

The Messenger

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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

Of puppies, productivity, and [im]perfection

I HAD PLANS for the summer at home with our school-age kids. There would be time set aside for reading, time for teaching some life skills and family responsibilities, and time for some summer fun.

Then, mid-July, we got a puppy. Yes, this was also part of our summer plan, but the *reality* of having a puppy turned out to be quite different from the *idea* of having a puppy, even with as many YouTube videos as I watched! There went my well-intentioned plans for summer. Suddenly, I found myself hearkening back to the days of having newborns and googling questions about sleep, feeding, and “is _____ normal?”

Once again, I’m tiptoeing around the house during a nap and feeling anxiety over someone ringing the doorbell. Once again, I’m paring back my daily to-do list to a single

Suddenly, I found myself hearkening back to the days of having newborns and googling questions about sleep, feeding, and “is _____ normal?”

item beyond “caring for my people [and dog].” Some days, that means doing some laundry. Other days, it means making something other than hot dogs for supper. And, once again, not a single day (or moment!) goes by that I don’t remind myself, “This is a season.”

This is also an every-episode reminder of one of my favourite podcasts: “On this show, we value contentment, compassion and living

in our season” (*The Lazy Genius Podcast*). (While it isn’t a faith-centred podcast, Kendra Adachi, “The Lazy Genius,” is a person of Christian faith and is clearly guided by Christ-like values in what she teaches.)

I think the Preacher would concur with Adachi, although he puts it this way: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). In his article on Ecclesiastes, Scott Marble reminds us that we can look for God’s gifts in every season of life, even in times of chaos.

This issue also contains encouragement to use what we have to serve God and others (p. 4), and to find contentment outside of possessions (p. 10).

In all these areas, productivity or “having it all” aren’t the goals; the Preacher would likely call this “chasing after the wind.” In a season when I’m getting less done than I would like to, I’m also finding solace in Erica Fehr’s reflection on intrinsic value in last summer’s issue of the magazine (“What do we mean when we ask about our value?” *The Messenger*, July/Aug 2025).

We’re about to embark on a new season as back-to-school approaches. I’m making some plans, while trying to hold those plans loosely. What’s non-negotiable? Contentment, compassion, and living in my season, through the strength of Christ in me.

– Rebecca Roman

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TELLING STORIES THAT MATTER

Visual storytelling as ministry in a modern world

FOR MORE THAN a decade, Cullen Klassen has been behind the camera telling stories. What began with homemade music videos and a GoPro camera eventually developed into a vocation focused on capturing stories of transformation and mission.

In 2022, Klassen founded Root Visuals, a Manitoba-based visual storytelling company that creates documentary and commercial work for non-profits and businesses. Since then, his work has taken him around the globe, capturing authentic, character-driven stories for organizations committed to meaningful impact.

Klassen's work raises an important question for the church: What if visual storytelling is more than a communications tool? What if telling compelling stories can itself become a form of ministry?





ALL PHOTOS SUPPLIED BY CULLEN KLASSEN

I (Scott Marble) spoke with Klassen about what makes a story powerful, why authenticity matters and how churches of any size can start using visual storytelling to serve their congregations and communities.

SM: What first drew you to visual storytelling, and when did you begin to see it not only as a creative hobby but as a way to serve people and organizations with a mission?

CK: Like a lot of videographers and photographers, I started doing it as a hobby. In high school, I would make music videos to songs I liked. When I went to Bible school, I bought a GoPro and started taking photos and making highlight videos of my experience.

At the heart of it, I think creating is just fun. There is something about capturing moments and then processing them in post-production—crafting them into something that lasts longer than the moment itself. Those moments can become the starting point for telling a larger story.

Things began to shift for me when I helped start a young adult worship ministry in Winnipeg called Bread We Break. The planning team needed someone to take on communications, and I thought, “I think I would enjoy that.” I jumped in and discovered that I really liked media, marketing, and communications. Eventually, I studied communications and media at Providence.

From there, I worked at several marketing agencies as the in-house video person. I gained skills and experience, but over the years I also had this growing sense that maybe I could use those abilities in a way that made a deeper difference—maybe even a kingdom impact.

About five years ago, I read *Garden City* by John Mark Comer. That book had a huge impact on me. It helped bring together things God had already been shaping in my life: mission, vocation, and the idea of using the skills God gives us to make the world a more garden-like place. I started asking how I could use the experiences and abilities God had given me more intentionally.

One experience in particular brought that into focus. I was working for a video company when my boss gave me time away to travel to Myanmar and film a project connected with Multiply [the mission agency of Mennonite Brethren churches in North America]. I documented a coffee business that was making a holistic impact in its community by providing jobs, helping families send their children to school, and creating relationships where people could encounter Christ.

I remember feeling completely alive on that trip: being in a cross-cultural setting, capturing what was happening with a camera and then shaping the story afterward. One of the questions

“FOR ME, A POWERFUL STORY IS ONE THAT SOMEONE WATCHES AND WALKS AWAY FROM FEELING A DEEP EMOTIONAL OR SPIRITUAL IMPACT.”



in *Garden City* is essentially, “Where do you feel most alive?” For me, that trip was one of those times where I recognized that God was calling me.

SM: You describe your work as “powerful visual storytelling that captures positive impact.” What makes a story powerful, and how do you recognize a story worth telling?

CK: For me, a powerful story is one that someone watches and walks away from feeling a deep emotional or spiritual impact. Maybe there is a moment in the story that connects with something God is already speaking.

The foundations of storytelling are fairly simple. There is usually rising action, conflict, and some kind of resolution. I recently taught a video seminar in Thailand and talked about those basic elements. We looked at the gospel as the greatest story ever told and saw those movements within it: growing conflict, the crucifixion as this climactic moment, and then the resurrection.

Especially in faith-based storytelling, I think we often see a redemptive arc that echoes the gospel. When you have experienced redemption personally, you resonate with stories that reflect that movement. That may be one reason baptism testimonies can be so powerful. We recognize something of our own story in them, and hearing someone else’s story can become an opportunity to worship God again.

Powerful stories often contain a contrast between struggle and redemption. A person goes through something we can relate to, or they experience a revelation that parallels our own lives. Sometimes a story also moves us toward action. It may cause someone to ask, “Am I being called to missions?” or “Is God asking something of me?”

Over the last few years, for example, I worked on two short documentaries featuring Philip Serez and his family as they walked through his experience with ALS [Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis]. ALS is already a relatively rare disease, but when you add someone willing to be vulnerable and allow a camera into that journey, along with the way faith and mission continue to shape his life, you have a unique Venn diagram of circumstances. [The video is available at multiply.net/serezvideo.]

Each of us has unique threads in our stories. Sometimes we are not comfortable enough to share them because vulnerability is difficult. Other times, we simply do not recognize what is unique about our own experience. That is where a storyteller can help. Someone who knows how to ask the right questions can draw out details that a person may never think to include on their own.

SM: This article is about innovative ministry in the modern world. From your perspective as a visual storyteller, how can video help churches imagine new ways to communicate the gospel and serve their communities in our current culture?

CK: Video is one of the primary communication mediums of our time, and it is likely to stick around. What is particularly interesting right now is that acceptable video quality is available at many different levels. Because of social media, something captured on a cell phone can sometimes reach more people than something filmed with an expensive professional camera kit. That creates a lot of possibilities for churches.

Internally, churches can use video for announcements, testimonies and baptism stories. Recording a baptism



“WHEN YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED REDEMPTION PERSONALLY, YOU RESONATE WITH STORIES THAT REFLECT THAT MOVEMENT.”

testimony ahead of time, for example, can help someone craft their story and allow the church to present it clearly.

But churches can also think beyond the Sunday service. Suppose you are running a community event. Someone can take a phone and capture short clips throughout the day. Those clips can quickly become a highlight video for social media that celebrates what happened and invites people into future events.

The technology in our hands is getting better and better. Cell phones are improving in low light, audio processing and noise cancellation. We already have access to tools that would have been significantly more difficult or expensive to use in the past.

The question becomes: How can we use what is already in our hands to tell stories?

SM: Your mission emphasizes authenticity—why is it important for churches to tell stories that include real struggle, not just stories that feel finished, polished, or successful?

CK: Think about watching a movie. Usually, the main character goes through some kind of struggle. That is part of what makes us relate to them. We want to cheer for them as they move through the difficulty and hopefully reach the other side.

I also think younger generations have become very good at detecting when something feels fake. There is something attractive about people who are honest and authentic. You feel as though you are encountering the actual person rather than a polished version of them.

It's like the difference between having small talk with someone in the church foyer and sitting down for coffee or sharing a meal. In that second setting, you can go one step deeper.

You begin to discover how the person is actually doing. Authentic storytelling does something similar.

When we hear someone honestly talk about what they are experiencing, we can begin to care for them differently. We may recognize that they are walking through something incredibly difficult. We begin to cheer for them. Their struggle may also connect with a struggle in our own lives.

That is one reason authenticity matters. Struggle is part of what makes a story powerful.

SM: Many churches think of video mainly to promote events or programs. How might churches begin to see storytelling as a ministry in itself?

CK: I think part of the transition is learning to tell stories well. Churches should think carefully about how they communicate so the story is clear rather than confusing or distracting.

From there, take stock of the people in your community. Who is already interested in video? Who gets excited about telling stories? Maybe that person begins as a volunteer. Eventually, a church may decide that communications and storytelling are important enough to invest in a part-time or full-time position. The important shift is seeing how storytelling can reach beyond the walls of the church.

If you record testimonies and people give permission to share them publicly, those stories can reach people who were not present on Sunday morning. Churches could also make a simple video showing newcomers what to expect when they visit. Walk them through the building. Show them where they can sit, where their children go, and who they might meet.

Visiting a church for the first time can be confusing and uncomfortable. A simple video can lower that barrier



“WHEN WE HEAR SOMEONE HONESTLY TALK ABOUT WHAT THEY ARE EXPERIENCING, WE CAN BEGIN TO CARE FOR THEM DIFFERENTLY.”



before someone ever walks through the door. Or consider churches already livestreaming sermons. Someone could take two or three short sections from the sermon each week, add captions and share them on social media. That can remind people of the message during the week. But those clips also have the opportunity to reach beyond the people who were sitting in the room on Sunday.

SM: For churches with limited budgets or small teams, where should they begin if they want to incorporate storytelling into their ministry?

CK: I would begin by sitting down with your team and putting everything on a whiteboard. Ask, “What would we love to do?” Do not worry about what is realistic at first. Just put the ideas up there.

Then start asking practical questions. How much time would each idea take? What people would we need? What equipment? What skills? That process will help you identify the low-hanging fruit. You might realize that one idea would hardly add any time to someone’s week, or that someone already serving in one role could easily add a small storytelling component.

Then take stock of the wider church community. Who is already interested in this? Maybe there are young people who love making videos. Maybe someone owns a DSLR camera because photography or videography is already a hobby.

You can even start with photography. There may be more photographers than videographers in your congregation. Begin by capturing high-quality photos of church life, Sunday gatherings, and community events, and start sharing those stories.

Over time, a church can consider investing funds into equipment or staff. But I do not think you have to begin there. Begin with the people, time, and resources God has already placed in your hands.

Ask God for the imagination

Visual storytelling happens to be the craft God has led me toward, but it is only one of many creative and innovative ways people can participate in God’s mission. It does not even have to be artistic. It could be business. I have met business owners who see what they do as a way of being on mission and building the kingdom.

What ties these things together is our God-given imagination. We can ask, “How could I use the resources God has placed in my hands to give back to him? How can I worship him through what I create? How can I build something that draws people toward him or participates in his kingdom?”

Maybe you are a videographer. Maybe you own a trades business. Maybe God has placed you somewhere completely different. Whatever it is, ask God for the imagination to see how you can use what is already in your hands—and the place where he has already put you—to build something with him.

Cullen Klassen is the owner and filmmaker behind Root Visuals, a Manitoba-based production company that helps businesses and non-profits tell meaningful stories through documentary and commercial filmmaking.

With more than a decade of experience in visual storytelling, Cullen has filmed for organizations and documentary projects in more than 25 countries around the world.



CONTENTMENT

the spiritual discipline of enough

By Cindy Stover



I'M A BIG fan of thrifting. Clothes, furniture, books, art, you name it—my home is filled with second-hand deals and vintage items that I've collected over a lifetime. A few of my favourites are an art-deco dresser I inherited from my grandmother, floral tins that decorate my cupboards, and a print of Swiss artist Robert Zund's "Road to Emmaus" that I picked up at a church rummage sale. Visitors have told me that my house looks like an eclectically curated treasure trove of "all the things Cindy would like at a thrift store." (I've wisely chosen to receive that as a compliment.)

Dumpster diving

As a young student in Toronto in the early 2000s, the people in my neighbourhood were much more affluent than my roommates and I, who were surviving on student loans and savings from summer jobs. We learned to go for walks on garbage night, looking at what our upper middle class neighbours thought was trash, and finding perfectly usable coffee tables and bookshelves and even a pizza baking stone to bring back to our walk-up apartment.

We'd also salvage armloads of flowers from the dumpster behind the florist on the main floor of our building. We had fresh bouquets and home-made pizza until we all graduated and moved away from an increasingly expensive city. On a recent trip to Toronto, I drove past our old street and saw that the whole block has been razed to build condos. I guess only the affluent can afford to live in that neighbourhood anymore.

These days I'm less of a dumpster diver and more of a bargain hunter. If I'm in need of something, whether it's a raincoat, a couch, a blender or snorkeling gear, I'll search it out second-hand before ever considering buying it new (and yes, I've found all these things used and yes, I did thoroughly clean the snorkeling gear).

One of my favourite yearly events with my friends is what we call "Wine and Thrift Day." I now live a short drive from Niagara, where dozens of wineries sit along Old Highway 8 from Grimsby to St. Catharines. There's also a steady stream of thrift stores along that route, which gave us the idea for a great way to satisfy both the wine lovers and thrifty pals in our midst. We start with breakfast at a florist with a flower-filled café. Then we alternate between stops at thrift stores and wineries as we travel east, never staying too long at any of them so that we don't overindulge in either, and then finish with a meal on a vineyard patio. We return with our trunks filled with clothes and trinkets and a nice bottle or two to bring home. It really is the best day!

Thrifty by necessity

I wasn't always this enthusiastic about second-hand things. I grew up shopping at thrift stores, as my family lived on a single income. My dad was a nurse, and my mom worked hard to finish a degree after having two kids. I remember going through bags of hand-me-downs from church friends and visiting Sally Ann for specific items like snowsuits that were needed in cold Northern Ontario winters.

By the time I was in Grade 8, I was an awkward teen, self-conscious that I didn't have the trendiest clothes. I remember visiting the store that had "the jeans" (the ones all the other girls in my grade were wearing) and trying them on just to see what they looked like. I desperately wanted those jeans, but they were \$70 and I knew we couldn't afford them. After a particularly rough day at school, my

At left: Vintage and thrifted items displayed in author Cindy Stover's home, including a print of Robert Zund's "Road to Emmaus" from a church rummage sale.

mom and I were at the mall and I pleaded with her, “I’ll never fit in until I have those jeans!” By some miracle, she agreed and we bought them! I was delighted. (If you’re reading this, Mom, thanks for making a teenager’s dream come true, even though I suspect that it probably meant we missed a bill payment that month.)

Nowadays, thrifting can even be considered cool. I hope that today’s Grade 8 students can be less captive to the materialism of having to wear the right brands or the perfect pair of jeans. There’s social media pressure, but clothes can also be seen as a way of expressing our personalities, a reflection of our varied interests and styles. While many young people today still seem drawn to expensive yoga pants or bougie sneakers, I hope there’s no longer the same ostracism towards those who dress differently. People should wear what they like!

Fast fashion

This changing sensibility is about more than simply being frugal. People also thrift for many reasons beyond budget. Some truly love the

aesthetic of a different era, and prefer vintage T-shirts and antique dishes over items mass-produced offshore. Some want to support local charities and know that for each trunk-load they drop off, they can bring home a bag of new treasures.

Many increasingly realize the true costs of fast fashion and home decor that changes every season. These industries are built on capitalist systems that take a horrific toll on the human labour that is exploited to produce cheap garments and home goods, along with the toxic environmental impacts of products that are designed for obsolescence. Many of these trends soon end up in landfills when they’re no longer serviceable or in style. It’s no wonder that seeking out second-hand has become a lifestyle choice, a personal “no thanks” to participating in these systems that degrade creation and our fellow image-bearers.

Enough

Our inner lives are also impacted by our consumer choices. We each need to discern the faithful balance between earthly necessities and

Cindy Stover
(middle) and
friends on a “Wine
and Thrift” tour.



“storing up treasures in heaven” to learn how to be generous with the blessings we’ve received, and to get comfortable with knowing when we have enough. This kind of openhandedness can be a difficult muscle to develop in a world that tells us our worth is defined by what we own, or by the image we project.

If I’m being honest, I’ve certainly coveted my share of status items—whether that was a car with air conditioning that actually worked, or a Smart TV to replace my perfectly functional but no bells-and-whistles TV. Or, most embarrassing of all, a self-cleaning robot kitty litter box. (Confession: I did get the robot litter box, albeit second-hand, and I did thoroughly sanitize it. But my cats refused to use it because to them it was a giant motorized toilet monster! So even second-hand, that was a waste of more money than I’d like to admit.)

It’s absolutely possible to get so wrapped up in the next best thing, or at least the next best deal, that our thrifty ways can still shape us towards overconsumption. I certainly could never be accused of being a minimalist (bless the hearts of those who can manage that lifestyle), but that doesn’t mean that I have to be a maximalist (even if the pictures here may suggest otherwise). It’s one thing to find a souvenir at a garage sale that reminds you of the town you grew up in; it’s entirely another thing to thrift compulsively because you can’t be satisfied with what you already have.

Gift mindset

Developing that spiritual discipline of contentment requires intentionality. To be truly open-handed, we need to loosen our grip on what we mistakenly think is ours to begin with. That often means setting a budget that restrains what we spend on ourselves and predetermines what we donate to charity. But it’s about more than budget lines; we need to learn to go beyond ourselves, thinking more about what we can give than what we can get. To develop this sort of gift mindset, we can practice looking for opportunities to share or help out; perhaps a neighbour could use your extra bookshelf; perhaps a family

at church could use the clothes your kids have outgrown; perhaps a newcomer getting their own apartment could use your help this weekend.

We also can move beyond the monetized economy entirely and put more time and energy into the values behind “reduce, reuse, and recycle.” Can we simply use less? Organize a clothing swap? Fix something before throwing it away? I learned how to change the belt on my dryer by watching a YouTube video! Can we find ways to save things that are going to waste? Maybe we can borrow tools from a neighbour instead of buying them to use once, order from thriftbooks.com instead of Amazon, or check if the very specific thing you need is on a social media marketplace before automatically going to a department store. That’s how I got the snorkel gear!

Now that I’m an auntie, I spend more time second-hand shopping for the next generation than for myself. My last thrifting adventure resulted in a pair of practical walking shoes for my next Europe trip, while the rest of my bag was filled with back-to-school clothes for my niece and nephew, who seem to grow a size or two every six months! I found the coolest jean jacket for my niece (which cost nowhere near \$70). She’s just starting Grade 8 this year and has been asking for a jean jacket for a while. I really do hope this one makes her just as delighted as I was with my own jeans all those years ago.



Cindy Stover is a Justice Mobilizer for the CRC in Canada, seeking to empower people to bear the image of Creator God as they enact justice in every area of our lives. She lives in a close-knit neighbourhood in Hamilton, Ont., where she is a part of Eucharist Church. This article was first published in the October 2025 issue of *Christian Courier*. It is reprinted with permission from the author.



God as sole giver

By Scott Marble

From rapture to rupture

This past week, my wife, Nicole, and I returned from a night away without our eight-year-old daughter. It's been years since we scheduled adult-only time. We were childless for twenty-seven hours; it was bliss.

Whole conversations free from interruptions, a night of unbroken sleep, and moments of quiet we had almost forgotten existed. It was as if we had stepped into another reality, one filled with abundant rest, where our problems softened and, for a moment, almost disappeared.

Unfortunately, all the fun blinded us from the obvious; our bliss was only temporary. Our marriage grew deeper, and we benefited from the



how Ecclesiastes teaches us to enjoy life's gifts

extra sleep, but our time on earth is not immune to calamity and chaos. To be clear, we don't think our daughter is chaotic. What I mean is that real life is chaos. Disordered. That disorder is part of the texture of reality.

The moment we arrived home, chaos met us at the door. Our daughter had developed a bladder infection that invaded her kidneys. The days that followed were filled with high fevers, chills, a trip to the ER, and many tears. If you've ever had a UTI, you know how miserable it can be. To add to the chaos, we discovered water in the basement. I had a cavity to get filled. And my wife was under pressure to submit multiple seminary papers despite having neither the time nor the mental space. Within hours, we moved from rapture to rupture.

Chasing after wind

Have you ever felt like life has you in a chokehold? Like blessing is always just beyond your grasp? It's as if all your plans and good intentions unravel faster than they came together. After a while, the stress builds, and your mind begins to short-circuit. If you've felt this way, you're not alone. It means you're human. Prone to what the Preacher in Ecclesiastes calls "a chasing after the wind" (1:14).

Who's the Preacher I'm referring to? The Preacher is the Latin translation of the Hebrew

Real life is chaos.

Disordered. That

disorder is part of the

texture of reality.

word Koheleth. It's not a proper name. It's a job description. It means the leader or speaker of an assembly, a preacher. The book of Ecclesiastes records the Preacher's quest for the meaning of life. A quest that takes a lifetime and culminates in frustration. The Preacher repeatedly calls his quest for meaning "a chasing after the wind" (1:17; 2:11; 4:6).

What does the Preacher mean by chasing the wind? The Preacher's phrase "chasing after the wind" is repeatedly linked to the Hebrew word *hevel*. *Hevel* means mist, vapour, emptiness, or meaninglessness. I prefer the word *ephemeral* because it captures the fleeting nature of our attempts to find satisfaction apart from God.

Old Testament scholar Ellen F. Davis writes, "According to this view, *hevel* expresses the total disparity between what we plan for and what actually happens" (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*). Sometimes, the things we work for are not the things we truly desire. And when we come to terms with that reality, we encounter life's *hevel*.

Chasing after wind robs life of meaning. It prevents us from experiencing genuine satisfaction. *Hevel* is like riding a stationary bike in front of a screen playing nature scenes and winding mountain roads. You pedal as fast as you can. Your legs burn. Sweat pours. It seems like you're travelling, but in reality, you haven't moved an inch.

In this way, the Preacher in Ecclesiastes is concerned about the fragility of our lives and the things we value. Ecclesiastes is not a book that promotes *carpe diem*, nor does it favour nihilism. It doesn't elevate hedonism or asceticism. It's not that life is not worth living or experiencing. It assumes life is too short to live foolishly. Life is too transient to ignore God's gifts. Its brevity demands wise living.

Gifts amongst the chaos

There's a positive side to Ecclesiastes that Christians often fail to note. God is described as the sole giver. For the Preacher, God creates everything, enabling every form of enjoyment. He becomes the ultimate gift-giver. God is pleased to give to his children. As the Preacher examines the world, he finds joy in these God-given gifts.

In Ecclesiastes, the repeated use of the Hebrew verb for "gift" shows this. It occurs twenty-eight times across twelve chapters. Often, this verb is associated with God, describing him as the singular giver. For instance, "God has *given* wisdom and knowledge and joy" (2:26); "he has *put* [given] eternity into man's heart" (3:11); "God has *given* wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them" (5:19; emphasis added to all).

What should we conclude from these verses? Again, Davis reminds us, "What Kohelet [the Preacher] aims to instill in his students is the ability to receive the pleasure of life as the gift they are and to recognize God as sole Giver" (*Getting Involved with God*). Genuine religion is about embracing God's simple gifts and the joy they bring to our lives, even in the midst of a chaotic world.

So, what are these godly gifts? The Preacher describes them in three ways: bodily enjoyment, relationship, and work.

Bodily enjoyment as a gift

Let's listen to the Preacher's wisdom for a moment: "That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God" (3:13); "A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God" (2:24); "So I commend the enjoyment of life, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun" (8:15).

Bodily enjoyment means accepting pleasure in life's ordinary gifts. Eating, drinking, and sleeping—these small pleasures are a relief from life's toil. God wants us to enjoy these gifts as we make our way through the world. In the Preacher's eyes, denying these pleasures would be tragic, a rejection of God's goodness.

A 50-minute drive from where I live is the English Garden, situated in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It's bursting with flowers, twirling paths, metal sculptures, and free-form beds. Their website calls it "a feast for the senses." I'm overpowered by the beauty every time I visit. The colours, smells, and

bodily enjoyment



relationship



Nicole and Scott Marble with their daughter.

sounds fill me with joy. Momentarily, the world's madness dissolves, and I'm filled with delight.

At the same time, everything in the English Garden is dying. Its beauty and brilliance are fleeting. Soon, the flowers and plants will wither and return to the soil. In much the same way, we, too, are moving toward death. Yet death is part of what makes life extraordinary. It reminds us to live fully and to receive the small pleasures God gives, because one day death will steal them from our grasp.

Finding joy in the chaos of the world doesn't have to be escapism. We're not trying to distract ourselves from real life, nor are we attempting to avoid pain, stress, or responsibility. Rather, when we recognize these gifts as coming from God and meant to be enjoyed, they become meaningful.

Relationship as a gift

Let's return to the Preacher's words: "Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun" (9:9).

On the surface, this could seem like cynicism, as if marriage were nothing more than a prison where you must somehow learn to enjoy your sentence. When we look deeper, the words "whom you love" jump out. This "wife" is someone you genuinely love and cherish, not someone you must endure. It underlines how relationships can be a gift from God, like a shelter in a storm, as chaos takes root in the world.

The Preacher is not declaring that only married individuals enjoy life, nor is he favouring marriage over singleness. He's simply naming marriage as one of life's gifts. A spouse is a particular blessing in a hostile world—someone to cherish and enjoy amid life's mess.

This idea becomes painfully clear when we look at what the Preacher says previously in Ecclesiastes 7:28: "My soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found" (ESV). This is one of the most self-revealing passages in Ecclesiastes. It reads like a moment of reflection, even confession, as the Preacher looks back on his life and names his regrets and disappointments.

The autobiographical statement suggests that, in his pursuit of wisdom, the Preacher either remained single or failed to find a wise spouse. That doesn't mean we should stop looking for wisdom. The point is the Preacher's honest disappointment helps us see a critical idea: relationships are gifts to be enjoyed when received under God's sovereign hand.

Work as a gift

One last time, let's return to the text: "So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?" (3:22). Before this declaration, the Preacher, in v. 16, shares an observation. He sees "something else under the sun": the righteous and the wicked share the same fate. They are equally subject to death; both will return to the dust.

What kind of world did God create where the righteous and the wicked receive the same death? It means all creatures stand on equal ground before YHWH (the name of God often rendered "the LORD" in English Bibles). Not one creature reigns supreme over the other. Everything exists in a reality that God can judge solely. He alone discerns the hearts and intentions of humankind. This is what the Preacher means in the following verse when he says, "God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked" (3:17).

This vision also reshapes how we understand work. It means that in a world where God is the ultimate Judge, where all creatures stand before him, and where everyone marches toward the same fate, work becomes a gift that facilitates knowledge, skill, and wisdom. Again, Davis helps us by writing, "Good work enables us both to grow and to contribute something of genuine value to the world, and thus it tends to curb the temptation to injustice" (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*). Work helps us know our value and limitations by connecting us to the world in functional ways.

Injustice arises when we believe the world owes us something and, to obtain it, we exploit and abuse others. Good work enhances our understanding of how much God has provided.



It reveals our God-given abilities and the privilege of using them in God's service. When work is understood as a means of knowing God and the world he created, it is a gift.

The Preacher teaches us to receive life's gifts and to recognize God as the sole giver. But how does this take shape in daily life? Part of the answer is for you to discern. As you do, remember that God is never caught off guard by the world's calamity. We may at times ask why God allows chaos to overrun our lives, but we cannot go so far as to suggest that God does not care. God knows this world better than we do, which is why, in the great scope of life, he provides good gifts to his children.

Ultimately, God enables every form of enjoyment. As lifelong students of YHWH, we are learning to receive these gifts for what they are, within their proper limits. This is the way of wisdom. Apart from him, we are left asking, "Who can have enjoyment?" (2:25 ESV). But with him, even ordinary gifts become signs of grace.



Scott Marble serves as director of communications for the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, bringing more than 23 years of experience in pastoral ministry and church communications to his role. He recently graduated from Providence Theological Seminary with an MA in Christian Studies. He lives in Manitoba with his wife and daughter.

Is EMC Missions work still relevant?

IN HIS BOOK *For the Sake of His Name*, David M. Doran says, “The chief means by which God will glorify Himself, if you accept the weight given in Scripture, is by saving people ‘from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’” (Revelation 5:9 NASB1995). The apostle Paul writes to the church in Corinth saying, “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 4:15).

The church gathers and the church scatters, and in both cases the goal is to make much of Jesus and bring glory to God. A church that only gathers but does not intentionally and missionally scatter is not only living in disobedience to the Great Commission but short-changing God of the glory he deserves from every tribe and nation.

Why does it matter so much that we are doing missions together as a Conference? Because missions is the primary way we express our passion to bring glory to God outside the church walls. Our gathered worship must lead to scattered mission. In fact, this passion to glorify God needs to be the driving force behind our missional work; more so than the tremendous

work of meeting the spiritual, physical, and emotional needs of people around us.

In Canada, it has not been hard for the EMC to build autonomous, self-sustaining, self-governing, self-propagating, and self-theologizing churches. But in many underdeveloped nations where the EMC serves, the journey to becoming self-sustaining is difficult, which is one reason we continue, in obedience to the Great Commission, to send workers who assist in starting churches.

What I have seen in my years working in the EMC is that our global churches have done incredibly well in the self-theologizing and self-propagating areas of local church autonomy. Governance and sustainability are

What I have seen in my years working in the EMC is that our global churches have done incredibly well in the self-theologizing and self-propagating areas of local church autonomy. Governance and sustainability are often hard components of this work.

often hard components of this work. And that is why in each country we serve, from the moment we arrive, we are already thinking about what our exit strategy will look like, and what steps we can take to get there.

We celebrate that the Fraternity in Nicaragua has been almost entirely autonomous since the early 1990s. The Conference of churches in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, has not had an EMC missionary since the early 2010s. In Paraguay and Bolivia our workers continue to see significant value in maintaining our presence there. This is why we continue to recruit workers for those locations. In Guadalajara, Mexico, we also see more fruit, and we recently sent another couple for language study in preparation to serve. And most recently in Spain, with the continuing surge of Moroccan migrants, we are growing our team there to engage in gospel conversations.

The EMC Board of Missions is incredibly thankful for the support of our churches in the work we do together!



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

From shoemaker's son to Bible translator

By Paul Thiessen
Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission

A SHOEMAKER'S SON, born in Steinbach, developed a dream for Bible translation. In April 1972, while Arden Thiessen was preaching at the Blumenort Community Church, this long-haired rebellious teenager rose to his feet and decided to follow Jesus.

It was that very moment when a vision impressed itself in this young man's heart. It showed him that he was needed for overseas missionary service. Some years later, he and his new wife attended Briercrest College to pursue missionary training in preparation

for an overseas assignment. After three semesters at the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the assignment became specific. Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission needed a translation team to provide the Scriptures for the Siamou people in Burkina Faso, West Africa.

That invitation marked the beginning of a 40-year Siamou New Testament Bible translation project.

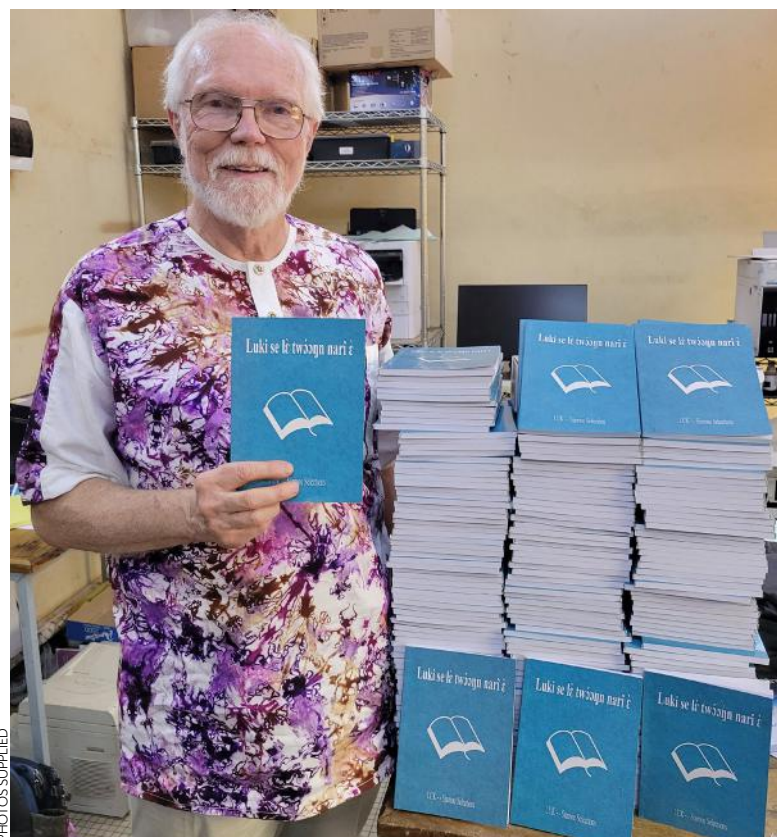
The road toward completing the New Testament translation had many barriers, mountains, and ravines to cross. First, it would require learning three languages. French was essential to begin any assignment in Burkina Faso. The Julia language was needed

for shopping in the market, and the target language, Siamou, had a formidable tonal system. A year in France brought us across the first hurdle, and some months in Bobo-Dioulasso gave us a start in Julia. But the impossible language was Siamou.

It took five years of spinning our wheels, with little progress, to realize that without expert help, it would be a hopeless task. God provided. Anne Garber guided me through a very complicated analysis of tone, giving us hope for progress in language. After years of hard work, we began to understand the patterns of the high, mid, and low tones. We discovered the nuances of high-mid falling tones and high-low falling tones. Every syllable had its own tone.

In the midst of this slow progress our growing family took turns suffering from malaria, hepatitis, cholera, boils, giardia, and bronchitis. But God was faithful and brought healing each time. However, with medical help far away, these illnesses slowed us down and interrupted our progress in prolonged and discouraging ways.

In 2008, we faced a health crisis that took us to Canada for an extended period. Before we left Burkina Faso, Pastor Traoré Siaka inspired us to remember that God had called us to translate the New Testament for the Siamou people and that we should plan to come back to finish the job.



Paul Thiessen with stacks of the published Gospel of Luke in Siamou.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

We also experienced opposition from people who questioned the need for a Siamou Bible. After all, most of the Siamou people speak the Jula language and the Bible was already translated into Jula. Why not just preach the gospel using this easier language? Our vision was clear. The heart language, the preferred language of the Siamou people was their precious Siamou. They needed to hear God speak in their mother tongue.

A season of several years was particularly difficult when my first language assistant got sick and died. This was followed by the deaths of a number of Siamou people close to us. This sorrow was compounded with the loss of family members in Canada, including Paul's and Lois's mothers.

Through all of this there were bursts of encouragement and blessing that kept us going. Anne Garber (now Anne Kompaoré) not only helped with the earlier tone analysis, but later became a consultant on the Gospel of Luke. Solo (Traoré Souleymane) became our Bible translator and worked at translation faithfully and tirelessly, year after year. Later, Idda Niggli guided us in correcting the Gospel of John. I thank God for Fatogoma, who worked with me from a distance for years, correcting the translated Scriptures. Eventually, Pastor Bananzaro became the director of the translation project. I am thankful to God for each of these people.

In 2025, I had already semi-retired from this translation work but still worked toward the goal of completing the Siamou New Testament. But progress was slow, and the end was

not in sight. During a visit with my son Caleb, he encouraged me to complete this task that I had been working on for 40 years. At the same time, I read Numbers, where Caleb and Joshua returned from spying out the promised land, and reported that in spite of the giants, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." (Numbers 13:30). God gave me a renewed vision that day; I thought, "We can succeed in completing the New Testament. It can certainly be done."

With a renewed inspiration, I asked the EMC Board of Missions for one more year to get the job done. They gave me six months, through the end of June 30, 2026. Lois and I made a plan to travel to Burkina Faso in January 2026 to do a four-week workshop to correct the last half of the NT. God blessed this effort by giving us visas to enter the country, providing the six Siamou assistants we needed, giving us health and protection, and providing the finances. The workshop was a success, and we got the Gospel of Luke published for distribution. Now the Siamou people have a physical book in their hands. Praise the Lord!

It has been up to Solo to study those proposed corrections and make the necessary changes in the translated text.

As we near the completion of the translation and correction of the New Testament books, we face the challenge of the final 12 steps needed to make it ready for publication. Again, Idda Niggli came to the rescue, offering to help from her home in Switzerland. She is willing to guide Solo as he prepares



Fatogoma, a key partner in the translation project.

introductions for each NT book, completes the glossary, harmonizes the Gospels, and prepares maps and illustrations.

As we approach the end of 2026, we anticipate that the Siamou New Testament will be ready for publication. We look forward with excitement to the date, expected in 2027, for the celebration and dedication of this book.

I am thankful to the EMC Board of Missions, to the EMC churches who have prayed for us, and the Siamou prayer group that has walked with us as we have approached our translation goal. I am thankful to God for the many generous donors who have made this work possible through the years. I am also thankful for my wife, Lois, who has stood with me, supported me, and assisted me every step of the way.

God is faithful as he builds his kingdom in Burkina Faso.

Paul and Lois Thiessen have been involved in work with the Siamou people of Burkina Faso since 1984.

Living what you preach

By Ángel and Blanca Infantes
EMC Missions, Guadalajara

THERE GO MY neighbours on their daily walk. I always greet them when they pass by my house. Juan Manuel and Nena have lived in this neighbourhood for years. We are the newcomers, and our first greeting was the beginning of something we hadn't imagined.

At first, it was just a courtesy. Over time those exchanges grew. They would stop to remark on the beauty of the day, recommend restaurants, and tell us about dishes worth trying. Those small conversations opened doors. From talks on the sidewalk, we moved to going out for meals together, and from meals to deeper conversations.

Ángel found a kindred spirit in Juan Manuel. They discovered a shared passion for reading and now discuss authors, styles, and writing projects. Nena, meanwhile, quickly struck up a bond with me (Blanca). Our conversations would stretch for hours, full of laughter and memories. These ordinary moments laid the foundation for trust.

When we finally shared the gospel with them, their response surprised us. They said it wasn't new to them—they had already seen our family's witness in everyday actions. "There is consistency between what you preach and how you live," they told us. That affirmation eased a concern we had long carried. In the past, people sometimes withdrew after hearing about our faith. However, in this instance, seeing how our life matched our words opened a door.

Nena showed particular interest. As a child she had attended religious schools but the memories were mixed. She had even been mistreated for being lefthanded. Juan Manuel had good reason to be cautious. He'd seen how religion could harm the vulnerable. Yet, both began to hear the gospel from a fresh perspective; not as an institution that condemns but as a message of healing and freedom.

Nena joined our Wednesday Bible study. On the first day, visibly moved, she stood and said, "This is what I've been looking for. I have to tell my sister."

That moment marked a turning point. Shortly after, Paty, Nena's sister, began attending. Neither had known they were waiting for an invitation like this. Both became steady students of Scripture and living examples of change.

The transformation quickly moved from belief to action. Paty started visiting a neighbour who had become a widow, offering tender help and companionship. "Since she learned about the gospel," Nena said, "Paty has become more compassionate and available." Nena invited us to serve at a local home for widows. We accepted gladly. We prepared meals, listened to stories, and offered patient presence—practical expressions of the love they were discovering.

Juan Manuel also began to participate. Where he once closed himself off to others' stories, he now listened with attention and openness, without the defensive barriers that had protected him from past hurts.

What began as a simple greeting on the sidewalk became the first of many steps toward friendship, understanding, and service. The gospel did not arrive as an abstract doctrine but as shared life: it turned casual conversations into community, distance into closeness, and suspicion into compassionate action. Through consistent acts of love, a neighbourhood has been reshaped, one life, one family, and one meal at a time.

Ángel and Blanca Infantes live in Guadalajara, Mexico, where they seek to draw their neighbours to faith through hospitality and faithful presence.

Paty (pink jacket)
invites Jesus into
her heart.



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I have become a Christian

By Arley and Janice

RABINA, OUR HOUSE-HELP, a young Afghan woman, very faithful and regular, showed no interest in spiritual matters. When she had family problems, including an abusive mother-in-law, we helped her and her husband move into a separate flat. After 9/11, when we left this place, we lost contact with her. She and her family moved back to Afghanistan.

During the 20 years of relative freedom in Afghanistan, we met her once but briefly.

Then came the Taliban takeover in 2021. By now Rabina had six children, the two oldest well into their twenties. Her husband had left for Iran a few years earlier in search of work but had disappeared without news of whether he was still alive. As a single mother with several daughters, Rabina felt extremely vulnerable with the Taliban in charge and possible Afghan suitors, real or imagined. They fled Afghanistan, and somehow she was able to contact us. We visited her in November 2022 when we spent a month among refugees. We shared with her, gave her a copy of the *Jesus* film, and prayed for her. But still no interest.

She got deported to Afghanistan, but with most of her children alone, she had to get back. Again, we were able to help her.

In January 2024, we received a voicemail from Rabina. She said, “I have become a Christian, on my own. I had a dream of Jesus and experienced healing.” We couldn’t believe our ears. Did she really mean it?

We immediately connected Rabina with Ariana Ministries—the ministry that Reza and Bahar Azimi serve. For more than two years, Bahar has faithfully walked with Rabina in a special 30-step discipleship program for believers with a Muslim background. Rabina’s life has transformed. She enjoys the personal connection with Bahar and tries to read the Word of God daily, even with her limited education. When reading is hard, she asks her children to help by writing texts for her, which gets them involved. She shared with Bahar:

I see now that I’ve often been the cause of family conflict when I yell at the kids so much ... I wish I had become a Christian when I worked for Arley and Janice ... I would not have had so many problems in my life, with my family.

In the spring of 2026, we visited the refugees again on behalf of Ariana Ministries. This dear woman wanted to join the larger home meetings we had in a different city. But she feared the

“I have become a Christian, on my own. I had a dream of Jesus and experienced healing.”



Arley speaks during a live broadcast for Square One World Media.

police checkpoints, which could deport her back to Afghanistan. We agreed to have a special service at her house. But she had overnight guests and we were scheduled to leave soon. The day before our flight, her home was empty. We had a special service in their home bathroom. Most of her children—along with a Pakistani couple, and Reza and Bahar online—witnessed their mother committing her allegiance to Jesus.

What a privilege it was for Janice to lead her in this special event, as she declared before her children and friends her commitment to walk with Jesus.

Arley and Janice served overseas among Afghan refugees 25 years ago.

Celebrating five years of the Lord's work



PHOTO SUPPLIED

A beautiful rainbow appears over the tents of the Gospel Music Jamboree, which Bow Island Gospel Church hosts yearly for the community.

Bow Island Gospel Church
Bow Island, Alberta

GREETINGS FROM BOW Island Gospel Church (BIGC)! This year will be five years since BIGC opened its doors. We have been continuously amazed at the growth and changes occurring during this time. We can look and say, "Look at what the Lord has done."

So here are some of the highlights within this past year with moments of great rejoicing, and a small glimpse of what our church looks like. This year Pastor Abe Dyck has preached through the books of Malachi and Jude. In our adult Sunday school we completed the book of Acts (which only took us a few years!) as well as Jonah. Currently we are discussing where to take Sunday school next, possibly a study of the Great Commission, but we shall see where the Lord leads.

We rejoiced greatly back in May to have 11 candidates testify what the Lord has done in their lives and publicly announce their faith via baptism.

We also added more members to the church. It's amazing to see the young church grow not only in numbers but in maturity, and we look forward to continuing to work together.

Also on the list of highlights and a view of how we serve our local community: our Gospel Music Jamboree was successful with a number of bands, a testimony shared by an inmate, a children's ministry program, and, of course, food, which was largely provided and cooked by our sister churches in Region 2. Funds raised through the event were sent to Prairie College's Prison Encounter Program.

We also join a rotation of local churches ministering to our local long-term care home, assisted living care centre, and a designated supportive living home. With the abundance of children in our church, we leave smiles on the residents' faces every time. We also have wonderful youth leaders who encourage the next generation of believers and join them in serving within the community.

This year we are looking to expand our ministerial team as well, hoping to add more deacons and pastors-in-training. Pray earnestly for these men and the Lord's guidance in their lives as they seek to do his will.

BIGC's mission is to live out Ephesians 4:12-13, "To equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." So when you think of BIGC pray that we constantly press toward this mark, regardless of what season, trial, or year. Our Saviour's sacrifice should never be taken lightly, and we should always aspire to glorify God and make his wonders known; please pray that we will be strengthened and equipped to do so! Pray also for discernment as we put on the full armour of God (another recent sermon series), recognizing the enemy and fighting the good fight.

– Abe Dyck

SNC loves, serves, and brings peace

Saturday Night Church
Landmark, Manitoba

SATURDAY NIGHT CHURCH (SNC) in Landmark continues to meet most Saturday nights, as a small group of believers and followers of Jesus Christ, using our various gifts, to “love, serve, and bring peace to each other and to the world,” as we covenant together each year.

We celebrated together this spring as our pastor Cyndy Warkentin graduated from Providence Theological Seminary. Her Master of Divinity degree, specializing in pastoral counselling, will help her continue to lead SNC and help others in the areas where she has been called to serve. Congratulations, Cyndy!

In the summer months, we don't have formally scheduled services, but we often gather for special events, potlucks, and service projects. An important part of SNC's life together is the variety of service activities we perform about once a month. We have tied blankets, made casseroles for food aid

groups, and made sandwiches to distribute to people who need help.

At the beginning of July, we took sandwiches to Siloam Mission, and at the end of the month, we were in charge of the Saturday pancake breakfast at Landmark's Friendship Festival. This was our third year serving breakfast to all comers. SNC took over this activity from the Kinsmen, who had run it for many years. Brent Nellis had the whole team working like a well-oiled machine to prepare for—and clean up after—serving pancakes and sausage, coffee and juice, to several hundred people on Saturday, July 25. We took in donations for the Taché Food Bank from the generous people of Landmark. The Friendship Festival always culminates with a community church service, in which the town churches cooperate to worship God together.

Our annual discernment process identified individuals who might serve on various committees, such as elders, service, speaking and teaching, business, and other roles. As a small church, we like to get almost everyone involved

in taking care of this part of Christ's body. Discernment often discovers people who didn't think of themselves in such roles, and who then become more enthusiastic and involved in the life of the church.

— Bill Rambo



Cyndy Warkentin, pastor of SNC, graduated from Providence Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree, pastoral counselling track.

Les and Cyndy Warkentin, and other SNCers, prepare and serve the pancake breakfast at Landmark's Friendship Festival, July 25, 2026.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Kleefeld EMC goes to camp

Kleefeld Evangelical
Mennonite Church
Kleefeld, Manitoba

KLEEFELD EMC ONCE again gathered at Roseau River Bible Camp for the week-end of May 29 to 31 for their annual church camp. The attendance this year was great, the weather was perfect, and activities were enjoyed by all.

The membership transfers of two young couples—Adam and Heidi Friesen, and Josh and Faith Slywchuk—were a special highlight of the weekend. After the service, everyone walked down to the river to witness the baptism of Faith, together with her sister from Saskatchewan. We wish them the Lord's richest blessings as they grow in faith and continue to serve and fellowship in our church.

The following Sunday, June 7, the church family acknowledged the retirement of Dave and Wendy Froese as deacons in our church. We appreciate their years of service in this capacity, and wish them joy and health as they continue serving in a more informal way.

—Louella Friesen



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Kleefeld EMC rejoiced to add new members at church camp: Adam and Heidi Friesen, and Faith (who was also baptized) and Josh Slywchuk.

Roseisle EMC adds 10 members



PHOTO SUPPLIED

ROSEISLE EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CHURCH (Roseisle, Manitoba) had 10 membership transfers on August 9, 2026! Pastor Fernando Hiebert welcomed the families to our membership and gave a brief devotion based on Ephesians 4:1–7 about unity in the body of Christ. We are pleased to welcome the following new members to our church family: Lea Schmitt, Jacinta Neufeld, Wes and Cathleen Martens, Dennis and Anna Whitman, Ryan and Marlie Whitman, Jennifer Whitman, Teresa Timmerman.

Pansy rejoices at creekside baptisms

Pansy Chapel
Pansy, Manitoba

JUNE 21, 2026, was one memorable morning! What could be better than joining with hundreds of others, each on our lawn chairs, gathering for a baptism service down by the creek?

This year the Lord blessed us with special bonuses—our surroundings of beautiful greens, gorgeous sunshine, and no mosquitoes, while the improved sound system and the newly created portable stage helped us hear all the testimonies clearly. Together we worshipped and praised Jesus; God is so good. Together we watched the baptisms and cheered on each candidate. Together we pray for their continued courage and perseverance as they go on in this new stage of life.

— Betty Barkman



The portable stage, part of the audience, and a background of nature at its best.



Randy Tkachyk, the first candidate, is baptized by friends Pastor Kevin Friesen (left) and Steven Cullins (right; who is also Kevin's stepdad).

PHOTOS SUPPLIED




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STEINBACH EMC

Mennville commemorates 75 years of God's faithfulness and goodness

Mennville EMC
Mennville, Manitoba

ON JULY 12, 2026, Mennville celebrated its 75th anniversary. As we planned this event, we were intentional in explaining that this was a celebration of the Mennville community and not just the church. We had approximately 280 people RSVP and we saw more than 350 people attend over the course of the day.

It was a beautiful but *hot* day with temperatures going over 40°C with humidity. The day started with a morning worship service outdoors. We had different song leaders lead music through the different “eras” of Mennville’s history (pre-piano, piano, all instruments). We had a children’s feature led by Carol Hiebert, Scripture reading from Mary Barkman, special music from the Friesen Sisters, and Layton Friesen shared a message from the Word of God. It was a blessed service and celebration of God’s

faithfulness and goodness through the last 75 years and beyond.

A meal followed the service. Lawn games and a bouncy castle were available for the afternoon’s entertainment.

In the mid-afternoon we had a short program of sharing and reminiscing. Derek Johnson (MLA for Interlake-Gimli) came and presented a plaque to Frank Barkman whose family was

one of the original Mennonite families to relocate to this area (and Frank still lives here to this day).

Thank you to all who came and contributed to making this day special. If you wish to view the events of the 75th anniversary, you can visit YouTube and search “Mennville EMC.”

– Michael Vanderzwaag



Aerial view of the celebration site in the afternoon.



MLA Derek Johnson presents Frank Barkman with 75th anniversary plaque



Worship team (“modern era”).

Golfers tee off to raise \$70K for Project Builders

PROJECT BUILDERS ONCE again had two fundraising golf tournaments this summer and, once again, people came to golf and to support a worthy cause.

The community showed its generosity and, ultimately, Project Builders came out as the clear winner of the tournament.

For the first time ever, La Crete, Alta., hosted their tournament before Steinbach, Man., did—yet the weather didn't cooperate there any better than last year. As the golf committee was busy praying for sunshine, the local farmers were praying for rain. Some may say that the farmers won this round, as the morning was dismal with a cool, steady rain that had most golfers drenched by the second hole.

Despite the weather, spirits remained high for most of the morning, but by lunch, people were ready for a break and there were very few

that ventured back out for the second nine holes in the afternoon. The lunch brisket on its own is worth the 21-hour drive that it takes for me to get to the La Crete tournament. The community showed its generosity and, ultimately, Project Builders came out as the clear winner of the tournament.



The Steinbach tournament experienced a fine day for golf.

Two days later in Steinbach, 130 golfers showed up to a cool, cloudy day that eventually would have golfers putting their jackets on and taking them off several times as the sun came and went from behind the clouds. Although I've never experienced a perfect day for golf, many expressed this sentiment throughout the day. A buffet lunch of pizza and chicken fingers as well as an amazing choice of desserts followed the 18 holes of golf.

Together, the two tournaments raised about \$70,000 to go towards the 18 different projects that we have pledged to support for this year in 14 different countries. Giving in general has been down in the last year, and Project Builders is currently about \$7,500 short of where we'd like to be. Donations, as well as a list of all projects for 2026, can be seen on our website at projectbuilders.ca.

— Luke Bartel



Privileged to return to service



Installing vinyl siding was one of many tasks the group performed.

IN THE SUMMER of 2019, while studying youth ministry at Steinbach Bible College, I had my first opportunity to serve with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS), helping rebuild homes in Grand Forks, B.C., following a flood.

This experience had a deep impact on my life. I learned many new skills. I

increased in confidence to face situations outside of my comfort zone. I built new friendships. All the while, my faith in Jesus was growing as I committed myself to serving others.

One of my weeks in Grand Forks, a youth pastor brought his youth group to volunteer. I tucked the idea away in the back of my mind: one day, when I graduate and become a youth pastor myself, maybe I could bring my own youth group to serve with MDS.

Seven years later, that idea became a reality.

July 26–August 1, 2026, now working as the youth pastor at the Steinbach EMC, three youth leaders and I brought ten of our senior youth to serve with MDS in Denare Beach, Sask., helping rebuild homes following a wildfire.

MDS is currently rebuilding four homes in Denare Beach. When our team arrived, the homes were at various stages of construction, giving our youth a variety of work—from hanging drywall, taping, mudding, and

painting to laying flooring, hanging vinyl siding, assembling deck railings, and moving cabinetry. Though much of this work was new to our team, MDS had experienced, long-term volunteers on site to provide training and guidance.

It was so rewarding for me to witness the very things that made my first MDS experience so impactful happening again to the youth on our team in Denare Beach. On this trip, I saw our youth learning new skills, increasing in confidence, building new friendships with each other and with older volunteers, all while growing in their love of serving others in the name of Jesus.

Though we rarely know exactly how, the work God does in our lives in the present is often done in order to impact the lives of others in the future. I believe our youth were deeply impacted through serving with MDS in Denare Beach; God only knows how this impact will be used to affect others in the years to come.

—Justin Marchand

The group who worked at Denare Beach, Sask., the week of July 26 to August 1, 2026.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Financial Reports

January-July 2026

	General Fund 2026	General Fund 2025
Income*	1,021,350	1,042,123
Expenses	1,212,713	1,245,306
Excess/Shortfall	(191,363)	(203,183)

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).*

EMC missionary Nancy Friesen is engaged

Nancy Friesen (Picture Butte Mennonite Church, EMC) and Matthew Braun (Hague Gospel Church, EMMC), are excited to announce their engagement and upcoming marriage on December 11, 2026, in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Following the wedding, Nancy will continue working in Amanecer with Misión Evangélica Menonita (MEM) in Bolivia, while Matthew will relocate to Bolivia as they begin their married life together. Matthew is currently applying to serve with MEM. They appreciate your prayers as they prepare for marriage and this new season of ministry together.



THE EMC BOARD of Missions is pleased to announce that Travis and Mary Diede (Abbeydale Christian Fellowship) have been accepted as associate missionaries. Travis served overseas in Taiwan and North Africa, and Mary in Tanzania, Chad, and France before getting married in 2021. They served together in France before returning to Calgary in 2024, where they now work with Borderless, a ministry of Africa Inland Mission, reaching out to immigrants and refugees in Calgary.



Travis and Mary Diede are the EMC's newest associate missionaries.

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@hlcfc-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. For more information, please visit aimmint.org/executive-coordinators-search.



Business Director, Radio Coordinator: Mennonite Community Services (Aylmer, Ont.)

Mennonite Community Services (MCS) is a Christian charity based in Aylmer, Ont. From a Jesus-centred lens, MCS serves people with various programs: settlement, radio,

family education and support, thrift stores and employment services.

MCS is seeking to fill the following two positions:

Business director: This role will be accountable for overseeing MCS's revenue-generating programs and its facilities.

Radio coordinator: This role will oversee programming for De Brigj Radio 105.9 FM.

The ideal candidates for these positions will embody the values of MCS, fostering a philosophy of faith and innovation while upholding compliance with regulatory standards and ethical practices. For more information, please contact Mary Giesbrecht, HR, at hr@mcson.org or 226-544-0380.

You may find the job postings on our website: <https://www.mcson.org/employment-opportunities>.



Youth for Christ

Youth Unlimited™ PORTAGE

North End Director, Drop-In Director, Campus Life Worker, Sports Director: Youth for Christ/Youth Unlimited (Portage la Prairie, Man.)

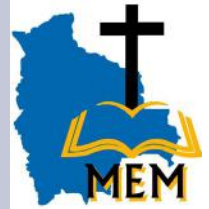
YFC in Portage is seeking to fill several vacancies on its staff: North End director, drop-in director, campus life worker, and sports director.

All applicants should:

- have a vibrant, mission-minded faith;
- demonstrate a strong theological / biblical understanding;
- possess strong collaborative people management skills;
- have well documented strategic thinking and planning abilities;
- have a passion to advocate on behalf of youth.

If you are passionate about serving today's youth, find out more about the positions available at <https://yfcportage.applytojobs.ca> or contact Executive Director Art Schroeder at art.schroeder@yfc.ca.

Misión Evangélica Menonita (Amanecer, Bolivia)



Teachers:

Amanecer School is a brand-new school for Low-German-speaking families in the Tres Cruces, Bolivia area, that started in 2025. It is financially and missionary supported by MEM but run by a director (principal) and local board.

We are looking for one or two individuals to teach all subjects at various grade and age levels. Applicants need to be proficient in Plautdietsch and English.

Please forward any inquiries to your local church's missions' representative, and/or directly to Nancy Friesen (director of the Amanecer School) at nancyfriesen2004@yahoo.ca or via Whatsapp at 591-634-82082.

Short-term pastoral couple: MEM 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.

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.

Do you ever feel super tiny?

HAVE YOU EVER felt super tiny? Whenever I stare down from an airplane window to the sprawling cities below, I feel my relative insignificance. I remember that each home equals a universe of relationships, obligations, and emotions multiplied by an entire community unknown to me.

I feel it, too, when I end up in a remote, quiet location and admire the nature around me—the life cycle of flowers and wildlife that exists unknown except by the Father who causes all things to grow. And tonight, I stay awake late after our church’s vacation Bible school (VBS) because I can’t help but worship the One who sends the brilliant lightning after a hot week in the middle of summer.

In Zechariah chapter 4, God says, “Who dares despise the day of small things” (v. 10), and I know that God works on the scale of the phenomenal, yet also the microscopic. The thunderstorm brings a million individual raindrops and somehow it quenches the thirst of my entire flower garden. I think back to the little hands wanting me to guide them through the VBS stations, to dirty faces contentedly eating snacks, and to young voices loudly singing out the name of Jesus. And I marvel that God uses the little things.

I drove home on the final day of VBS listening to my daughter listing off the themes from past years and remembering a Sunday school teacher who taught her a verse that she has never forgotten. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:3–4 ESV). *What is man that you, Jesus, have chosen to suffer for our sins, then to fit us together as a body called your bride? I’m amazed that I get to pause my schedule for the five afternoons of VBS so that I can be a tiny muscle moving your body in service to these children.*

I hope that when an account is given of my life, I can see that my tiny drop has watered where God has given an increase (1 Corinthians 3:6)! This week, among the fun and excitement, the precious, tiny seeds of God’s Word were sown, and we know that from a tiny mustard seed a magnificent tree can grow (Matthew 13:31–32)! I pray that I never grow tired of celebrating wherever God’s name is spoken because in

these last days he has spoken through his Son and that is very good news indeed (Hebrews 1:1–3).

Perhaps I’m being overly dramatic by painting this week as being so significant. But, rather, I think that I’m describing one of those tiny houses seen out of the plane window. By itself, it’s easily numbered and accounted for, but alongside others it creates a spectacular urban landscape. A VBS in the life of a church is easily forgotten (alongside the third verse in the hymnal), but the adjoining events and divinely orchestrated appointments are working together according to God’s perfect will.

As I watch the lightning flash brilliant once again, I hear echoes of the “very good” spoken over creation followed by the “It is finished” at the cross (Genesis 1:31; John 19:30). As the storm moves along and the days blur into weeks, I think about how the “very good” and “it is finished” is culminated by God’s proclamation at the end of the New Testament. When I dwell on these verses, they motivate me to joyful service in the little things! “He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children” (Revelation 21:6–7).

I know that God works on the scale of the phenomenal, yet also the microscopic.



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

Wanna fight? Just go to church

CHRISTIANITY SEEMS TO be incurably cantankerous.

This begins with the Bible. “Bible” comes from the Latin *bibliotheca*, meaning “library.” It’s not a book—it’s books. It’s a collection of strikingly different books written over thousands of years by dozens of authors clapped into one volume. The Scripture’s final collection was not settled until 300 years after Christ. In contrast, the Qur’an was written by one man and its form settled within 20 years of his death.

This library is a unity, but a noisy unity. Why does God think we need two slightly different accounts of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus and Deuteronomy? Why two quite different versions of Israel’s kings from the books of Kings and Chronicles? And most striking, why, at the centre of our faith, must we have *four* different versions of the story of Jesus?

This goes further into our deepest theology. Christians believe the Bible is both a human and divine book. Christ is both human and divine. God is both three and one. *Both*, going fiercely in two directions, and not some happy medium. Christianity is the struggle to stay on two horses at once. Heresies fall off one horse and simplify things. For example, “Jesus is not human, he is divine.” That’s much easier to explain to children and skeptics—but it’s wrong.

Our doctrines were quarrelled out in centuries of rancorous, even bloody controversy. The Chalcedonian Definition (AD 451), which (for us) settled the question of Christ’s human and divine natures, is still not accepted by many

Christian churches in the Middle East, though we all worship Jesus as human and divine.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says that for Jews—this is where Christianity gets it from—the truth was always in the space between things. God’s truth appears in the space between Moses and Isaiah and Esther, in their conversation

Christ is both human and divine. God is both three and one. *Both*, going fiercely in two directions, and not some happy medium.

within Scripture. He says, “I sometimes think the reason God chose the Jewish people was because he loves a good argument” (“The Beautiful Institution,” *Plough*, February 1, 2023). We can say the truth of Christ appears in the space between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, in their banter back and forth.

This is why discussion, debate, and controversy have been the default mode of the Jewish and Christian

faiths. We exist by arguing with God and with ourselves. The word “Israel” means *one who struggles with God*. This doesn’t mean everything in our faith is uncertain. Far from it. We have a closed canon and are done debating the Nicene Creed. Jesus is Lord. Period.

But the Christian faith will never be finalizable for us. There are always deeper depths to explore, and we often get deeper by descending to blows. To agree that God is both three and one is not to solve anything; it’s to point into a fathomless mystery that will keep the churches nattering till kingdom come.

Church, then, is like a feisty marriage between a man and a woman that endures but never resolves, never gets to a time when, sixty years in, he won’t shock her over breakfast with a comment from nowhere, provoking a sharp retort. Scripture with all its voices, calling this way and that, will never stop giving us something else to argue about.

There is finally one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. We will see this, though, when we learn to sit patiently together in the library and revel in the clamour of God’s books.

Layton Friesen is academic dean at Steinbach Bible College. He lives in Winnipeg, Man. Layton blogs at Sugar Creek Theology, www.laytonfriesen.ca.



Keeping ministry momentum

THIS SUMMER I had a chance to visit Eagle Lake Bible Camp (run by Blumenort Community Church) and Longbow Bible Camp (run by Ridgewood Church). It is exciting to see the flurry of activity when you arrive at a Bible camp. I was able to interview a couple of staff to understand why they thought camp was such an important part of their church ministry.

You can do years of ministry in a week of camp. There's just something about being together 24/7—eating, playing, worshipping—that you can't get at a youth group or drop-in.

Sam Pauls (Rosenort EMC): "I love to see kids growing in their faith and making it their own, because they're not at home anymore, and they can grow in themselves, as well as watching them learn new skills

and becoming competent and growing in their own confidence, and that's just so rewarding."

Jenna Sawatzky (Ridgewood Church): "I really believe in discipleship. A lot of our youth come to camp here, so I really appreciate continuing that relationship through the summer and being able to encourage them in their walk with Jesus. [Camp] is a big part of my testimony. So, I kind of want to pass that on to the next generation."

Kyra Sawatzky (Blumenort Community Church): "Students that attend Bible camp often point to their weeks at camp as faith-shaping moments of their lives and that is reason enough for camps to exist. But camps also play another significant role in discipleship. It is often in a camp setting that young

followers of Jesus are given the opportunity to lead for the first time. They are invited to serve as cabin leaders, teaching skills, leading games, or serving on worship teams. These are often skills that they haven't done in the context of their weekly church life."

Faith grows in the moments when we realize that we need God to accomplish ministry. Camp is filled with these moments, and this is what makes serving at camp a faith-building incubator.

By the time you read this article, most camps have wound down their summer activities. It would be easy to remember with fondness this past summer or look forward to next

summer. However, this is a significant time for action, especially with the young leaders who served at camps. Find ways to invite them to grow their leadership and ministry skills. This may require making extra room for apprentices or leaders in training in your ministries. Failing to find creative ways for these young leaders to serve would be an error.

Camp is a fantastic leadership pipeline. It begins by inviting children and youth to follow Jesus more closely and continues by developing these students into young ministers who are given significant responsibility. Churches need to continue this development by being ready to mentor and give these young leaders opportunities for meaningful service.

If you spent time at a Bible camp this summer, thank you! You may never know which of our future church leaders you had a hand in encouraging and developing.

EMC church health assessment

Assess how your church is doing in key ministry areas such as discipleship, engagement, outreach, and more. What are your church's next steps? An assessment is available from the EMC office by emailing info@emconference.ca.



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