more details on the job description and other requirements, please contact our search committee. You can reach Jake Koethler at 403-635-1205 (WhatsApp) and Alex Wiebe at 403-849-8815.



Associate Pastor of Congregational Care: Westpointe Community Church (Grande Prairie, Alta.)

Westpointe Community Church is in Grande Prairie Alberta. Our vision is to glorify God through creating opportunities to draw people into community, to encourage, guide and equip each other to walk closer to Christ and be empowered to minister beyond. We are seeking a dedicated and passionate associate pastor to join our ministry team. This individual will play an important role in providing Congregational Care with a focus on supporting the youth leadership team. The position also includes active participation in Sunday morning worship services.

Some key responsibilities include creating mentorship and discipleship opportunities, working with staff and volunteers, oversight and development of youth leaders.

The successful candidate will maintain a strong personal relationship with Jesus Christ through prayer and Bible study and be committed to biblical teaching. Previous experience in church ministry or pastoral leadership and a degree in theology, ministry or a related field are preferred.

Interested candidates should submit their resume, cover letter, and references to office@westpointecc.com

Interim Pastor: High Level Christian Fellowship (High Level, Alta.)

High Level Christian Fellowship (HLCF), located in northern Alberta, is seeking an

interim pastor to bring preaching, teaching and leadership for building community within our church family of approximately 100 people. The interim pastor will also assist in providing visionary guidance and supportive direction as we review how we carry out HLCF's values, vision and mission. If this interests you or additional information regarding the job description is required, please contact James Connellan, board chairperson at elder@hlcf-emc.org.

Senior Pastor: Island Gospel Fellowship (Burns Lake, B.C.)

Island Gospel Fellowship is seeking a full-time pastor. Burns Lake is a community in the heart of the beautiful Lakes District of northern British Columbia with an approximate population of 2,000. Burns Lake serves as the supply centre for a population of 7,000 people.

Island Gospel Fellowship has a strong presence in the community serving as a gathering place for many community activities and events in our church gymnasium. We are a congregation of all ages with about 145 adults and children who call IGF home.

We are looking for a Spirit-filled pastor gifted in preaching, teaching, and reaching out to our community. It is important that the pastor can work effectively with other leaders in the church, community and conference. A successful candidate will have a minimum of two to three years of biblical studies (bachelor's or master's degree preferred) and would be willing to become credentialed/ordained with the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. Please send your resume to: igf@telus.net marked "search committee."



Other Positions



Executive Coordinators: Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (Africa and North America)

AIMM seeks to fill two executive coordination positions. The next executive coordination team of AIMM will include two individuals who are committed Anabaptist Christians and exemplify dynamic, growing faith in Jesus Christ. They will be energized by the call to help lead an organization towards a thriving future in a changing and complex environment. Both must be members of a Mennonite World Conference congregation and have a university degree.

The lead co-executive coordinator will be based in Africa and must be fluent in French and English. The supporting co-executive coordinator will be based in North America and be fluent in English, with French as a significant asset. To send nominations, request the profile, or submit a letter of application with resume, email aimmsearch@aimmint.org by August 10 or until the position is filled. For more information, please visit aimmint.org/executive-coordinators-search.



Children's Ministry Pastor: Bethel Church (Hochfeld, Man.)

Bethel Church is inviting applications for the position of children's ministry pastor. Our congregation has approximately 400-plus attendees and is located 10 km south of Winkler, Man.

Bethel Church is a growing and active congregation-led church that supports a wide variety of ministries serving young people, families and the community. We are looking for someone who is passionate about children's ministry and developing leaders. This full-time position will involve sharing responsibilities and delegating tasks in collaboration with the program directors for the following ministries: Awana, children's church, children's and youth Sunday school, VBS, and all future children's ministry opportunities.

To learn more about Bethel Church, go to our website www.ourbethelchurch.com or contact us at ourbethelpastoralsearch@gmail.com.



Family Life Pastor: Winkler EMM Church (Winkler, Man.)

The Winkler EMM Church congregation is seeking an individual with a heart for discipleship and leadership development to serve as the family life pastor. The family life pastor will champion the spiritual formation and relational health of families and young adults with the WEMMC. This role is rooted in our mission to connect people with God and each other, encourage transformation into the image of Jesus, and impact the world for Christ. Through discipleship, teaching, and pastoral care, they will cultivate a vibrant, Christ centered community across generations.

Applicants should possess a graduate level theological degree, demonstrated pastoral ministry experience, and strong interpersonal and communication skills. Only qualified applicants will be contacted. A full job description is available upon request. Please forward requests and/or resumes to the pastoral search committee chair Dale Dueck at dale.f.dueck@gmail.com.



GOSPEL FELLOWSHIP CHURCH

Lead Pastor: Gospel Fellowship Church, (Steinbach, Man.)

Gospel Fellowship Church is seeking a full-time lead pastor. We are a congregation with an average attendance of 75; our church is a part of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC). GFC is a faith community in a broken world, sharing the hope of freedom in Christ. We are searching for an individual who passionately loves God and loves people, one who is able to provide vision and direction for our church, and willing to compassionately lead our congregation with sound biblical teaching.

For a full position description, please visit our website (www.gospelfellowshipchurch.ca) or contact us at applications@gospelfellowshipchurch.ca.



Short-term pastoral couple: Misión Evangélica Menonita (Amanecer, Bolivia)

Misión Evangélica Menonita in Bolivia is seeking a short-term

pastoral couple to minister to Low German-speaking families in the Tres Cruces area from about October 27, 2026, until January 5, 2027.

Responsibilities are to preach God's Word on Sunday nights, organize youth activities Sunday afternoon, be available for Bible studies, and visiting families in the colony as the opportunity presents itself.

Requirements are fluency in biblical Low German (Plautdietsch), a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ, and a passion to care for Low German-speaking people.

If you are interested, please contact: Darryl Goertzen, MEM field director, at darrylandmuffet@live.ca or contact Benjamin Kauenhofen at bbbeek@gmail.com.

Wristwatches, time management, and eternity

I MARRIED A man who tells time the way a compass points north. He knows exactly where he needs to be and when he needs to be there. I unfortunately don't have the same innate sense of urgency. If we need to leave in ten minutes, I'll pull out the vacuum cleaner. If I start a cleaning project now, I reason, I'll be five minutes ahead when we get home. Needless to say, that usually also means we'll arrive fifteen minutes late.

Considering our differences, I'm sure my husband was delighted when a wristwatch was at the top of my Christmas list this past December. I didn't want a fancy smartwatch of the modern era; rather, I requested a straightforward watch of ancient times. Several months after receiving my watch, I noticed an interesting phenomenon. An analog watch is only

useful when you look at it. This isn't earth-shattering news, but it revealed an uncomfortable habit I've developed of purposefully not looking at the time. By ignoring the clock, I pretend that I can temporarily pause the incessant march from present to past. If I don't acknowledge the time, then perhaps it doesn't exist. This is no longer a simple time-management problem, but an avoidance of responsibility.

Obviously, only God can pause the sun's orbit or cause the day to reverse (Joshua 10:12-13; Isaiah 38:8). I first considered God's control of time while reading Augustine's *Confessions* several years ago. He contemplated ad nauseam the reality that God exists outside of time. Genesis 1:1 documents both the start and the Source of time with these simple, familiar words, "In

the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." How fascinating that time, which is incredibly restrictive for humanity, shares a beginning point like we do. Time exists in the past, present, and future, yet God is infinite. And that is the God I serve with my finite time. He has given me good works to complete and directs me to do everything heartily as to him (Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 3:23).

Instead of trying to outmaneuver reality, I'm learning what obedience means within my scope of work and rest. I find perspective through advice given to the great abolitionist politician William Wilberforce. John C. Colquhoun says this advice was given to Wilberforce by pastor and hymn writer John Newton: "Stay at his post, and neither give up work, nor throw away wealth; wait and watch occasions, sure that [God], who put him at his post, would find him work to do" (as quoted in *Fierce Convictions* by Karen Swallow Prior). Christ, who not only created time, but entered it to save me, surely knows my desire to "make the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:16) and my struggles to do so faithfully. I can trust that as I take these little steps forward, he will continue to direct my path (Proverbs 3:5-6; 16:9).

I probably won't master time on this side of eternity, but I am confident that God always completes what he sets out to do. None of God's promises fail. One day, I will praise him in perfect satisfaction because the good work he started in me will be complete (Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 10:23).

By ignoring the clock, I pretend that I can temporarily pause the incessant march from present to past. If I don't acknowledge the time, then perhaps it doesn't exist. This is no longer a simple time-management problem, but an avoidance of responsibility.



Karla Hein (Westpointe, Grande Prairie) is the wife of one and mother of two.

Should baptism be connected to membership?

AT THE RECENT Steinbach Bible College Leadership Conference on baptism we found out the real controversy in our churches is over baptism and *membership*. Many churches are now questioning whether baptism should *automatically* make one a member of the church.

Why now? Why have we now become conflicted about connecting these two when for so long they were connected? Here is my theory: our theology of baptism is not changing, but our practice of membership might be.

Now, all churches have *some* concept of membership, some idea of who belongs to them and who they are responsible for. And though churches practice this belonging differently, most churches in history, whether Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox, have believed that baptism is central to whatever the church considers membership. It's hard to read Galatians 3:27-28 any other way: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (NRSVUE).

Of course, spiritual membership in the body of Christ is distinct from *official* local church membership. But there needs to be *some* resemblance, some connection between the two. Official membership should be a church's attempt to give this larger spiritual membership in the body of Christ local expression and practice. It should make it tangible, lived out in shared casseroles.

Official membership should be a church's attempt to give this larger spiritual membership in the body of Christ local expression and practice.

But here is my question: Has local church membership become a merely bureaucratic thing rather than a spiritual belonging to the local family of God? Is this why it doesn't seem to make sense anymore to connect it to baptism?

When church membership no longer numbers the saints living the Spirit-filled, baptismal life, clothed with Christ, overcoming local cultural, economic, and gender divisions to be the holy body in unity, then it should be disconnected from baptism. Because that is what baptism does. It makes that kind of members.

If membership is merely about voting for church officers, hearing minutes at business meetings, and reviewing the audited financial statements, then don't connect it to baptism. Notice I keep saying *merely*. Being in the body of Christ will always involve audited financial statements; we can't escape Christ's determination to have a *human* institutional body. But my point is: if baptism in your church does the Galatians 3:27-28 kind of work, why not number these people as your church members? *Official*

church membership should not be a higher, premium level of membership achieved sometime after the Galatians 3:27-28 membership.

If baptism is connected to a purely bureaucratic membership that gets you the right to vote on the budget, baptism becomes a merely human bath. On the other hand, if baptism is disconnected from a Galatians 3:27-28 expression of membership, baptism becomes an individualistic me-time with Jesus, sundered from the body of Christ.

So let's connect baptism to the most beautiful local membership we can find. Our membership list should number all local baptized believers the church takes responsibility for. It should number those who are repenting of sin and daily walking by the Spirit. It should number those who are accountable to their sisters and brothers in this congregation and who are powered by the Spirit to serve, discern, love and witness with the body of Christ.

If you are not a member, the church should be evangelizing you and inviting you to the river.

Layton Friesen is academic dean at Steinbach Bible College. He lives in Winnipeg, Man.



Mentoring the next generations

OVER THE NEXT few issues, I want to continue interviewing people who are investing in inspiring faith in the next generation.

In this article, I'd like to introduce you to Kiara Kosta. Kiara has been the youth director at Evangelical Fellowship Church in Steinbach, Man., for the last three years. Kiara and her husband, Dominic, are Steinbach Bible College alumni and are expecting their first child in the fall. Kiara recently completed her credentialing assignments for the EMC and is waiting for her final interview.

Kiara brings a young and fresh perspective to youth ministry. I began my interview by asking her about the challenges that get in the way of discipleship in the current generation.

Kiara: *I think one of the biggest challenges is time and busy*

schedules. I think their brains are so full that they almost can't think about anything else, which pushes away the need for them to see that discipleship matters. They're being pulled in so many directions—sports, music, and drama—that it is hard as a teenager to see that growing in faith is more important than those things. The other challenge is that it is hard for students to find mentors. The mid-life people love to see young people, but it's almost like they don't want to make a personal connection, which is what's needed for mentorship.

I continued by asking what brings her excitement or hope as she interacts with this generation.

Kiara: *I get really excited when I see them serve. They are often so quick to say yes; yes, I'll be on the worship team; yes, I'll read scripture at youth; or yes, I'll connect with you and go out for coffee with you. They seek connection.*

RESOURCE CORNER



The Good and Beautiful series

This series by James Bryan Smith would be great to walk through in a mentorship or small group setting. The series answers key questions like: who is God? How do I live? How do we live together? and Who am I becoming?

Lastly, I asked Kiara what's the one resource you can't do without in ministry?

Kiara: *So, I entered youth ministry with a Bible college degree but without any youth ministry courses, and felt like I entered youth ministry almost blind. I knew right away that I needed a mentor. So I found a mentor, and she has been fantastic. She's been a God-given gift, someone that I can reach out to and bounce ideas off. I also connect regularly with other youth pastors from our region and from our city. These gatherings*

provide inspiration and ideas, and you just know that you're not alone in the challenges. That's been my best resource: people.

Did you catch the theme? Mentorship is a priority. There was a subtle and yet direct appeal for us middle-aged church folks to make ourselves available to mentor the next generation. Mentorship can be as simple as intentionally taking an interest in others and building relationships. It can also be volunteering in your local youth ministry. Mentoring is the key activity of the church in discipleship. Participation in discipleship is not optional for a Jesus follower, and neither is mentorship an optional activity for the church.

Who are you mentoring, and who is mentoring you?



As EMC Director of Next Generation, **Mo Friesen** equips and encourages those working with next generations across the Conference.