

The Messenger

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE

Volume 64 No. 3 May/June 2026

Regional Leadership
Forum in Arborg, Man.,
on February 11, 2026.

EMBRACING
THE EMC
DISTINCTIVES
P. 4

FAITH ON THE INSIDE AND WORKS
ON THE OUTSIDE: AN INTRODUCTION
TO SEASON 3 OF THE ARMCHAIR
ANABAPTIST PODCAST
P. 9

GOD'S PRESENCE COME TO
LIFE: THE SUBTLE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN SACRAMENT AND
SACRAMENTAL
P. 14



MANAGING EDITOR
SCOTT MARBLE



EDITOR
REBECCA ROMAN

PUBLICATION AND PURPOSE

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.

Phone: 204-326-6401

messenger@emconference.ca

www.emcmessenger.ca

ISSN: 0701-3299

Publications Mail Agreement Number:

40017362

Second-class postage paid at Steinbach, MB

COPYRIGHT

The articles printed in *The Messenger* are owned by *The Messenger* or by the author and may not be reprinted without permission.

Unless noted, Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

SUBMISSIONS

Views and opinions of writers are their own and do not necessarily represent the position of the Conference or the editors.

Advertising and inserts should not be considered to carry editorial endorsement.

Letters, articles, and photos are welcome.

Submissions should be sent to messenger@emconference.ca.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Print subscriptions are free of charge to all members and adherents of EMC churches in Canada. For those not associated with an EMC church we suggest a donation of \$20/year.

To sign up for the email newsletter or submit an address change,

email messenger@emconference.ca.

ADVERTISING

The Messenger does not sell advertising, but provides free space (classified and display) to enhance our Conference, its churches, boards and ministries, inter-Mennonite agencies and educational institutions, and the wider church. Inquiries can be sent to messenger@emconference.ca.

Editor's Note

It's planting season!

“WHAT HAS KEPT us from planting more churches in the recent past?” EMC Director of Canadian Outreach Carl Heppner asked this question as part of his report during the April 18, 2026, conference council meeting (see the more detailed report on the weekend meetings on p. 25). It's been five years since EMC has planted a church, he said; the most recent is Bow Island EMC in Alberta, which was planted in 2021.

The poll question to go with his report shows that respondents believe the biggest barrier to planting new churches is a lack of leaders willing to go out (see chart).

This makes sense. We've seen this in other areas as well. While the situation is not as bleak as it was about a year ago, several of our churches continue to look for pastoral leadership without a positive result. Some of the EMC's boards are struggling to find members. (If you know of someone—possibly yourself!—who would be a good fit for the Board of Church Ministries, the board responsible for this award-winning publication and more, talk to EMC Executive Director Emery Plett.)

And for the other barriers that were presented as possibilities, the EMC has a pretty strong game plan. For example, church plants receive financial support from the Conference for up to 10 years. We also provide resourcing and support through national office staff, equipping events, and other resources.

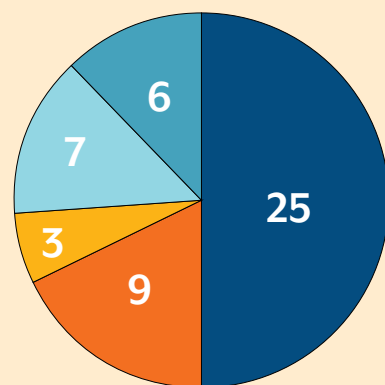
Hopefully, as a Conference with the motto “live, reach, gather and teach,” we also have a vision for reaching our communities. However, as Heppner challenged, when our churches think about meeting the needs of our communities, is the expectation that people will come to us with their needs? Or, are we considering how we can “go out and meet them in their need?”

Further to that point, Heppner said, “Do you know what the needs are in your community? And have you, as a congregation, been talking about how you will encounter and walk with those who are in need in your community? That's the basis upon which we have this drive to be a people that plant churches, that meet people where they're at and proclaim the good news wherever we go.”

In an increasingly secular society, we know that the fields are indeed “ripe for harvest” (John 4). Significantly, when Jesus says this, he has just encountered the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus went to a specific place at a specific time to meet a specific need. Let's do the same. EMCers, it's planting season!

— Rebecca Roman

In your church, what would be the biggest barrier to planting a new church in your region?



- Leaders willing to go out
- Vision for reaching the community
- Financial resources
- Other
- Supports for planting

CONTENTS

MAY/JUNE 2026

FEATURES

4 **Embracing the EMC distinctives**

By Andy Woodworth

Conference Pastor Andy Woodworth wraps up “The appeal of...” series by exploring the values that make us distinctly EMC. What are our unique qualities that can draw us to unity?

9 **Faith on the inside and works on the outside: An introduction to season 3 of *The Armchair Anabaptist* podcast**

By GERALYN WICHERS

The upcoming season of the podcast explores what it looks like to balance right belief with right practice.

14 **God’s presence come to life: the subtle difference between sacrament and sacramental**

By Nathan Bartel

A recap of the SBC Leadership Conference (March 13–14, 2026) where Patrick Franklin spoke on The Transformative Presence of Jesus in Baptism and Communion.

COLUMNS

19 **Global impact Missionary newsletters: vulnerability and accountability**

By Gerald Reimer

34 **His light to my path God over technology**

By Karla Hein

35 **Further in and higher up Libertarian cats and thoughts on freewill**

By Layton Friesen

36 **Inspiring faith Would you pray a blessing for these people?**

By Mo Friesen

DEPARTMENTS

- 2 Editor’s Note
- 20 Global Focus
- 21 Local Focus
- 25 News
- 30 Letters and Notices
- 31 Books and More
- 32 Shoulder Tapping

Embracing

the
EMC

truth

people

relationships
and Christian
community

obedience

discipleship

distinctives

By Andy Woodworth

Editors' note: To wrap up our series on "The appeal of..." that ran from May/June 2025 to Mar/Apr 2026, Conference Pastor Andy Woodworth guides us in finding unity through diversity by embracing our key EMC distinctives.

ITALIAN-BRITISH CELEBRITY CHEF Gino D'Acampo appeared on the British TV show *This Morning* and prepared pasta carbonara live. As he completed the dish, co-host Holly Willoughby suggested adding bacon or ham. Gino strongly rejected the idea, saying, "If my grandmother had wheels, she would have been a bike!"

His passionate comment stems from his love of cooking and the belief that for a dish to be true to itself, it must include ingredients in specific proportions. Adding, subtracting, or substituting flavours or ingredients simply alters the dish. It eventually becomes something different from what it was meant to be.

For the past few years, I have asked what it means to be the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. What are the elements that make us who we are? What combination of flavours gives us a distinct style and approach to ministry that identifies us as being EMC? What values do we commonly hold that shape our ministry mindset? Because they exist. We may not be able to readily articulate just what those individual ingredients are, or their prominence in the overall makeup. But when we experience it, we just know: this is it. By contrast, we also know instinctively when something is just out of proportion.

The Messenger series "The appeal of..." explored a variety of ecclesiastical flavours: Reformed evangelicalism,

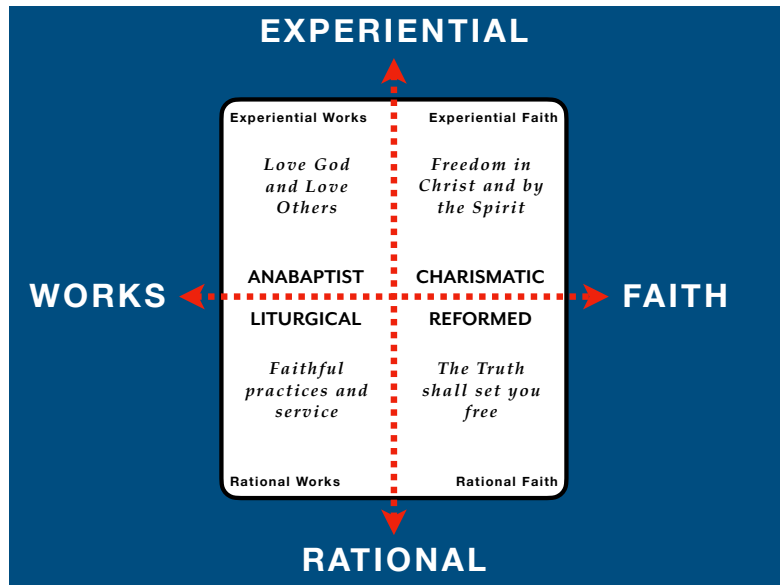


Diagram A

traditional/liturgical practices, charismatic evangelicalism, progressive Christianity, and fundamentalism. We are not taking up a posture of fortifying ourselves against the influences of different leanings, nor wanting to be so ambiguous as to lose all sense of community identity. We see the value in exploring the appeal of other styles to gain a renewed appreciation for our own unique qualities.

Unity and diversity of the body of Christ

Part of our Mennonite culture is to avoid pride at all costs and always present ourselves in the humblest ways. However, recognizing what we do well and acknowledging the unique makeup of our Conference is not about taking pride in our own achievements. It helps us see that we contribute something meaningful to the overall church community. I believe there is something about the EMC that addresses specific needs within our culture, which is worth acknowledging.

As a visual learner, I like to use diagrams. In thinking about the overall work of the church, I use a box divided into four quadrants [see Diagram A]. The box is divided into two horizontal sections describing the key motivations for behaviours. The top half is Experiential, meaning

behaviours are driven more by feeling than by reason, while the bottom half is Rational, meaning behaviours are driven more by reason than by feeling. The diagram is also split vertically to describe the expressive values. The left side is motivated by Works, valuing the practical application of faith. The right side is motivated by Faith, valuing beliefs that drive one's practices.

Those motivated by Experiential Faith (upper-right quadrant), such as charismatics, hold beliefs that must be lived out through their words, behaviours, and worship. Those who operate with Rational Faith (lower-right quadrant), such as the Reformed movement, value well-articulated doc-

trine to adhere to a set of beliefs grounded in a high regard for Scripture as the Word of God. Within the Rational Works quadrant (lower-left), such as mainline or liturgical churches, they maintain carefully thought-through practices that they participate in to express or live out their faith. Finally, those inspired by Experiential Works (top-left quadrant), such as the Anabaptists, value the lived experiences of worshipping and serving together.

force within the world. When we are competing with one another for ecclesiastical superiority, then we are no more than "a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1).

There exists a counterbalance within the body of Christ, obtained not by having all groups converge at the center as one homogeneous church, but by having a heterogeneous church marked by unified diversity. The EMC maintains certain distinctives that set us apart from other Christian churches in Canada. These nuances do not put us in competition with other churches. Instead, they are meant to enhance the church's overall work. The important question is, "Do we recog-

The EMC maintains certain distinctives that set us apart from other Christian churches in Canada. These nuances do not put us in competition with other churches. Instead, they are meant to enhance the church's overall work. The important question is, "Do we recognize the value we bring to the table as the EMC?"

trine to adhere to a set of beliefs grounded in a high regard for Scripture as the Word of God. Within the Rational Works quadrant (lower-left), such as mainline or liturgical churches, they maintain carefully thought-through practices that they participate in to express or live out their faith. Finally, those inspired by Experiential Works (top-left quadrant), such as the Anabaptists, value the lived experiences of worshipping and serving together.

nize the value we bring to the table as the EMC?"

What makes us who we are?

Methodist theologian Albert Outler coined the phrase Wesleyan Quadrilateral to explain how Christian beliefs and practices are shaped by Scripture. Outler asserted that Scripture is understood through the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience. A few generations ago, the majority of members within the Conference would have been born and raised within an Anabaptist tradition. Most would have shared experiences of culture, language, and lifestyle (mostly rural). Sunday school curriculum, Bible college training, and Sunday sermons would have promoted commonly held theological thoughts, which shaped the EMC way.

Going back further, to historical Anabaptist tradition, six tenets were held dear: (1) Christ-centred reading of Scripture, (2) Salvation through

repentance and obedience, (3) Active service as a demonstration of faith, (4) The believer as an agent of peace, (5) The visible church being the community of believers, and (6) Being in the world but not of the world. These beliefs contributed to the foundation of the EMC way.

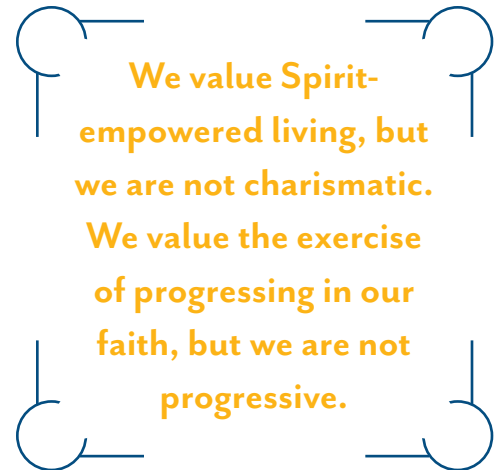
Today, our members have not necessarily been born and raised within the Anabaptist tradition. Our experiences have been more diverse because of advancements in technology and the ease of travel. Our studies have included sources not necessarily restricted to or aligned with the traditional Anabaptist theological camp. Scripture, therefore, is no longer solely interpreted by the EMC way. The reality is, we struggle somewhat to define what the EMC way is anymore. We recognize that individuals and churches are, to varying degrees, being influenced by the appeal of Reformed evangelicalism, traditional/liturgical practices, charismatic evangelicalism, progressive Christianity, and fundamentalism. The EMC way has become murky.

We might say we are having a bit of an identity crisis as a Conference, but that does not have to be viewed negatively. We have the opportunity to engage in a conversation about values, beliefs, practices, and traditions. We have this moment to look honestly at who we are and reflect on who or what we want to be as we move forward. So, what do we want it to mean, to be EMC?

Our values define us

We are not a franchise of churches, all looking and sounding the same. Nevertheless, there is something that connects us—a flavour and texture that we recognize when we experience it. Exploring other church proclivities is meant to help us lean into what we are designed and gifted to be as the EMC.

You see, we value the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but we are not fundamentalists. We value Spirit-empowered living, but we are not charismatic. We value the exercise of progressing in our faith, but we are not progressive. We value the richness of ritual and tradition, but we are not liturgical. We value doctrine that re-forms the church and individuals, but we are not Reformed.



All those ingredients may be present in our Conference, but mixed and proportioned in a way that defines us, that distinguishes us, that identifies us as the EMC.

At the heart of who we are, we see characteristics that define and empower us to contribute to the greater work of Christ in our world. A few years ago, we defined these as EMC Core Values, and they help clarify who we are today.

We Value Relationships and Christian Community: As a family of churches, we affirm that, in Christ, we are part of a shared faith story, historically and theologically, and that this fellowship builds us up. In offering mutual support, we learn from one another and are enriched together. We value the cooperation this relationship affords, realizing we can do more together than we can individually. (Ephesians 4:3–6; Galatians 3:26–29; Romans 12:4–5)

We Value the Truth: Jesus is the Truth, and he is faithfully revealed in Scripture. We hold biblical doctrine to be of primary importance and seek to interpret the Scriptures together. We value the theological approach of the early Anabaptists who read Scripture through the lens of Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Joshua 1:8; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39)

We Value People: Human beings are created in God's image, and his desire is for all people to be reconciled to himself through Christ. That is our desire, too. With compassion, we seek to carry the good news of salvation in Christ to people

near and far. (John 3:16; Luke 2:10–11; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 18:14)

We Value Obedience: We believe that to love Jesus is to walk in reverent obedience to him. He calls us to a life of love. Within this calling, we are to obey the commission of Christ to make disciples of all nations. (John 14:15, 21, 23; Romans 13:8–10; 1 John 5:1–3; Matthew 28:18–20)

We Value Discipleship: We value people growing in maturity as they follow Christ in a life of worship, prayer, and deepening faith. We value the calling and developing of mature church leaders. We want our faith to be seen in a life of integrity and authenticity. We want to discern God’s leading for our lives, individually and corporately. (Mark 8:34–35; Romans 12:1–2; James 2:17; Ephesians 4:13)

I’ve come to realize we don’t grow because of what we do, we grow because of who we are. Those values that define us—community, truth, people, service, and discipleship—are ingredients that, when combined, form the thing that many are longing for or need.

We are the EMC

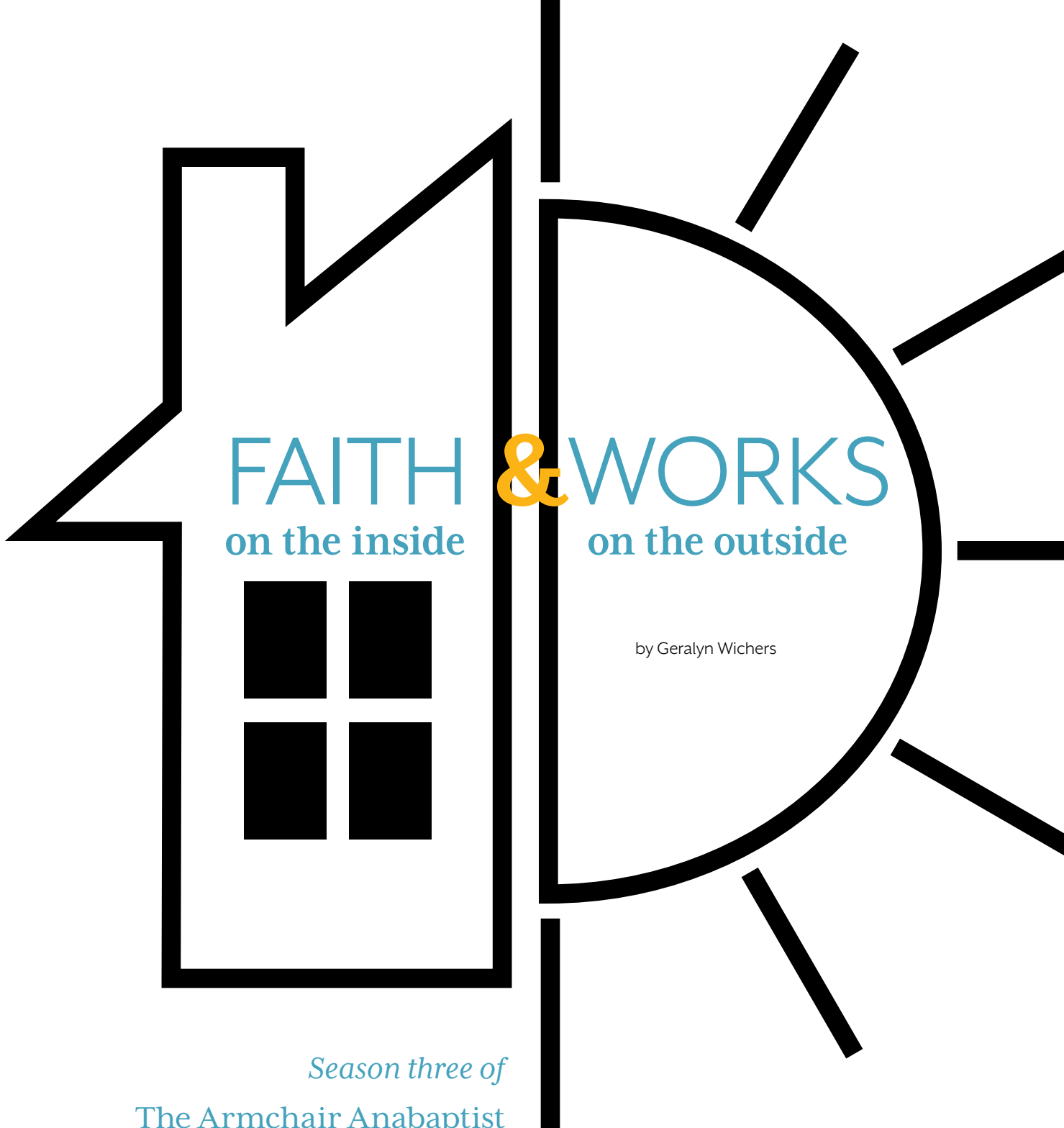
When churches are growing, I will always ask them, “What are you doing to attract the people who are showing up?” Often, the church leaders cannot answer that question comprehensively. I’ve come to realize we don’t grow because of what we do, we grow because of who we are. Those values that define us—community, truth, people, obedience, and discipleship—are ingredients that, when combined, form the thing that many are longing for or need.

Whether we are talking about a conference, a church, or a Christian, when we do what we are created and gifted to do, in the way Christ leads us to do it, we find spiritual fulfillment, genuine results (good fruit), and a spirit of joy abounding. Asking what it means to be the Evangelical Mennonite Conference is not an attempt to change or undermine who we are, but to clarify it, so we can live it out with passion and confidence.

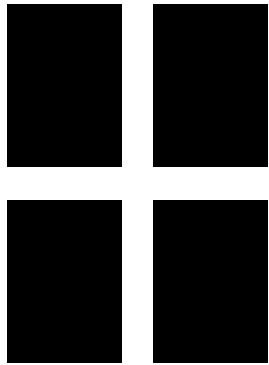
In the end, we do not want to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but neither do we want to think of ourselves as insignificant to the broader work of the church or live in comparison to other styles of churches. We want to think of ourselves with “sober judgment” in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of us, but that does not mean seeing ourselves in a disparaging or irrelevant way (Romans 12:3). The EMC has a role to play, and we want to be true to our calling, in our homes, our communities, our nation, and our world. Let us embrace and celebrate what it means to be the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

Andy Woodworth has served as the EMC conference pastor for the past three years. He brings over 35 years of pastoral ministry experience into this role. He and his wife Stephanie live in Landmark, Man.





FAITH
on the inside



& WORKS
on the outside

by GERALYN WICHERS

*Season three of
The Armchair Anabaptist
podcast explores the roles of belief
and good works in the life of the
Mennonite believer*

D

Dennis Rader

*said, “I was
a good man,
who just did
bad things.”*

Who is Dennis Rader? True crime fans will recognize his name, because Dennis Rader is a serial killer better known as BTK—an acronym for his modus operandi. He bound, tortured and killed his ten victims.

Before his arrest in February 2005, we probably would have thought Rader was one of us. Just shy of his sixtieth birthday at the time, Rader had two grown kids, had been a scout leader, and had served as president of the council of Christ Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kansas, according to an October 2005 article from *The Christian Century*.

“Dad wasn’t the black hat. He’d been the white hat—the good guy,” wrote

Rader’s daughter Kerri Rawson in her 2019 memoir *A Serial Killer’s Daughter*. “The guy who saved the day. The hero—my hero.”

Was Rader a good guy who did bad things? Did he believe what he heard in church? Even if one doesn’t know the details of his crimes, most would probably say no—he couldn’t possibly have believed it. Why? Because of his deeds.

But wait. I believe what I hear in church and I also do bad things. I don’t “bind, torture and kill,” but I can be self-indulgent, self-centred, and unkind with the best of them. What do my deeds say about me?

Faith or works: what’s more important?

I joined Jesse Penner and Andrew Dyck as hosts of *The Armchair Anabaptist* in 2025. *The Armchair Anabaptist*, an EMC podcast, seeks to take Anabaptist theology out of our armchairs and into our world.

As a journalist with an agricultural news company, I am the only non-pastor in the group.

As we began planning the third season of *The Armchair Anabaptist* podcast, I and my fellow hosts Jesse Penner and Andrew Dyck anchored ourselves in James 2:14–26. James writes, “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” (James 2:14).

The centre of James’s argument is the story of Abraham who, at God’s bidding, took his son Isaac up a mountain and prepared to sacrifice him. At the last moment, God stays Abraham’s hand and provides a ram instead. “You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did,” James says (2:22). He concludes, “faith without deeds is dead” (2:26). Faith and works can be a real tightrope.

Andy Woodworth calls it the “battle of the orthos.” Orthodoxy (right beliefs) versus orthopraxy (right practice). Woodworth is the EMC’s conference pastor. He spoke with Jesse Penner for episodes nine and ten.

Martin Luther, a contemporary of the earliest Anabaptists, didn’t like the book of James, Darryl Klassen told me in an interview for two episodes of *The Armchair Anabaptist*. Klassen is an adjunct professor at Steinbach Bible College, where he teaches Anabaptist History. Luther, a tortured soul who felt he could never please God, found his life transformed by Romans 1:17, “the righteous will live by faith.” He swung hard toward justification by faith and stuck by it even when he found in his own congregation people were living as they pleased.

The early Anabaptists weren’t satisfied with this. “They widened or thickened the definition of faith,” said Layton Friesen, academic dean and professor of Bible and theology at Steinbach Bible College. “When they said that we were saved by faith alone ... what the Anabaptists meant was that we are saved by an obedient, loving faith that’s willing to suffer with Christ.” When they said they are saved by grace, Friesen explained, they meant not only God’s undeserved favour but also the offer of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, “just like the sunshine on the soil just awakens the soil and causes it to grow plants ... that’s how salvation happens ... it’s this faith empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good works,” Friesen said. “That’s the whole package in terms of justification.”

Yet, while this definition balanced the role of works as an outworking of faith, in practice Anabaptists tended to fall off on one side of the tightrope. “We tend to feel the most comfortable in the orthopraxy,” Woodworth said, “I don’t think there’s a lot of cases ... where

“When they said that we were saved by faith alone ... what the Anabaptists meant was that we are saved by an obedient, loving faith that’s willing to suffer with Christ.”



– Layton Friesen

we're dividing over certain creeds, but we certainly divide over certain behaviours and practices."

While this tendency to emphasize works stemmed from a desire to take the Bible seriously, historically it presented challenges. In their desire to maintain the right lifestyle, they frequently tipped over into a tradition of do's and don'ts, Klassen said.

The Kleine Gemeinde (now the EMC) emerged from a church community that they saw as slipping into spiritual stagnation. Kleine Gemeinde leader Klaus Reimer was sickened when a community member bragged in church about beating his servant. The man had even brought the stick to church, Klassen said. "Klaus Reimer was just sickened by that and said, like 'what have we become?'" It seems that works without faith are also dead.

Works at the speed of the Spirit

"We actually are created for good works," said, James Driedger, senior pastor of Blumenort Community Church (EMC) and podcast guest. Those things don't save us, but out of the life-giving grace we receive and out of our identity as creations of God we do those works. The Anabaptists believed that the Holy Spirit gave power to change and to actually live like Jesus. However, change takes time.

Of the interviews I did, a story about a South German Anabaptist named Pilgram Marpeck (a baby name that should make a comeback) stuck with me. Marpeck criticized the Swiss Anabaptists for what he saw as an overly harsh attitude toward sin, Layton Friesen told me. This attitude led the Swiss brethren to frequently excommunicate people who were struggling with sin. "[Marpeck] just found this alarming," Friesen said. "He wrote some really harsh letters ... saying, 'if you guys actually believe in the Holy Spirit, if you really believe that the works of righteousness, sanctification is produced by the Holy Spirit ... then you're going to have to just be patient.'" "You have to actually kind of work at the pace of the Holy Spirit."

I find this concept to be encouraging. As I said, I'm no BTK killer, but despite my sincere desire to do good, I struggle with sins I can't seem to shake. I sometimes quote Romans 7 to myself. In verse 19, Paul laments that he doesn't do the good he wants to do and he does the things he hates.

Paul says in Romans 7:24-25, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" We see a fascinating dance on the tightrope of faith and works. Bible school professors would call it the already and not yet. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good works, and yet, we won't be perfected until our final deliverance in Christ Jesus.



"When we bring our sin into the light and stop trying to hide it, then we can actually have true fellowship."

– Arlene Friesen

Confession and the true community

In this season of *The Armchair Anabaptist* we noted that when there's a strong emphasis on works, sin is often driven underground—still there, but secret lest anyone find out who we really are.

John writes in 1 John 1:6-7 that if we claim to have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness, we don't live out the truth. If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and Jesus's blood cleanses us from sin. "I used to hear that verse ... and would hear 'I have to walk in the light, like I have to do right in order to have fellowship with others and to be cleansed from sin,'" said Arlene Friesen, a former professor at Steinbach Bible College. "It became like a weight, instead of hearing it as ... when we bring our sin into the light and stop trying to hide it, then we can actually have true fellowship." "The true self who acknowledges the sin and confesses it is facing another true self who is also doing the same thing," Friesen said. "Then also the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from that sin ... we receive that cleansing."

We took a podcast episode to look at the role of confession in the health of the Christian and the church. I championed this topic because for me, confession has been transformative. About a year ago, I confessed a bad habit to my family. I felt pathetic and exposed as I recorded a voice message for the family group chat, but I asked for help. Within minutes, messages of support came back and I had recruited allies in my fight. I've started to see confession of sin as just that—recruitment of allies in the battle against sin. For that matter, one can ask for help pre-emptively by saying to a trusted believer, "I'm tempted to sin. Please pray for me."

This is a vulnerable position. You are, in effect, handing the other the rope that's around your neck. They can help you remove the noose, but they can also use it to hang you.

However, when a culture of transparency is fostered, it makes space for true community, said counsellor and spiritual director Peter Ascough. People crave to be "safe and seen and soothed and secure, and here we are modelling it," Ascough



“Even in our imperfections we can all be saying ‘come join us as we are moving together towards this ... towards true community.’”

– Peter Ascough

told me. “Even in our imperfections we can all be saying ‘come join us as we are moving together towards this ... towards true community.’”

True community will walk through the challenges and discomforts and give grace to one another, as God grants grace to us. Confession and repentance serve to bring faith and works together. Our belief in and love for Christ drives us to be the same on the inside as on the outside. Join Andrew, Jesse and me as we explore this further in the upcoming season of *The Armchair Anabaptist*.

Geralyn Wichers is an editor and agricultural journalist who has written for publications like *The Western Producer*, *Manitoba Co-operator* and *Country Guide*. She attends Evangelical Fellowship Church (EMC) in Steinbach, Man.



GOD'S PRESENCE COME TO LIFE

*the subtle difference between
sacrament and sacramental*

by Nathan Bartel

SBC Leadership Conference
March 13-14, 2026
weekend recap

SBC'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE topic this year was The Transformative Presence of Jesus in Baptism and Communion. Patrick Franklin, associate professor of theology at Tyndale University, was the main speaker for this weekend. He assumed the task of walking through perspectives on baptism and communion not familiar in our churches. These perspectives explored the presence of Jesus in baptism and communion.

To explain how Jesus is present in these church practices, Franklin introduced a definition of sacrament that transcends church denominations. But first, Franklin defined sacramental as "God's presence in all things."

He then gave an overview of the grand story of God's presence among God's people from the garden of Eden to Jesus to the Holy Spirit and to the church. Franklin finally showed us how two church practices, baptism and communion, embody the gospel story and how Jesus is present with us in them.

Patrick Franklin during the panel discussion.



Sacramentality

When we hear the words sacrament or sacramental we might have a negative reaction initially. We might assume that sacraments are too Catholic. In our minds, we might immediately protest the idea of a works-based salvation. But this is not a true picture of what sacramental means in the life of the church. Sacramental, as described by Franklin, is the “presence of God in and through his creation.”

The sacramental refers to the physical expression of a spiritual reality within. We believe that God created the world, and we believe that “through him all things were made” (John 1:3). We also believe that God is ever present in all of creation because “in him all things hold together” (Colossians

1:17). We believe that God is present everywhere. Surely, then, we believe that God is present in our churches too.

The idea of sacramental is articulated by the Anabaptist scholar John D. Rempel in his book *Recapturing an Enchanted World*. Rempel explains that sacramentality is the hiddenness of Christ become visible. In the life of the church, we act out this spiritual presence with rituals and ceremonies symbolically, and then bring the presence of God into the world within us. In this definition, symbolically doesn't mean that God is not actually present when we perform these actions. God is present in creation, in our churches and in our lives. God's presence is at work through his creation. With these definitions of sacramentality, we can see that all created things are sacramental. All of creation shows that God is present.

Practically we know this is true. In our church services we believe that the Spirit is at work. When we sing worship songs to God, we know the Holy Spirit is present. When we pray as a church body together, we know that Jesus is present. When our pastors are preaching, we know the Holy Spirit is working through them as they deliver their sermons. When we share our praises and prayer requests with each other, we know that Jesus is present and hears our prayers. Beyond this, if we believe the claim in Colossians that “all things have been created through him and for him” (1:16), when we go on hikes in nature and witness a beautiful sunset, we see God's presence all around us. Christ is present in all things.

A helpful way to visualize this presence is in the image of a temple. In the ancient world, people would build temples for the pagan gods to inhabit and



to encounter their presence. Franklin uses the biblical imagery of the garden of Eden as a temple to show how God is present in our world. The garden in the creation account is God's temple. We see that the garden is where humans encounter God. In this temple of creation, humans experience the presence of God constantly and clearly. But the fall (Genesis 3) distorts our ability to experience God's presence. Humanity has been separated from God through our own actions, and sinfulness causes humanity to hide from the presence of God. Through sin and separation from God, it becomes difficult to truly experience God's presence.

This separation hinders the role that humans were created for. Franklin explains that humans are special creatures, meant to be God's representatives on earth. Humans inhabit this special place as priests to the world. In other words, humans act on God's behalf in the world. But the distortion of sin prevents humans from accomplishing this task. Instead, you can see throughout the biblical narrative an attempt to fulfill this calling that never comes to be. First with Adam, then Moses and David, the Bible is full of humans falling short of this priestly calling.

However, God in his wisdom sends his son, Jesus, into the world to become the perfect mediating priest on our behalf. It is through Jesus that the world experiences the literal presence of God. Jesus is the Word of God become human, while remaining fully God. Jesus is the perfect priest, the mediator of God's grace and presence to creation. If a temple is where we experience God's presence, Franklin believes that first the garden was the temple, then Jesus became the temple.

Then, after Jesus' death and at Pentecost, Jesus sends out God's Spirit to live among and within the disciples. Jesus' followers become the temple of God, the place where you can encounter God. It is through the Holy Spirit that the church becomes the temple where you can encounter God. The church is the body of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Sacraments vs sacramentality

What does this have to do with baptism and communion? After all, we believe that God is present in all of creation. This means he is present in our lives, including when we pray. We are also fed spiritually when we participate in worship services and listen to the Word. We encounter God in all these practices. But there is a difference between creation and these practices.

While the world is sacramental—Jesus' presence in and through all things—sacraments are specific practices that reveal Christ's grace to us. Sacraments are practices that embody the gospel narrative. This is the difference between sacramental and sacrament; while creation is sacramental, not everything is a sacrament. In the wider protestant tradition, we believe there are two sacraments, baptism and communion. These are the specific and special parts of creation to which Jesus reveals his presence. When we witness and participate in these sacraments, we are encountering Jesus' presence.

What makes baptism and communion different?

Baptism and communion are different because they were given to us by Jesus. In other words, Jesus has ordered us to do these things. The word ordinance

IF A TEMPLE
IS WHERE WE
EXPERIENCE
GOD'S
PRESENCE,
FRANKLIN
BELIEVES THAT
FIRST THE
GARDEN WAS
THE TEMPLE,
THEN JESUS
BECAME THE
TEMPLE.

BAPTISM AND
COMMUNION
ARE WAYS TO
PHYSICALLY
INTERACT WITH
THE GOSPEL
AND TANGIBLY
EXPERIENCE
CHRIST'S
PRESENCE.



reflects this reality. An ordinance is a rule or order meant to be followed. Jesus commanded us to baptize and to take communion, and so we follow his instruction. While obeying Jesus is enough to communicate to us that baptism and communion are different, this is not the only reason they are set apart.

Baptism and communion proclaim the gospel. If the entirety of creation is proclaiming God's presence, baptism and communion proclaim the gospel message specifically. These two church sacraments especially proclaim Jesus' death and resurrection. In baptism we die with Jesus, and we are raised to life with Jesus. We are joining in the gospel message and committing ourselves to Jesus. Similarly, in communion, as Paul summarizes, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Participating in communion reveals what Jesus did on our behalf and is a continual reminder of that sacrifice. Both sacraments are ways that creation can proclaim the gospel story.

Humans are physical beings and experience the world through physical interaction. There is a common phrase (attributed to Bob Fosse) in musical theatre that I think summarizes the human experience of physicality: "When emotions are too strong for words, sing. When emotions are too strong for song, dance." We as humans express ourselves physically because sometimes words don't fully express how we feel. It's why we hug

Conference attendees listen during Franklin's presentation.

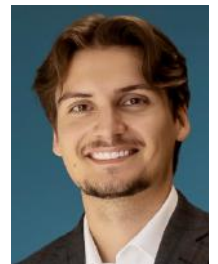
our close friends after a long separation or embrace our spouses to tell them we love them. Physical acts communicate things to us in a way that words don't always make clear. Baptism and communion are ways to physically interact with the gospel and tangibly experience Christ's presence. Participating in church sacraments is a direct way we interact with Jesus.

What does this mean for the church?

When we combine all the factors that add into the role that baptism and communion play as sacraments in our churches, we begin to understand the rich and deep ways that Jesus meets us with his presence. Jesus commanded us to be baptized and to baptize others. When we do so, we are dying with Jesus and being raised with Jesus in new life.

Jesus commanded us to partake in communion. When we do so, we are proclaiming Jesus' death and resurrection. Both are physical ways we encounter the gospel message in our churches and experience the sacramental dimension of those two sacraments. We should treat them with respect and understand the wonderful gift that they are from Jesus. A gift that enables us to encounter Jesus continually.

Nathan Bartel has served as the admissions counsellor at Steinbach Bible College. He loves hiking and seeing God's wonderful creation.



Nathan and his wife live in Steinbach, Man, where you can find them walking, cycling, and playing pickleball on summer afternoons.

Missionary newsletters: vulnerability and accountability

“WHAT AN EXCITING day! This morning I picked up 210 copies of the Gospel of Luke!!!!” That is the first sentence of a recent newsletter that we received from Paul Thiessen after more than 30 years of translation work in West Africa.

As the director of the EMC’s mission program, I have the incredible privilege of receiving numerous newsletters every week. I love reading about the stories, the joys, the challenges and the insights that our workers have as they

serve around the world. Attached pictures are always an added blessing.

I remember clearly, as a young fellow, when missionaries came to report at Pleasant Valley, my home church. I felt anticipation as I sat in the pew watching them set up their slide projector, some even with the double stack. And then the excitement of the presentation itself—the pictures from faraway lands, of course, always ending with a beautiful sunset picture. These reports

were part of the seeds that the Lord was sowing in my heart. While the call to go into full-time missions and ministry only came years later, thankfully, the Spirit of God was working in me along the way.

Today, newsletters, missionary reports, and social media posts allow our workers to be in constant communication with their sending base. They give us a powerful and engaging window into their lives. Calls for prayer regarding specific things can happen at the exact time they are engaged in ministry, prompting God’s people to intercede immediately. What a privilege that we can partner with workers across the world.

I don’t know how many newsletters you are signed up to receive, but I encourage you to go to our website, emcmissions.ca, and sign up for as many as you can. The effort the workers put into preparing them can weigh heavily on them—being vulnerable to stakeholders who desire to support, pray, and give, but also who often have questions about sustainability, stewardship, and strategy. Workers strive to be honest, but at the same time are tempted to *sell* their vision that it is worth your and my support to keep them on the field.

My recommendation is to receive and prayerfully digest the stories, praise items, and prayer requests that are shared and to respond with a vision to strengthen your partnership so that their work can continue fruitfully.

Chris and Katie Koop



Home Church: Kleefeld EMC

Agency: EMC Missions

Serving in Mexico

The Board of Missions is pleased to announce that Chris and Katie Koop (Kleefeld EMC) have been accepted to join the mission work in Guadalajara, Mexico. They have begun pre-field orientation and are preparing to leave this summer for Texas to begin learning Spanish at RGBI. Following their year of studies, they will move to Guadalajara to join Angel and Blanca Infantes in the church planting work. Please pray for the Koops as they embrace this call on their lives together with their young children Sawyer and Oaklee.

[Sign-Up for the Koops Newsletter](#)

This EMC missions website screenshot shows the profile page with newsletter sign-up button for newest missionaries Chris and Katie Koop.



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

Crossing the threshold to hope

By Elsa Hein
Paraguay

Elsa and Bertram Hein have served as directors of Alto Refugio for 15-plus years. This ministry to people dealing with HIV/AIDS in Asunción, Paraguay, has welcomed and ministered to hundreds of individuals and families through the years. Begun by EMC missionaries David and Judy Schmidt, the EMC continues to support Alto Refugio through Project Builders and other special projects. Elsa has been compiling short stories and testimonies of many of these dear people. Enjoy reading the following story of God's transformative work in Angel's life.

AT ALTO REFUGIO, the first visit is much more than a formality; it is the moment when masks are allowed to fall. When a young man named Angel stepped through our door for the first time, he looked like someone carrying the weight of the entire world on

his shoulders. Our coworker Cinthia—petite and delicately built but blessed with an inner strength that leaves no room for doubt—welcomed him. She invited him into the counselling room, but Angel stood rooted to the spot in the doorway. His gaze fixated on the book on the table. “I don’t want to be in this room,” he said with a hoarse voice. “Not with a Bible on the table. This book only shows me that I have burdened myself with a lot of guilt.”

At this moment, the story could have ended. However, Cinthia did not respond with accusations, but with a calmness that filled the room. She promised him that the Bible was not a book of accusation, but a guide to freedom. She explained to him that forgiveness is an offer to everyone—a door that is open, but through which one must walk themselves.

The ice broke. Angel sat down and began to talk. He spoke of the

dark years he had spent working in a brothel. A life on the edge, characterized by coldness and loneliness. The end came abruptly: His boss ordered HIV tests for all employees. Angel’s result was positive. With the diagnosis came dismissal. He stood before nothing—marked by a disease and haunted by his past, he was devastated.

Cinthia listened without judging. She helped him change his perspective: sometimes God leads us down paths that we initially do not understand. What feels like the end can be protection from an even deeper abyss. She showed him that God has a plan that goes beyond a medical diagnosis.

What happened next touched us deeply. Angel confessed with tears in his eyes: “I have been searching for God for so long. But I never knew where and how to find him.” The supposed “accusation” he had feared in the Bible turned into an invitation. He asked Cinthia to write down the Bible verses she had read to him. He didn’t want to say a prayer immediately in front of others—he wanted to go home, read the words in silence, and make his beginning with Christ all alone, without an audience.

Angel left, but he is no longer alone. He now carries words of hope in his pocket. We at Alto Refugio now accompany him in the most important way possible for us: in prayer. We trust that the Holy Spirit will continue the work that began in this small counseling room.



Elsa Hein inside Alto Refugio.

Angel confessed with tears in his eyes: “I have been searching for God for so long. But I never knew where and how to find him.”

Being the church in Winnipeg's Spence neighbourhood

Many Rooms Church Community
Winnipeg, Manitoba

FOR US AT Many Rooms Church Community (MRCC), living in the neighbourhood is a core part of our church's DNA. We are a network of house churches in the Spence and Daniel McIntyre neighbourhoods in Winnipeg's core area. We worship and fellowship in our homes and enjoy living within a short walk or drive from each other.

So, what is the neighbourhood like? Well, sometimes our neighbourhood is defined by its problems, like crime, homelessness, drug addiction, and poverty. However, for those of us who have felt called by God to live here, we also witness the beauty he has put in our neighbourhoods.

There is beauty in the great diversity of people God has placed in this area. Walking down Sargent Avenue from Central Park to Arlington Street, you could pass by newcomer youth enjoying a soccer game, numerous Ethiopian and Eritrean-run convenience stores, Vietnamese restaurants, Portuguese sports clubs, African barbershops, Asian nail salons, and even a Mexican taco shop. With a high Indigenous population, as well as international students attending the nearby University of Winnipeg, our neighbourhood has people from all over the globe.

There is also beauty in the relationships that we have seen among neighbours. Some have commented that our neighbourhood can have a small-town feel. Since many folks in

our neighbourhood are on EIA or disability assistance, it is not uncommon to find people sitting out on their front porches talking to each other and to those passing by throughout the day.

One of the ways that MRCC seeks to minister is through housing. Many in our church work at a local property management company providing affordable housing to low-income people in the neighbourhood. Others own rental properties which are rented out to church members and others in the neighbourhood. Still others live in their homes with one or more roommates. Our lives together are strengthened and challenged by these tenant-landlord relationships.

Another way that our church reaches out to the neighbourhood around us is by helping out at our neighbourhood block parties. Twice a year, once in winter and once in

summer, folks from MRCC partner with our local neighbourhood organization (Spence Neighbourhood Organization) to make these parties happen. MRCC folks, along with our neighbours, help with planning, set up, baking, as well as volunteering at food tables, and kids' activities. In the past few years we've also been blessed to be joined by students from Steinbach Bible College's Mission X program to help share the work at our winter party. These parties are a great opportunity for us to meet new neighbours, grow relationships, and help serve our community.

There are other ways that MRCC is involved in our neighbourhood, including with our youth group, and community prayer room, but hopefully this gives our EMC family a snapshot of what life is like in this part of the world, which God so loves!

– Dave Guenther

Kids and adults play broomball at the winter neighbourhood block party. MRCC partners with Spence Neighbourhood Organization to plan block parties twice a year.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Mennville EMC gets to know their neighbours through community events

Mennville EMC
Mennville, Manitoba

I'M OFTEN ASKED, “How are things in Mennville these days?” I respond with one word: “Healthy.” We truly find ourselves in a healthy place (spiritually speaking). We genuinely enjoy gathering and doing life together. As we venture into the spring of 2026, we are joyfully anticipating celebrating Mennville’s 75th anniversary on July 12. We are looking forward to celebrating a community that many have called home, in both the past and present.

As we reflect on ministry in our rural context, we journeyed through a great fall and winter. In October, we

We are looking forward to celebrating a community that many have called home.

held our annual fall supper and filled our church basement and half of our sanctuary with tables, chairs, and people! Some of our church members went home to get tables so we could seat even more people! We invited Dale Friesen of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to speak on the work of the foodgrains bank and how they are fighting hunger around the world, and the roles that we can play from our location.

On December 7, we had our annual Christmas in the Country event, which involved bonfires, hayrides, chili, hot chocolate, and live musical entertainment. This year, we added a crokicurl game in our parking lot. This event continues to pick up momentum as we plan it annually. This event brings the entire church family together to play a role in some way, whether through practical action, prayer, or baking dainties.

This was the ninth edition of this event here in Mennville and though it has changed over time, the weather

has rarely been an issue. Even this year, it was supposed to be cold and gusty, yet for the two hours of outdoor activities, the wind subsided. We’ve seen God bless the event through weather and other means.

Both fall and Christmas events are intentionally planned to connect with our community and to have a great time getting to know each other—or reconnecting, whichever comes first. We consider it a privilege to be settled in a rural community where we can engage our neighbours in different ways.

As we move into 2026, we will be pursuing a season of prayer and vision-casting. Our demographics have shifted in recent years, and we want to evaluate where God would have us move and grow. We ask that you would pray for God’s guidance, that we might follow him wherever he goes, especially as we reflect on 75 years of his goodness and faithfulness in this community.

– Michael Vanderzwaag



PHOTO: BARRY BARKMAN

In crokicurl, a new activity held this year at Christmas in the Country, frozen milk jugs are slid from the edge of the ice surface with a curling feel.

Pastors ordained at Heartland and Coaldale

HEARTLAND COMMUNITY CHURCH (LANDMARK, MANITOBA)—On March 15, 2026, Pastor Matt Funk (pictured far right with his wife Kathy, middle), lead pastor at Heartland Community Church in Landmark, Man., was officially ordained as a pastor by EMC Conference Pastor Andy Woodworth.



PHOTO: MARC BROWN



PHOTO: DANIEL VAN EWJIK

COALDALE MENNONITE CHURCH (COALDALE, ALBERTA)—On Sunday, April 19, 2026, Carl Heppner, EMC director of Canadian outreach, ordained Pieter Van Ewijk (lead pastor) and Eric Giesbrecht (lay pastor) from Coaldale Mennonite Church. Ordination recognizes and affirms that the Holy Spirit has called a minister to a lifetime of pastoral leadership and service. Pictured above are April and Pieter Van Ewijk, Eric and Maribel Giesbrecht, and Carl Heppner.

Seasons of fellowship and service at MFC

Morris Fellowship Chapel
Morris, Manitoba

WHILE THE COLD days of winter are gone for now, they certainly reminded us of our dependence on the Lord. He is in charge of each day and we pray that we will make the most of each day he gives us.

Morris Fellowship Chapel celebrated a wonderful Christmas season, including many entertaining programs. We held a Christmas banquet, a brunch on Christmas morning, and a Sunday school program. Of course, many family gatherings took place as well. It was good to be together.

As a church family, we have also had a season of many moves. It was exciting for the pastor Jeff and Laural Ann Plett to move to a new home. The church guys pitched in to make this move very doable, arriving with many trucks and family. After a noon meal, most of the work was done. This was a good start; the next move was at the home of Bill and Joyce Siemens who moved to Winnipeg. Then, it was time for James and Arletta Boulton to move to Morris from their farm. By this time, the moving crew was so well trained, the move took only two hours! It is wonderful to have ambitious, strong men and women in church to share the work.

We have also recently had Greg Carpan come on as assistant pastor. He will assist with Bible studies, preaching, and other activities.

At a Valentine's party, we had a fun game with four couples involved. The winners were those who knew their spouse best, with a gift card prize. The youngsters loved the cookies!

It has been so interesting to have Pastors Jeff and Greg speak alternately on the book of Colossians, with a challenge to the congregation to memorize some of the many important verses.

— Lorraine Loewen



Children perform at the Sunday school Christmas program.



Beautifully decorated cookies were served at the Valentine's party.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

EMC leaders meet online to strengthen mission and plan ahead

ON APRIL 17 and 18, the EMC ministerial and conference council gathered for their semi-annual meeting. This cycle of meetings is online. It was good to see strong attendance from across the Conference.

Ministerial

On April 17, the ministerial met and had three presentations to prepare and enhance the dialogue in upcoming November meetings. Andy Woodworth, EMC conference pastor, began with an address about the state of the church. His talk encouraged all churches to not think in terms of programs or facilities but to think about bringing people into a relationship with Jesus. If we get caught up in programs and buildings, we miss the point of why these programs are in place.

Mo Friesen, EMC director of next generation, followed up by discussing discipleship and his own journey. As we look to the future, he encouraged us to think of discipleship as a relationship,

not a process with prescribed steps (see graphic). We need to help the next generation develop a transformational relationship with Jesus, powered by the Holy Spirit.

Next, Carl Heppner, EMC director of Canadian outreach, reviewed the resources available to churches for leadership development and church planning. These resources are designed to help churches as they plan for the future and what is next for their congregations.

Finally, Cameron McKenzie, chair of the Board of Leadership and Outreach, closed the meeting by unveiling upcoming ministerial discussions on baptism and membership. The goal is to ensure the topics remain relevant and grounded in the EMC's historic confession of faith.

Conference council

The spring conference council followed the new format introduced last year—a Zoom meeting in April. An emphasis

has been placed on the November meeting being in-person.

Andy Woodworth opened the meeting with a devotional. He encouraged participants to discern God's will by being attentive to his guidance, even if it means changing course.

Elections were held and everyone nominated received strong affirmation. There remain vacancies on boards, and delegates were encouraged to seek nominations for these openings.

The audited statements were presented and accepted, highlighting a \$149,000 deficit due to lower giving, higher spending, and a planned \$50,000 gift to Steinbach Bible College. Despite the deficit, the Conference maintains a strong financial position, with a \$700,000 surplus in the general fund and a \$30,000 surplus across all funds.

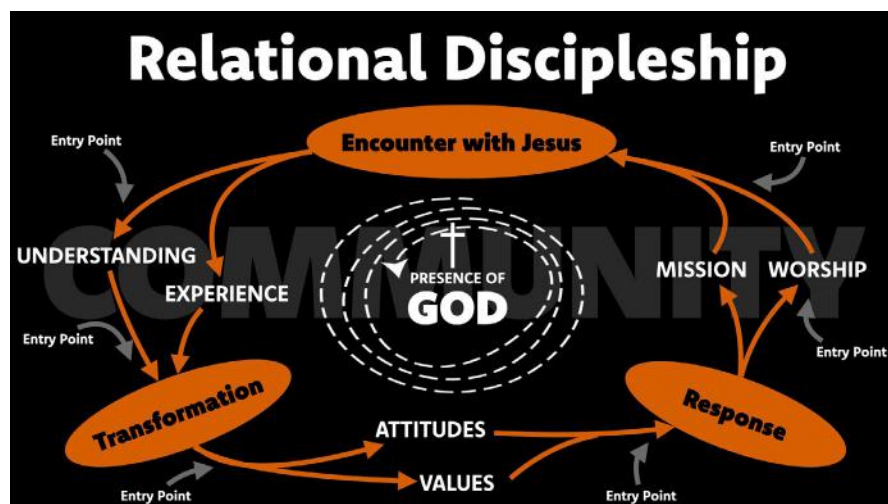
Constitutional amendments were presented and discussed. They were then tabled in accordance with our policies. They will be voted on in the fall. A detailed list of changes is available on our website at emconference.ca.

Each board reported on the work they have been doing. It was encouraging to hear about the progress in the Conference as we seek to live, reach, gather, and teach.

Thanks to Abe Bergen, who has served as the moderator for the past five years and is now ending his second term. His service to the Conference is deeply appreciated.

—Emery Plett

EMC executive director



EMC young adults gather for relationship-building

In photos: March 6–8, 2026, young adult retreat at Red Rock Bible Camp



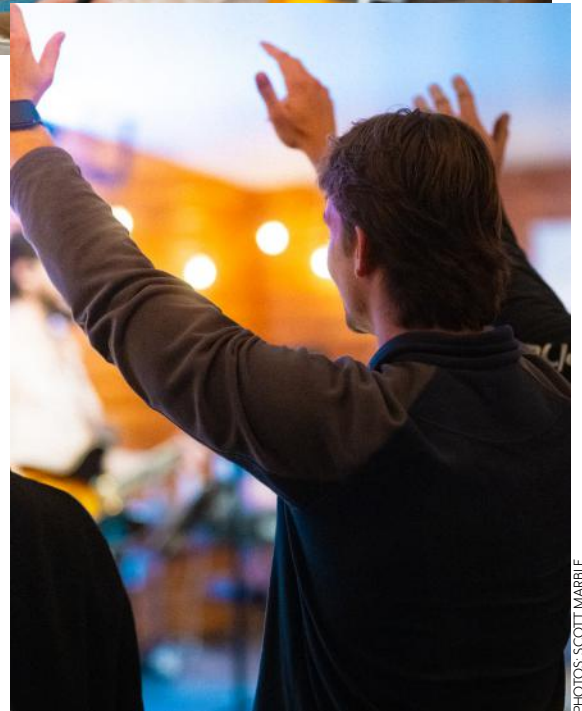
Saturday evening worship was led by a group of young adults in the Red Rock Prayer Chapel. It's powerful to witness young people leading their generation.



Above: Saturday morning workshops were held in various locations around the camp. Young adults had the opportunity to listen and learn about various subjects led by knowledgeable speakers.



Cameron McKenzie, lead pastor of Fort Garry EMC, leads a workshop in the fireside room. He talked about the significance of the story of Scripture and how it informs our faith story.



Times of worship throughout the weekend were opportunities for young adults to connect with God and witness the Spirit's transformation among their friends.

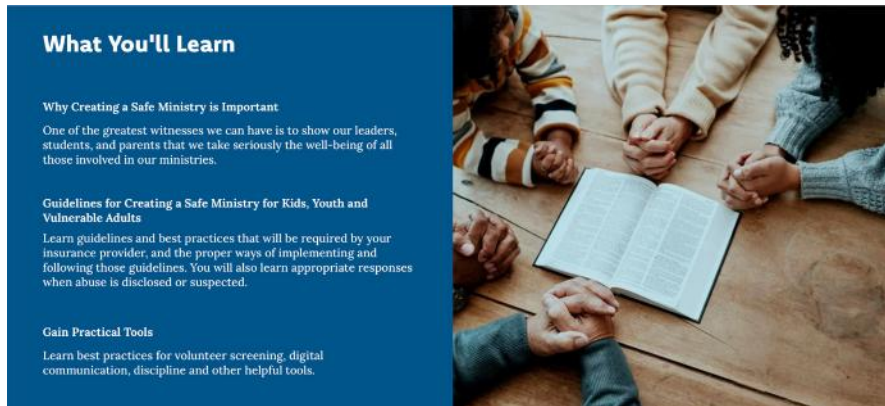
PHOTOS: SCOTT MARBLE

EMC develops child and youth protection resource

MINISTRY TO KIDS and youth has changed significantly. Remember the Bible trivia games that happened in the eighties and nineties? Students were forced to sit on a stool with metal mesh on the seat. If they answered a question correctly, they received a prize, but if they answered incorrectly, the host pressed a button powered by a car battery, resulting in an uncomfortable zap. In the youth group planning book, this was called the hot seat. Kids would get zapped, and everyone laughed. Embarrassment was a teaching tool. As our culture has grown, we have realized that embarrassment is not an appropriate teaching tool.

In the emergence of the Sunday school and youth group movements of the nineteenth century, the church was seen as inherently trustworthy. The programs it ran and the people who ran them could be trusted. Over the years, there have been many damaging stories of abuse and inappropriate behaviour. These cases have left many people scarred and traumatized by those they trusted. This

I see this as a tremendous opportunity for the church to communicate our commitment to the safety and well-being of others.



Screenshot from www.emconference.ca/child-protection-training

reality has forced ministries to take extra care when creating safe ministries for leaders and participants. The need for churches to carry liability insurance to protect the ministry from abuse has resulted in a different ethos of ministry.

Now we live in a culture of permission slips, liability forms, and child protection policies. Some view this as an attack on the church's ability to do ministry because it creates a logistical nightmare. I see this as a tremendous opportunity for the church to communicate our commitment to the safety and well-being of others. We can show that we take ministry protection seriously, especially for minors and vulnerable adults.

Many churches in the EMC have a child protection policy in place and are seeking to follow it to the best of their ability. While this requires effort to run background checks, gather permission slips, and ensure proper procedures are followed, churches do this extra work to prevent abuse and its consequences. There are churches starting

to develop child protection policies and need resources to create a plan.

Over the last year, a team has created a resource for churches to understand what needs to be included in a protection policy and what is required by insurance providers. This resource was made into short teaching videos or a downloadable PDF and PowerPoint files. The EMC does not have a standard child protection policy that churches can copy and paste. Each church needs to create a policy that works in its context. This resource helps leaders consider what to include as they build the child protection policy. We would also recommend developing a relationship with your insurance provider. Many providers have staff who work directly with churches and charities.

Check out this child protection resource on our website at www.emconference.ca/child-protection-training.

– Mo Friesen

EMC director of next generation

Steinbach Bible College's new campus takes shape

STEINBACH BIBLE COLLEGE (SBC) is taking big steps toward completing its new campus at 333 Loewen Blvd, in Steinbach, Man., marking a significant milestone in the institution's mission to equip servant leaders for ministry and service worldwide.

The ambitious \$15 million project, launched to expand SBC's capacity for discipleship, education and community, has already surpassed \$13.69 million in funding commitments. The new campus will feature dormitory space for 80 students, expanded classrooms to accommodate future growth, a second-floor chapel and library, and a vibrant student centre and cafeteria designed to foster community and spiritual formation.

Construction progress has been steady. The roof and windows are complete. Main office spaces are ready for flooring, with a June 2026 move expected. Electrical and plumbing are being worked on in the education wing and the dorms.

We attribute the success of the project to God's blessing and to overwhelming support from donors, alumni, and the local community. We are deeply encouraged by the

incredible affirmation and generosity that have propelled this vision forward. Significant contributions, strong leadership from the board, and dedicated efforts from Superior Projects have kept the development on track.

I marvel at the way the pieces have been coming together. Steinbach Christian School found itself in a season of opportunity for growth and a need for our spaces. The Loewen campus property suddenly became available to us. We had people joining our board in the past few years who seemed divinely appointed for this moment to lead us on this project. Early supporters gave us the momentum and the faith to jump in. Many alumni have given \$1,000, with many committing to three years of support. A future student told me they didn't have much to give but they wanted to be part of the project. Then they gave me a \$10 bill.

One day we'll look back and marvel at how all these pieces came together to build the SBC Loewen Campus where God's good news will be amplified to the world!

We are thankful to all our supporters. With less than \$1.31 million remaining to reach the fundraising goal, the college is inviting additional partners to help cross the finish line.

This campus will shape lives and build character for decades to come. Together, we can ensure SBC continues its mission to raise up servant leaders who follow Jesus, serve the church, and engage the world.

A big thank you to the EM Conference, churches and individuals! Your support has been a great encouragement to us, and we are excited to be your partner in leadership development.

– Dave Reimer, SBC president



Exterior view of building progress in late March 2026.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Students tour through the new SBC campus on March 12, 2026.



EMMC hires next gen director

IT IS WITH much joy that Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) announces its hiring of Rob Redekop as next gen director. After much prayer and conversations with several individuals, we believe God has led us to this decision.

We welcome Rob as our newest staff member, bringing a rich blend of ministry experience, leadership, and passion for equipping others. Rob's journey began with two years of youth ministry training at Steinbach Bible College, followed by two years in the agriculture degree program at the University of Manitoba.

Rob went on to serve as a youth pastor for five years and has been a dedicated Sunday school teacher for more than two decades at his home church, Niverville Community Fellowship in Manitoba. Alongside ministry, he has extensive experience in the business world, having spent 20 years as both a business owner and a general manager.



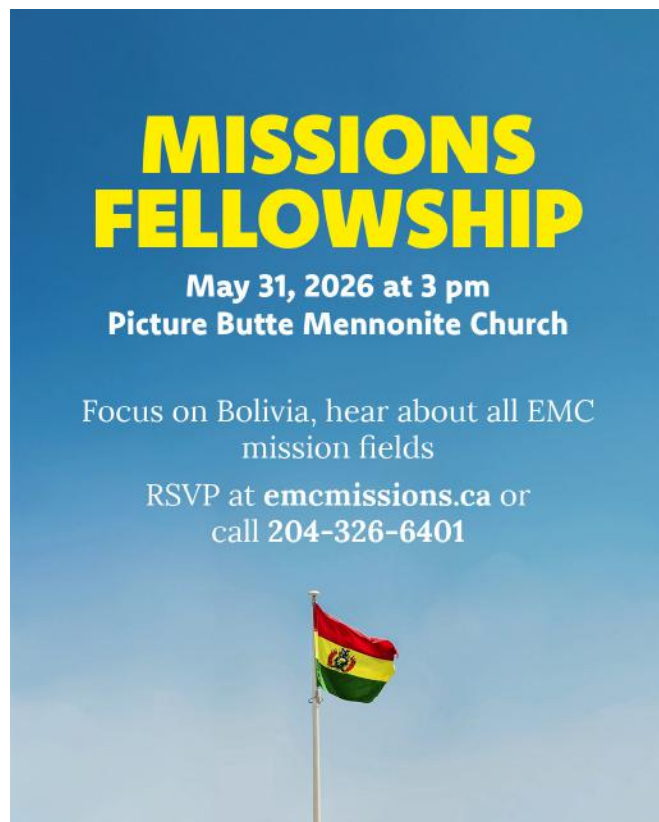
Rob Redekop

Family is an important part of Rob's life. He is married to Darlene Redekop (Sawatzky), celebrating 28 years together in April, and they are parents to two young adults: Connor and wife Juliana, and daughter Alyssa.

Rob is excited about returning to ministry, working with a strong and supportive team, and—most importantly—having the opportunity to disciple, teach, and encourage youth pastors and youth workers. His passion is to help others grow in their faith by equipping them with the tools they need to thrive.

Rob begins this new role on May 1, 2026. We are thrilled to have Rob join us and look forward to the impact he will make!

— Henry Redekopp
EMMC executive director





Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Financial Reports

January–March 2026

	General Fund 2026	General Fund 2025
Income*	334,124	331,426
Expenses	531,170	538,456
Excess/Shortfall	(197,045)	(207,030)

We give thanks to God for the continued strong support of EMC ministries, and we acknowledge the contributions of EMC churches and individuals who give so generously.

– The Board of Trustees

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

Guidelines for letters

Letters (250 words or less) are generally to comment on issues raised in *The Messenger*. The magazine reserves the right to edit letters.

Letters by mail must contain a handwritten signature with the writer’s first and last names and a mailing address.

For letters by e-mail, the writer’s name and e-mail address are deemed to be an electronic signature.

The writer’s name and general address are to be published. In sensitive matters, names may be withheld.

project builders
32nd Annual Golf Classic
 June 18, 2026
 Fly-In Golf Club
 Steinbach, MB

[Learn More](#)

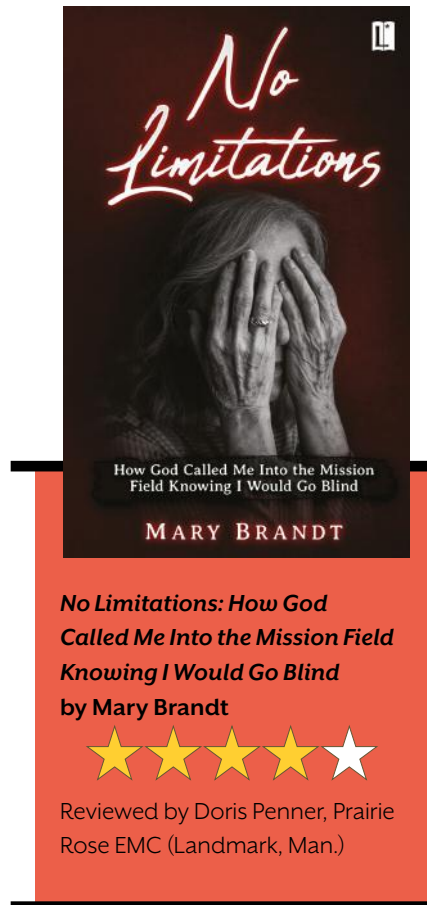


THE BOARD OF Missions is pleased to announce that Chris and Katie Koop (Kleefeld EMC) have been accepted to join the mission work in Guadalajara, Mexico. They have begun pre-field orientation and are preparing to leave this summer for Texas to begin learning Spanish at RGBI. Following their year of studies, they will move to Guadalajara to join Angel and Blanca Infantes in the church planting work. Please pray for the Koops as they embrace this call on their lives together with their young children Sawyer and Oaklee. Find out more about their work at www.emcmissions.ca/missionaries/ckkoop.

THE SUBTITLE FOR Mary Brandt’s memoir *No Limitations* is “How God called me into the mission field knowing I would go blind.” This book clearly shows there is no limit to what God can do despite inadequacies and disabilities, and it leaves the reader in awe of Brandt’s courage and trust.

In 1963, Brandt set out to do one year of voluntary service in a children’s home in Germany—and never left. In looking back over her long years of service, she can see (with eyes of faith) how God prepared her for service in early life, then led her step by step to face each challenge as her eyesight grew progressively worse. Her reflections include both the ups and downs of living with blindness—laying herself bare before the reader, as she puts it—with the hope the story will encourage perseverance when life may seem unbearable.

Brandt grew up in a large family on a small farm in Manitoba’s Interlake. When she experienced night blindness as a child, her parents suspected she had inherited a rare genetic incurable eye disorder known as retinitis pigmentosa (RP) from her mother. Since the disease was in the early stages, Brandt took jobs that satisfied her love for working with children—an experience that was invaluable for her later ministry. Close observations of how RP affected her mother in daily life



prepared her for what she could expect in later years.

However, the thought of severe loss of vision, perhaps even blindness, for herself was something to worry about in the future. So, Brandt and a friend applied to work in a children’s home in Germany run by Levi and Elizabeth Reimer. She immediately felt she belonged as her High German grew stronger and she came to love the

Her reflections include both the ups and downs of living with blindness—laying herself bare before the reader, as she puts it.

children under her care and heard their often-heartbreaking stories.

After several relocations of the homes which meant learning new surroundings, and more frequent mishaps such as linking arms with strangers thinking they were acquaintances, getting lost on the streets, and being caught for a while behind a church door, Brandt finally faced the fact that she was officially blind. With that awareness, she made several drastic changes which included attending a training school for the blind; this set the trajectory for future years.

At one point, for a short period, her vision returned and colours brightened due to surgery. When the improvement vanished, she went into a state of depression. However, this was short-lived as she mulled over this thought, “I will not spoil what I have by desiring what I do not have.” As much as she longs at times to be able to see, she does not blame God for her disability, but instead thanks him for providing help in various ways at just the right moments.

This slim book (150 pages) is a good resource for anyone interested in learning how progressive loss of vision and blindness impacts daily life, as well as how to gracefully overcome the challenges it presents. It shows how God can use anyone, no matter the disability, if one trusts and obeys as each day unfolds. And every reader will be inspired by the story of a blind person who can say in later years, “I look back on what an amazing adventure my life has been.”

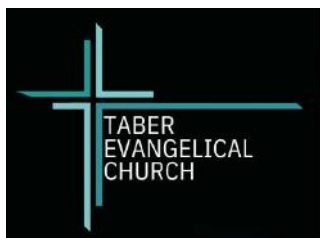
Shoulder Tapping

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 Discipleship: Rosenort Evangelical Mennonite Church (Rosenort, Man.)

Rosenort EMC is seeking a passionate and servant-hearted associate pastor of discipleship to join our ministry team. This newly created role offers a unique opportunity to shape and strengthen discipleship within our church family, helping people grow in faith and live out the gospel in their daily lives, all within the context of a growing and vibrant rural community in Manitoba.

The associate pastor of discipleship will lead and oversee key ministries, including Sunday school, youth and young adult engagement, evangelism, pastoral care, and spiritual mentorship. This role calls for strong communication skills, a heart for teaching and mentoring, and the ability to foster spiritual growth across all generations.

For a full job description, go to our church website at www.rosenortemc.ca. Please send your resume, cover letter, and references to info@rosenortemc.ca.



Youth Pastor: 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 youth pastor to join our ministry team. This individual will play an important role in leading and overseeing our youth ministries while actively participating in Sunday morning worship services.

Some key responsibilities include oversight of the youth ministry program, coordinating weekly youth group gatherings, creating opportunities for mentorship and discipleship, and involvement in youth Sunday school.

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 youth 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



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.



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.



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.

Executive Director: Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba

Mennonite Central Committee Manitoba (MCCM) is searching for a skilled executive director to provide leadership to the relief, development and peacebuilding work of MCC in Manitoba. The ED is responsible for upholding the vision, purpose and values of an organization that envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation. The successful candidate will provide leadership and vision from an Anabaptist orientation, working collaboratively with the leadership team to provide effective programming, fundraising, financial accountability and human resource services. This role is well-suited to a leader with experience and comfort with public speaking, connecting with external stakeholders and nurturing relationships with colleagues and partners. Other key responsibilities include representing MCCM with constituent denominations and providing support for the governance function of the board. For more details and to apply before July 1, 2026, please visit mccglobal.my.site.com/MCCJobs/s/

God over technology

WHEN MY HUSBAND and I decided to put our antique collection online in 2017, the budget-friendly option was a free tutorial course that I completed while being a stay-at-home mom. Speaking of motherhood, I joke that building the website was more painful for me than giving birth. But that's not a fair comparison. I had pain medication and a medical team for childbirth. For the website, I was on my own.

Fast forward to the current year and our store now needs significant upgrades. I find myself back in learning mode as I tinker with functionality and security features. After working for a particularly long, slow stretch, my mind jumped to a stormy sea and a calm Saviour. "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him" (Matthew 8:27).

It's obvious when studying Scripture to see that God is the creator and sustainer of life. God is actively involved in every glorious sunrise displayed and each crashing wave contained (Job 38:8–12). Yet I haven't really believed that God is also king over every AI robot and PHP code. The dizzying acceleration of technology has been astonishing for the layperson (and perhaps, even more startling

for those who have a better grasp of its capabilities).

I have found it easy to separate the two realms. God is a God of the natural world; humans created the machine and all the automations that followed. "Come, let us build ourselves ... a tower that reaches to the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). Men and women rise from slumber and zealously pound the keyboard to generate more advances that have both the capacity for much good and for sickening depravity. And whether artificial intelligence ever does surpass human ability to reason and perform, it will never master God, and it will never have an immortal soul that communes with its Redeemer.

Through the centuries, technology has simply advanced human discoveries of creation's orderly patterns. Scientists break down complex concepts like light and vision into basic processes. These discoveries advance our ability to care for ourselves and our world in convenient and comfortable ways.

Even my slow-running website is a puzzle of generated code that communicates with servers to display information on pixelated screens powered by electrical impulses. While

God is actively involved in every glorious sunrise displayed and each crashing wave contained (Job 38:8–12). Yet I haven't really believed that God is also king over every AI robot and PHP code.

people may have developed the system, its complexity surely points to a Creator who spoke it into existence long before we would learn to harness it. I believe that technology is proclaiming the praise of a Creator just as much as the stars shout forth his praise (Psalm 19:1–4). Christ not only holds everything together with the power of his Word, but he also stooped down into his created world to save his people from their sins (Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 1:2–3; Matthew 1:21).

Whatever task I now encounter whether simple or complex is an opportunity to work eagerly for my Saviour (Colossians 3:23). Each thought formed and every key typed is a miracle that leaves me marveling at God's supremacy as recorded in Psalm 46:10–11: "He says, 'Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.' The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." What a comfort to claim him as our refuge as we encounter each new technological advance in his world!



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

Libertarian cats and thoughts on freewill

DO YOU BELIEVE in human freewill? Two basic approaches have been debated for thousands of years. First, some Christians believe in *libertarian* freedom. Here, freewill means people really could choose to act differently than they do. Sally chose to follow God, but she could have chosen to follow Baal instead.

Other Christians hold to *voluntarist* freewill. Here, freewill means we *will* to do what we *are* doing, regardless of whether we could do otherwise. Sally has freewill in following God because this is what she genuinely wants to do. She has no Baal-option, but because she really *wills* to follow this one path, she is not being coerced and is acting with freewill.

Which version seems most biblical to you? Wouldn't a world of libertarians mean that parts of God's plan wouldn't get done and that he was only partially sovereign at best? It would be like herding cats. But if we're all voluntarists, doesn't sovereignty seem too easy for someone at God's paygrade?

Think about sovereignty. God is the Creator, and in the Bible he is the

Creator not only because he starts creation, but because he completes it to the end of history. That's why we hear so much about God as Creator in the Book of Revelation. The end of the story is filled with imagery drawn from the beginning (Revelation 1:8, 2:7, 4:11, 13, 10:6, 21:1–6, 22:1–5, 13–14). Like a master builder God starts and completes his project—he is a true Creator. That is sovereignty.

But what version of freewill could God's sovereignty reckon with and still be Creator at the end? Revelation steams with the demand for decision. It sets us on the knife-edge: Choose! Now! But amazingly, there is no hint in Revelation that the New Jerusalem would have been better had there been no freewill. No hint that God wanted Heaven to be five-star, but because of our sinful choices, it will only be two-star, an eternal vacation at the Motel 6. No. Revelation steams with decision and God is utterly victorious. That is the great mystery.

So back to our rival versions of freedom: libertarian or voluntarist. Could God pull off the New Jerusalem using either form of freewill? If so, which version would trigger your greatest cry of praise? Would Revelation's vision of utter sovereignty be a higher

achievement with libertarian freewill or voluntarist freewill?

It seems to me a Creator who could sovereignly herd libertarian cats into Heaven deserves higher praise. Voluntarists in the choir of Heaven might sing as conducted, but wouldn't libertarians dance for sheer happiness? Not congratulating themselves for choosing God over Satan but praising God's brilliance in achieving his vision with audacity, ingenuity, and love through a world steaming with real choice. For libertarians, escaping hell was a close shave, an immediate and real possibility for themselves, but here they freely stand by God's infinite wisdom and grace.

This is why, until I am convinced otherwise, my money is on libertarian freewill. Salvation is then a more dramatic feat on God's part. Sovereignty here works as the attractive and provocative power of God's love. A voluntarist choir in Heaven feels like a North Korean military parade—everyone's smiling and clapping, but do they really have a choice?

But how would God do it? How does he win when he goes on creating thousands of new ornery libertarian cats a day? That's a question worth pondering, possibly forever.

Could God pull off the New Jerusalem using either form of freewill? If so, which version would trigger your greatest cry of praise?

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



Would you pray a blessing for these people?

I WAS RECENTLY in one of our Conference churches and spoke about ways that we can engage the next generation. At the end of the service, the pastor said he wanted to end “a little different than he had planned.” He called all those present under the age of 18 to come to the front of the sanctuary. He also invited people who did ministry with those age groups to join them. Then he asked one of the senior ladies of the church to pray a blessing for these young people and for the rest of the congregation.

While I’m not entirely sure if it was the pastor’s plan, the senior lady began going to each of the young people gathered in the front and praying individually. There were prayers for growth in their love for Jesus, sensitivity to the Spirit, and acknowledgement of

challenges. The prayers were personal even though she didn’t know all the kids, youth, and leaders she was praying for.

When she started, I found myself thinking, wow, this could take a while as there was a large group of people up front. But then I saw it—the picture that took away all my concerns about the time: this was a teaching moment to remind students and those gathered that God saw them. None of them had planned for this.

I don’t know what these students will remember from that morning, but I can’t help but think that a core memory and belief in God was planted in their hearts and minds. It was the church of God, *being* the church for these students. This grandmother of their gathered church showed that each of them

What You'll Learn

- Why Child Protection is Important**
One of the greatest ministries we can have is to share our beliefs, attitudes, and passions that we care not only the well-being of all those involved in our churches.
- Guidelines for Creating a Child Ministry for Kids, Youth and Vulnerable Adults**
Learn guidelines and best practices that will be required by your respective denomination and the proper level of implementation and reporting when guidelines are not followed. You will also learn appropriate responses when a situation is suspected or reported.
- Child Protection Tools**
Learn best practices for relations screening, digital communication, discipline and other helpful tools.



EMC Child Protection Training Course

This course will help explain some of the basics of why a church should develop and follow a Child Protection Policy. It will also outline guidelines and best practices to include in a Child Protection Policy. Find out more on p. 27 of this issue or go to www.emconference.ca/child-protection-training

was worthy of her time, of our time and of God’s time. The way she lovingly prayed for each one showed God’s heart for them. The prayers sought to encourage and solidify faith and were spoken in humility.

It would be easy to suggest that churches simply add this to the end of their services, creating another programmatic tool to connect the next generation with the rest of the church. However, I don’t see that as the takeaway from this

experience. Rather, my encouragement to our churches would be to remain open to the Holy Spirit’s nudging and find creative ways to care for each other. This requires time, flexibility, and humility.

There may be situations where our normal rhythm of church needs to change to respond to the Holy Spirit’s leading. We may need to adjust some of our planning and be willing to take a chance. This needs to be done with humility, acknowledging our need for God in all circumstances.

Thank you, churches, for every attempt to inspire faith in the next generation. Let’s continue to creatively and intentionally pass on our faith.



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