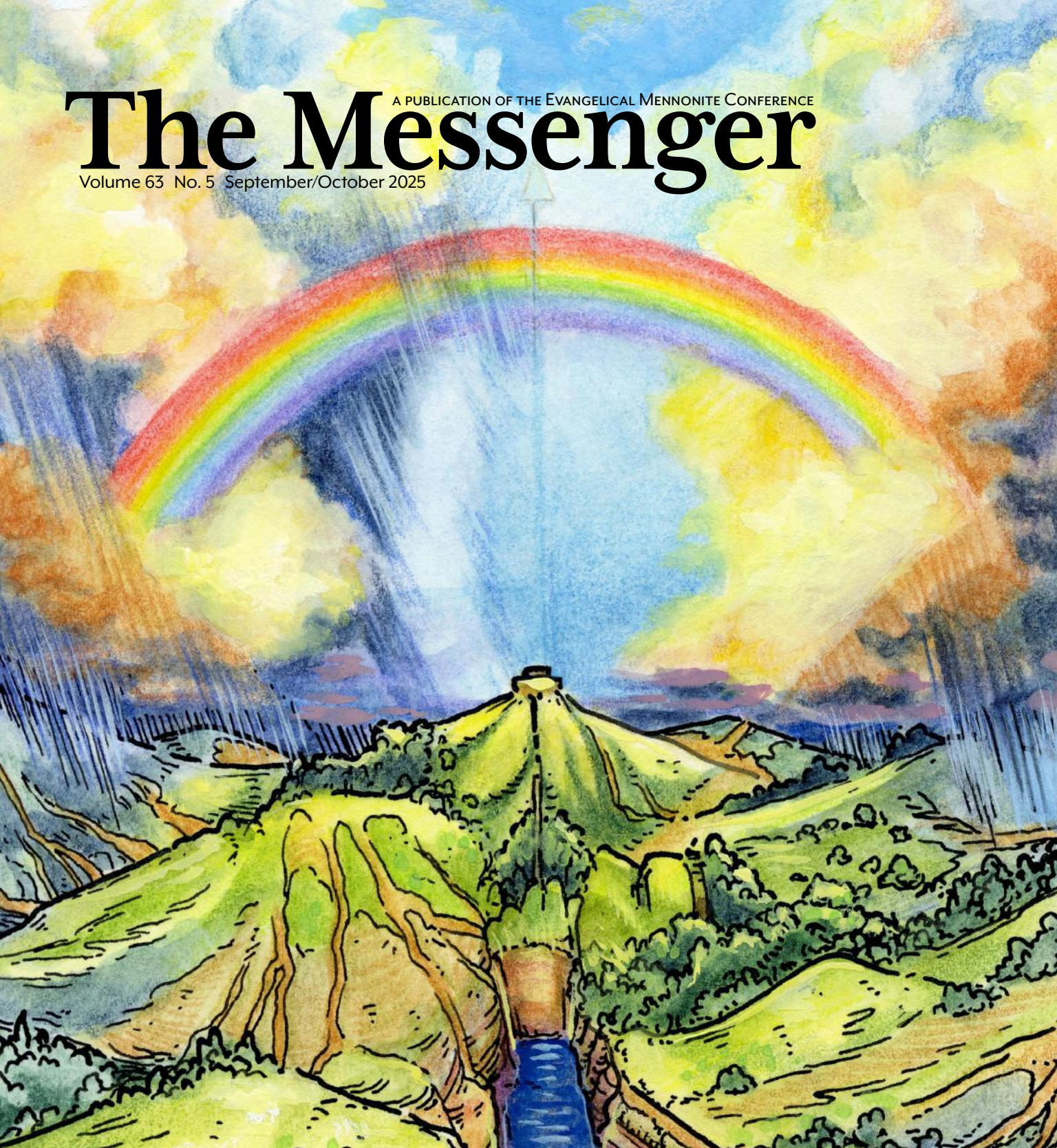


# The Messenger

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE

Volume 63 No. 5 September/October 2025



ARTIST  
PROFILE  
P. 5

PERSONAL, HOPE-FILLED AND  
SPIRIT-EMPOWERED: THE  
APPEAL OF CHARISMATIC  
EVANGELICALISM  
P. 6

THE STORMS  
JESUS  
CALMED  
P. 10

AUTISM AND  
THE CHURCH  
P. 14

SHOULD  
CHRISTIANS  
BE ZIONISTS?  
P. 19

Fill out our readership survey! (information on p. 2)



# We want your feedback on *The Messenger*!



TO MAKE SURE that *The Messenger* stays relevant, appropriately challenging and encouraging to readers, please respond with your opinion in one of three ways:

1. Fill out the printed survey on this page (feel free to add additional comments on a separate sheet of paper), take a photo, and send it to us by email to [messenger@emconference.ca](mailto:messenger@emconference.ca) (or mail to: *The Messenger*, 440 Main St, Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5).
2. Scan the QR code to be taken to the survey online.
3. Complete the survey online by clicking the link at [emcmessenger.ca](http://emcmessenger.ca).

## *The Messenger* content

How do you see *The Messenger* now?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
It is theologically reliable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is good variety in topics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It gives me a good sense of who EMC is	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writers are knowledgeable about their subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is well designed and attractive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I usually find content valuable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Would you like to add to or elaborate on any of the above?

---



---

Do you read the following sections?

	Rarely if ever	Sometimes	Quite regularly	Almost always
Editor's note	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead articles (including artist profile)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Column – Global impact by Gerald Reimer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Global Focus – EMC mission features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Focus – EMC church news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
EMC News	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affiliate Organization News	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Obituaries, job postings and ads	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Column – His light to my path by Karla Hein	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Column – Further in and higher up by Layton Friesen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Column – Inspiring Faith by Mo Friesen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What kind of topic do you find most valuable?

---

What would you recommend we add, remove or otherwise change about *The Messenger*?

---

## *The Messenger* readership survey

Your gender    Your age    How long have you been part of an EMC church?

- |                                 |                                   |  |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> male   | <input type="checkbox"/> under 30 | <input type="checkbox"/> less than 5 years             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> female | <input type="checkbox"/> 30–44    | <input type="checkbox"/> between 5 and 10 years        |
|                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45–64    | <input type="checkbox"/> between 10 and 25 years       |
|                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65+      | <input type="checkbox"/> more than 25 years            |
|                                 |                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> I do not attend an EMC church |

Were you aware that everyone who attends and EMC church is invited to receive *The Messenger* without paying the subscription fee?

- ☐ yes    ☐ no

Which of the following versions do you receive or access another way?

- ☐ print version    ☐ digital – pdf style    ☐ digital – website  
☐ audio

# CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

## FEATURES

**5 Artist Profile**  
**Navigating tension in the art world**  
 By Kyla Wiebe

**6 Personal, hope-filled and Spirit-empowered: the appeal of charismatic evangelism**  
 By Steven Warthe  
 A revolutionary discovery led to formative experiences with charismatic Christianity.

**10 The storms Jesus calmed**  
 By Alain Reimer  
 A first-century Jewish understanding of the sea adds a third layer to the story.

**14 Autism and the church**  
 By Stephanie Fast and Dani Caldeira  
 The authors together work to bring clarity and help us understand how autistic people engage with the church

**19 Should Christians be Zionists?**  
 By Michael Zwaagstra  
 God promised land to Abraham's descendants, but does that promise extend forever?

## COLUMNS

**23 Global impact**  
**Is your profession needed overseas?**  
 By Gerald Reimer

**34 His light to my path**  
**Battling weeds of discouragement**  
 By Karla Hein

**35 Further in and higher up**  
**You might not be going to the best church**  
 By Layton Friesen

**36 Inspiring faith**  
**Serving as a spiritual practice**  
 By Mo Friesen

## DEPARTMENTS

2 Editor's Note  
 4 Letters and Notices  
 24 Global Focus  
 25 Local Focus  
 28 News  
 29 Books & More  
 31 In Memory  
 32 Shoulder Tapping

## LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS

MANNA MY WORD. NO.	A MANNA THE CLOTH? NO.	YOU DA MANNA! NO.	A MANNA OR A MOUSE-A NO.	WHO WAS THAT MASKED MANNA? NO.
MANNA THE PEOPLE? NO.	I AM IRON MANNA! NO.	MIND YOUR MANNAS. NO.	TO THE MANNA BORN. NO.	MACHO, MACHO MANNA... NO.
MANNA THE HOUR NO.	MIND OVER MANNA! NO.	A MANNA ACTION NO.	IN A MANNA OF SPEAKING NO.	SEE A MANNA 'BOUT A DOG. NO.
MANNA LA MANCHA. NO.	ANGRY YOUNG MANNA? NO.	BEDSIDE MANNA? NO.	A MANNA AMONG MEN? NO.	A MANNA FEW WORDS? TOO LATE.

THE HEBREWS ARE TIRED OF EATING THE SAME THING AFTER YEARS IN THE DESERT, SO AARON BRAINSTORMS CUISINE RE-BRANDING IDEAS TO WRITE ON MENUS OR POSSIBLY A FOOD TRUCK.

# The Messenger

Volume 63 No. 5 September/October 2025



**MANAGING EDITOR**  
ERICA FEHR



**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, instruct in godliness and victorious living, 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 \$20.00/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.

Ads and inquiries can be sent to

messenger@emconference.ca.

## Letters and Notices



Evangelical Mennonite Conference

## Financial Reports

### January–July 2025

	General Fund 2025	General Fund 2024
Income*	1,042,123	1,074,670
Expenses	1,245,306	1,070,865
Excess/Shortfall	(203,183)	3,805

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).*

## Responding to July/August 2025 issue

Morgan Fehr's article "Ancient, continuous, and meaningful" describes a faith experience formed by wrestling the angel, as in Genesis 32. We benefit from thoughtful, focused clarity in exploring the complex ways the church draws us in and pushes us away, sometimes at the same time, and this is really wonderful writing.

In a related but separate way—with due respect to Emery Plett and the work done by the Board of Missions—the article "What does it mean to be aligned?" spins in unfortunate circles. If "the key operational philosophy of the BoM is church planting" then neither the EFC nor MCC make the grade, as both coordinate the response of existing congregations rather than plant new ones. Part of the EFC's stated mission is to advocate on behalf of the concerns of evangelical churches, although MCC has been criticized for exploring advocacy roles. It seems that the concerns with MCC being "liberal" are code for an unstated issue, since

the MCC constituency includes congregations and conferences that are both more liberal and more conservative than the EMC. Would it be fair to say that MCC is currently unpopular in evangelical circles and it's a bit of convenient virtue signalling on the part of the EMC to distance itself from MCC at this time as a way of moving away from Anabaptism and toward a more evangelical public image?

The article references Layton Friesen's recent writing on the creative tension involved with holding to both evangelical and Anabaptist ideals. That tension can be creative but it's also possible for it to become a distraction from doing the difficult work of either Anabaptist or evangelical faith in practice. As a denomination we should hold on to both organizations and do the practical difficult wrestling with them that Morgan Fehr models in her writing about her own experience.

– Jeff Thiessen  
Austin, Man.

## Navigating tension in the art world



Kyla Wiebe has peace and assurance amid the “winds of the world.”

**I’VE BEEN DRAWING**, writing, and crafting for as long as I can remember. Aside from my Christian faith, this is my defining feature. However, faith and art initially seemed incompatible.

My church was not opposed to my interest in art but they did not have space for visual creative expression, and couldn’t provide me with direction as I sought to pursue art seriously.

Many creative Christians live in this tension. Their Christian world has nothing to say about art, and the art world has nothing good to say about Christian faith!

For many, it seems necessary to choose one or the other.

The way before me was obscure. It seemed like my fate was to enter the art world and struggle against the tides of secularism alone.

In Mark 6:50–51, when Jesus’ disciples were struggling in the chaotic waters, Jesus “spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.’ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased.”

Happily, I did not plunge into the secular art world right away. Instead, after high school, my mom found a Christian option, the YWAM School of Cartooning and Animation for Missions.

While attending the school in Thailand in 2012, God “entered my boat.” My school leader, Dave, taught us, “Your artistic skills are a gift from

God, meant to be invested back into his kingdom, to God’s glory.”

In that moment, the disconnect I felt between my faith and art disappeared. By offering my art to God, my “mere hobby” was transformed into something important, dignified, and eternal. I didn’t know where this boat was headed, but I knew that God was in it with me.

This has given me peace and assurance even when the winds of the world whisper tempting lies like, “You’ll only be successful once your art makes a lot of money,” or “You aren’t a real artist because you would like to be paid for your art.” (Yes, these winds are contrary!)

God gave me a wonderful gift in my YWAM community, who push me toward creative excellence and faithful obedience. The church has also grown in their understanding of creative folks like me, and I have benefitted from the support and care of my church family so much.

When I gave my art to God; he made a way for me to serve him that I never could have imagined.

Learn more by emailing [kyla@createseeds.org](mailto:kyla@createseeds.org), visiting [createseeds.org](http://createseeds.org) or see Kyla’s art page at [kylart.ca](http://kylart.ca).

– Kyla Wiebe



Illustration of Jesus walking on the water from the Roma children’s Bible.

**About the cover:** I painted this illustration as part of my “Drawing Through Genesis” series. It depicts the rainbow God placed in the sky after the flood: a promise to never again flood the earth; a war bow pointed toward heaven itself, foreshadowing Christ’s sacrifice! Can you spot the hidden archer?





# ☑ PERSONAL ☑ HOPE-FILLED {AND} ☑ SPIRIT-EMPOWERED

*the appeal of  
charismatic  
evangelicalism*

By Steven Warthe

**Editors' note:** This is the third article of a series *The Messenger* is commissioning on “the appeal of ...”

To learn more about the what and the why behind this series, see the “editors’ note” on p. 7 of the May/June 2025 issue.

**I WAS TWELVE** years old when my best friend at the time shared with me that there was a place you could go where you would feel awkward for *not* raising your hands in praise to the Lord while you sang. Hearing this was revolutionary for me. As one of two students in our Christian school who would raise their hands while we sang, I regularly felt awkward.

Hearing that such a place existed not only intrigued me—but created in my heart a longing to visit! A year later I was formally introduced to a leading charismatic discipleship centre. Little did I know, this first encounter would set me on a trajectory which shaped much of my teenage and young adult years. I was one among many who would race down for the annual year-end conference the centre held, and I even enrolled in their six-month internship program.

Though there are varying degrees to the charismatic stream, my involvement has come primarily from my time at a charismatic discipleship centre. While I should mention that these are my reflections and does not define the charismatic stream in its entirety, there were four primary factors that appealed to me in my discipleship process.


### **Spirit-empowered living**

The first factor is the emphasis on Spirit-empowered living. Charismatics display an abundant understanding, experience, and ongoing pursuit of the Spirit's involvement in the life of the church and individual. While at times it seems other streams of evangelicalism are left wondering how to approach Holy Spirit, are unfamiliar with Holy Spirit, or leave Holy Spirit on the shelf entirely, charismatics fully immerse themselves in the third person of the Triune God.

They not only emphasize and have a theology concerning Holy Spirit, they earnestly seek the power, manifestations and gifts that come with Holy Spirit in their everyday life. Charismatics take Jesus' words seriously when he said, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7 ESV). Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, was given to us as our Helper, and

Charismatics rely heavily upon Holy Spirit to lead, guide and empower.

With Spirit-empowered living comes the importance of the gifts of the Spirit that God has given his church! Charismatics are continuationists, meaning they believe all the gifts of the Spirit are for the church today. As the staff of *Charisma* magazine write, "The spiritual gifts outlined in the New Testament ... are not considered historical artifacts but present realities that actively shape the believer's journey. These manifestations of divine power provide tangible evidence of God's involvement in the world today, reinforcing faith and igniting spiritual passion" ("Is the

 **While at times it seems other streams of evangelicalism are left wondering how to approach Holy Spirit, charismatics fully immerse themselves in the third person of the Triune God.**

Charismatic Movement the Key to the Next Great Awakening," *Charisma*, March 2025 issue). They believe that every believer is equipped with certain gifts used for the building up of the body of Christ! This is a profound realization that, when understood, leads to full involvement of each person for the health and well-being of the church.

As a growing disciple of Jesus, I often questioned whether all the gifts of the Spirit were for the church today. I was not asking from a theological standpoint, but from an experiential one. Nowhere in the New Testament did I see the gifts of the Spirit come to an end; however, when I observed the practice of the church around me, only a few gifts were spoken of and acted upon. Being a part of this charismatic discipleship centre was revolutionary for me as I saw people exercising all sorts of gifts. As I observed this and was ministered to, I was left encouraged, strengthened, and wanting more! The usage of the gifts revealed signs of life and proved that each part of the body mattered!

Another facet to Spirit-empowered living is the realization that the church is engaged in a spiritual battle as outlined in Ephesians 6. Many in the Western Church have knowledge regarding the spiritual battle that rages around us, however, they are not actively engaged in it. Charismatics not only talk regularly about the spiritual battle, they are actively engaged. Through the power of Holy Spirit, we are empowered to live the victorious life in Christ Jesus. We have been equipped with the Spirit to lead us through trials and temptations, as well as to deliver people from demonic bondage, experiencing resurrection victory. Having my eyes opened to the battle and power of Christ, not only did I see victory in myself, but freedom and deliverance in others, too!


### **Emphasis on personal encounters with Jesus**

The second factor is the emphasis on personal encounters with God. This was particularly evident at the discipleship centre, which focused Friday evening services on encountering God. Charismatics believe that God is relational and personal and wants to make himself known. Therefore, they stress that God knows, sees, and hears the cries of his people and wants to meet them there!

I've been to a few charismatic churches where, after the service, they invite anyone forward who has felt the Lord ministering to them. Whether they need ministry for what they have just heard, healing, deliverance, victory over sin or freedom from bondage, a time of prayer is held over them with the expectation that God wants to meet them and set them free!

I found these times especially rejuvenating as the body was coming together to minister to each other just like we see all throughout the New Testament. Alongside personal encounters with God comes the freedom for people to worship God in whatever expression they see fit—hands raised, kneeling, lying prostrate on the floor, dancing, standing, shouting, waving flags, among other expressions. For many of us who grew up in a conservative Christian background, bodily worship was never mentioned nor exemplified, and it may

have been looked down upon or viewed as weird. However, throughout the Scriptures God's people worshipped God with their body. Charismatics understand this and give people the freedom and space to worship God freely! I have experienced much peace and freedom worshipping and being among others who worship God freely.

 **Throughout the Scriptures God's people worshipped God with their body. Charismatics understand this and give people the freedom and space to worship God freely!**

### **Emphasis on the return of Jesus**

The third factor is the emphasis on the return of Jesus. Though there may be a wide number of beliefs regarding how Jesus will return, charismatics are faithfully engaged in Jesus' return, encouraging each other and the larger body of Christ, reminding us that Jesus is coming back!

In my younger years, I knew Jesus was coming back, but His return had little to no effect on my life. Being in the charismatic circle directed my attention toward the return of Jesus; I found myself considering the return of Christ more, and having a hunger and longing to be with him. It's one thing to know Jesus is coming back, it's another to eagerly wait for his return and prepare while one waits. There is a wedding coming, and having that mindset, the church has motivation to prepare for our wedding day with the Lord! Whether that motivation leads to transformation, evangelism and outreach, or simply having renewed obedience, Jesus is coming back and that is worth longing and preparing for!

### **Emphasis on spiritual growth**

Finally, the fourth factor is the emphasis on spiritual growth. They have an understanding that our discipleship in Christ is not defined by a prayer that we prayed years ago, or a life just going through the motions. Rather, our relationship with Christ, both individually and corporately, is



an ever-growing, vibrant, life-transforming reality of being in Christ! For these reasons, spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, giving, serving, and worship through song, are vital to the Christian's life of faith. It's through these disciplines by which we come to know God, reflect his likeness to those around us, and experience his presence, guidance, and leadership. Prior to my time in the charismatic stream, I hadn't spent much time on the disciplines, but during my time there they became a core part of what I did as a disciple of Jesus.

Along with an emphasis on spiritual growth, charismatics focus on the need for renewal. Throughout history, they have prayed for the reviving of God's church. They recognize that the church can become stagnant and often when God's people pray, God has moved in powerful ways. Reading the testimonies of what God has done stirs my heart for what he wants to do in the local church today and engages my heart to join in with those of old, to cry out for God to revive his church again!

### **My journey**

It was in my first year at Bible college that God showed me how vast his kingdom is, and how many expressions there are in the kingdom of God. I remember a diagram used in a Spiritual Formations class to show the various streams in Christianity—charismatic, holiness, social justice, evangelical, incarnational, and contemplative streams—and tied to each stream was one person of the Triune God that the stream related to most. As I saw that diagram, God did two things in me; 1. He showed me that there were many ways to worship and live out God's kingdom; 2. That we all desperately need each other! As much as I loved my time in the charismatic stream and having God reveal himself to me in a number of ways, I have come to realize that all the answers are not found in any particular stream, but in all of them together!

Each of the appeals that I have mentioned here in this paper have negatives if you take them to the extreme. I have been the charismatic that seeks after the gifts and the manifestations of God

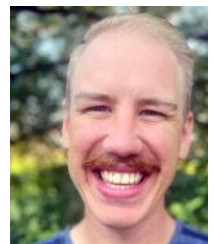
more than God himself. I have believed a human's prophetic word over the word of God. I have done the disciplines because in them I thought was salvation rather than trusting Jesus for salvation. I have seen the gifts of the Spirit used for personal gain and not that of God. I have seen a lack of the gift of discernment when it comes to the gifts. Though there are false usages of the Spirit-led life, that doesn't nullify the Spirit-led life that God intends for us .


In saying that, the Spirit-led life isn't found only among the charismatics but in the other streams as well! While the Spirit-led life might take on different expressions, the call for us is to humble ourselves and learn from each other. Can we as evangelicals learn from charismatics? Absolutely! Can charismatics learn from evangelicals about the nature of the cross, salvation, the lost, and the kingdom of God? Absolutely!

In the past three years there has been a great shaking in the larger charismatic church which has left me with a lot of questions. However, I still hunger to live the Spirit-empowered life as I see throughout the New Testament. And though the gifts are very much a part of that, so is seeking the fruit that comes by the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—as well as faithful study of the Word of God, and living out the lifestyle of Jesus before God and humanity!

My desire for myself and the church is that we will be faithfully grounded in a steady pursuit of God, not tossed around by every piece of doctrine, but steadily following God's commands and leadership, as we seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, so that we can carry out God's purposes in the church and the world among us, as we eagerly await Jesus' return! Amen.

Steven Warthe lives in Vanderhoof, B.C., with his wife Janelle. Steven serves as the lead pastor at Vanderhoof Christian Fellowship. He enjoys spending time outside hiking in the mountains, golfing, playing hockey, or whatever sport is in season!





# THE STORMS JESUS CALMED

By Alain Reimer

**THE SUN SLOWLY** ebbed on its course toward the horizon creating a warm reflection off the Sea of Galilee. Water lapped gently against the small fishing vessel, and the familiar cry of seagulls echoed sleepily overhead. A young rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, slept peacefully in the stern of the boat as his disciples conversed among themselves in low tones. The exhale had finally arrived after a busy stretch of ministry.

Then, in a moment, everything changed.

Thunderclouds formed out of nowhere, and the gentle breeze transformed into cold, gale-force gusts. The deep blue of the Sea of Galilee that had only moments ago beautifully reflected the setting sun was now a rolling, churning picture of chaos. Waves crashed over the side of the boat, filling the hull and soaking the men's clothes, leaving them shivering in the chaos. Terrified shouts and curses were muffled by the roar of gale-force winds, ear-splitting thunder, and crashing waves.





LIGHTSTOCK

But amidst the chaos, Jesus still slept peacefully. His head gently rocked back and forth on his cushion like an infant being rocked in his mother's arms.

"Teacher! Wake up! We're going down!" came the chorus of panicked voices from all corners of the boat. "Don't you care that we're all going to drown!? Help us! Save us!"

The rabbi's eyes opened gently, and he lifted his head off his pillow. Hair dripping and clothes sodden with water, he slowly stood up, gathering his balance while taking in the scene before him. He looked out over the wind and waves as a teacher looks out over her rebellious students, then said in a clear, confident voice, "Peace! Be still!"

It really was just that simple. No coercion was necessary. The water and wind listened and in a matter of moments, what had once been towering waves become gentle ripples. The moon came out from behind the clouds, reflecting beautifully off the calm sea as the disciples looked at each other in awestruck wonder.

Their heads churned almost as violently as the waves had churned only moments ago. Who was this man standing in the boat with them?



Many of us have heard this story on repeat since childhood, either through the wonder of flannelgraph as children, on the pages of the gospels or maybe even in some dramatic cinematic re-telling. It's a beautiful picture of God's power over nature, and a bold

proclamation of Jesus' divinity. But I wonder if one of the most profound theological elements in this story is, for the most part, missed by many modern western readers due to our unfamiliarity with the first-century Jewish understanding of the sea.

**I wonder if one of the most profound theological elements in this story is, for the most part, missed by many modern western readers due to our unfamiliarity with the first-century Jewish understanding of the sea.**

Allow me an illustration.

Many of us can remember the wonders of the overhead projector. A simple lightbulb in a box would direct its luminous glow through a clear sheet of plastic called a transparency. The words or designs on the transparency would then create shadows which reflected through a series of mirrors, projecting the image from the clear sheet of plastic onto a wall or screen. Incredible. (For any Gen-Z readers, you'll just have to take my word that something so magnificent once existed.) Here was my favourite part about overhead projectors. You could layer transparencies to add various elements to whatever it was you were wanting to show, slowly creating a more complete image from what you started with.

Most of us are familiar with what I'll call the first two transparencies of the story above. The first transparency is the simple facts. Jesus and his disciples

are out on the Sea of Galilee when a terrifying storm arrives. Jesus speaks to the storm. It immediately ceases. The disciples are amazed at what they've witnessed.

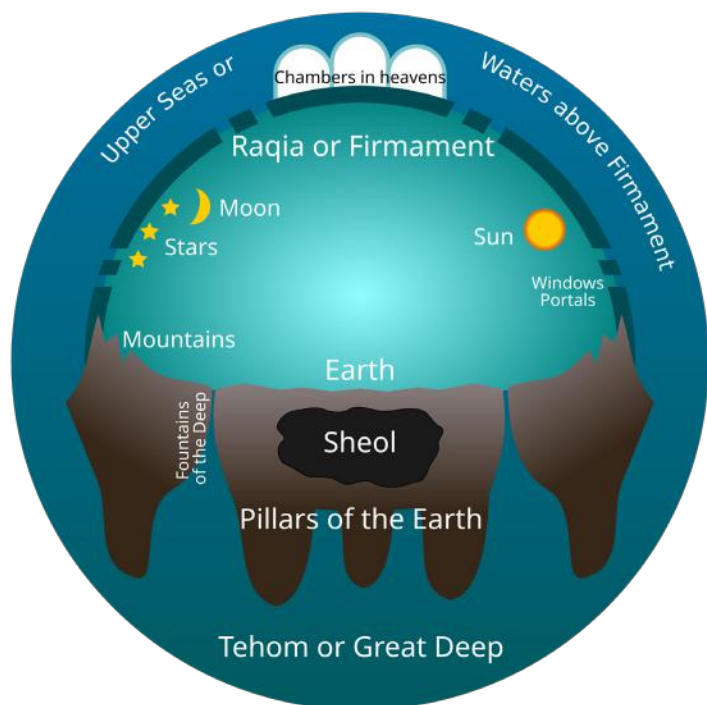
The second transparency highlights that because only God can control the weather, clearly this is a reference to Jesus' divinity. Jesus is doing what only God can do. True. Powerfully true in fact. But there is a third transparency that more fully completes the picture.

For an ancient Jew, the watery depths were a terrifying place. They perceived the earth as existing in an "expanse" between the waters above and the waters beneath (Genesis 1:6-8). This expanse was sheltered from the chaos of the watery abyss surrounding it, so that life could flourish in God's good, ordered world. In their cosmology, the seas—or any large body of water for that matter—were not just glorified puddles, but bottomless, terrifying chasms that led to the

watery chaos that surrounds the "expanse" we call home (and you thought you were afraid of deep water!). The sea was the picture of the universe's pre-formed, chaotic state. It's where monsters lurk, it's where the beast in John's apocalypse ascends out of (Revelation 13:1). Nothing good happens in or on the sea.

To add to the fear and trepidation, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the watery depths are the places from which God unleashed his wrath on stubborn peoples.

In the flood account, when humanity had degraded to a place of complete obstinance towards God, "the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened" (Genesis 7:11). When God wanted to finish his task of humiliating the Pharaoh of Egypt and pronouncing his greatness over their counterfeit gods, he caused the entire Egyptian army to be swallowed up by the waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:27-28). Later in the story of Israel, we find a stubborn prophet named Jonah fleeing from God across the sea. When a violent storm materializes out of nowhere, Jonah doesn't hesitate one moment in pronouncing what the cause is. He's read Genesis, he's read Exodus, he knows what chaotic waters mean. God is angry, and God is sending the chaotic depths to swallow up his rebellious servant.



Early Hebrew conception of the universe illustrating the waters above and below (Tom L, Wikimedia Commons).



Now, with the third transparency laid on top of the first two, let's revisit our story.

Jesus and his small band of followers are out on the Sea of Galilee, a body of water that at least some of them were very familiar with. They had spent their lives fishing this sea. They knew it forward and backward, undoubtedly having navigated a few harrowing tempests on its



unpredictable waters. But when this storm erupts, seemingly out of nowhere, it's like nothing they have ever encountered. They panic. They are sure they are about to drown. And as good Jewish young men who had grown up on the stories and teachings of the Old Testament, what is surely going through each of their minds?

God is angry.

We've missed the mark.

His wrath is coming for us.

Then, in the midst of their fear, they cry out to Jesus for help—for salvation. And to their shock, their rabbi stands up in the boat, looks out over the chaotic waters—the Hebrew picture of chaos and the agent of the wrath of God—and transforms it into perfect peace.

They could never have known how profound that moment was as a picture of the Messianic mission of Jesus. He had left his place of rest to enter the storm of human life under the curse of sin and would eventually absorb it fully into himself on the cross so that any who called out to him for help—for salvation—could receive in full what those 12 water-logged and wind-torn men received only in part.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Romans 5:1-2).

Now fast forward to the second last chapter of the Bible, where John is trying to put into words the vision he has received from Jesus pertaining the final, redeemed state of creation. I imagine him peacefully smiling, relaxing his shoulders, and letting out a contented sigh as he wrote down the words, “and there was no longer any sea” (Revelation 21:1). No more fear, no more anxiety, no more sin. No more churning, tossing agent of wrath needed to punish the stubborn and rebellious people of earth.

Just peace. Perfect. Unending. Peace.

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

Alain Reimer lives in Fort Frances, Ontario, with his wife Emily and their three young children. He serves as pastor in the Fort Frances Evangelical Fellowship Church.



# EMC EQUIP

**London, Ontario**  
**October 24–25, 2025**

**SPEAKER: DAVE REIMER**  
Registration Fee: \$35/person

visit our website  
**emcequip.ca**





# Autism and the church:

*Creating a welcoming space  
for autistic people in our EMC  
congregations*

By Stephanie Fast

**MOST OF US** know someone in our close circle of family and friends who is autistic, or you may be autistic yourself. As autism becomes more widely understood in our society, this raises the question of how churches can create welcoming spaces for autistic people. Perhaps your church is already far along in developing ways to welcome autistic people. That is excellent! However, if your church is new to this conversation, I hope this article can be a way to open space for this topic. Let's briefly look at three aspects of autism and the church:

1. What is autism?
2. Why is it difficult for autistic people to feel welcome in churches?
3. What are some practical ways in which we can work toward creating welcoming spaces for autistic people?

## What is autism?

Autism is fairly common, with approximately 1 in 50 children/youth currently diagnosed with autism in Canada, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada. Defining autism is not straightforward, as there is great diversity among those who are autistic. Is it a disorder, as implied by the term "autism spectrum disorder," or is it a

way of being that is simply different from being neurotypical?

From a clinical point of view, autism is a "neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent impairments in reciprocal social communication and social interactions and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interest, or activities" (Mark L. Batshaw et al., *Children with Disabilities*, eighth edition). Symptoms of autism from this perspective are described as: abnormal body posturing, poor eye contact, inappropriate social interaction and lack of empathy (Daniel Bowman Jr., *On the Spectrum: Autism, Faith and the Gifts of Neurodiversity*).

In contrast to this, the Autism Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) describes autism not in terms of medical symptoms, but as a particular way of being and viewing the world. Here are some of their descriptors:

1. Autistic people may have particular interests in things that others don't care that much about.
2. Routines and rituals can be highly important to autistic people.
3. Many autistic people experience hyper or hypo sensitivity to things such as light, touch, sound, smell and taste.



4. Some autistic people may not be able to speak, but this does not mean that they do not have important things to communicate.

5. Autistic people may need help with daily tasks.

These descriptors may raise questions about the differences between “high-functioning” or “low-functioning” autism. Certainly, there are a great variety of support needs within the autistic population and these needs may ebb and flow over the course of a lifetime. According to the current diagnostic criteria, however, all autistic people are now considered to be on a spectrum, without separate diagnoses given for Asperger syndrome or other “forms” of autism (<https://www.autismcanada.org/history-of-autism>). Having said that, there may be reasons that an autistic person prefers to describe themselves as having Asperger’s, or use a different descriptor, in which case it would be most helpful to be respectful of their preference.

There are also questions surrounding what language to use when referring to autistic people. Should we speak about an “autistic person” or a “person with autism”? “Person with autism” is widely used among medical professionals, as it is seen as a way of defining individuals not as primarily autistic, but as primarily human beings. However, because this language mirrors the language around illness (such as “my friend with cancer” [Armand Léon van Ommen, *Autism and Worship: A Liturgical Theology*]), it is seen by some autistic people as problematic. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen to use “autistic person,” but I want to acknowledge that not every autistic person will feel the same way and may prefer other terms to describe themselves.

### **Why is it difficult for autistic people to feel welcome in our churches?**

Whether we are conscious of it or not, every church community has expectations of what it looks like to be a “normal” churchgoer: come to church every Sunday, greet your neighbour with a handshake, stand during this particular bit of the service, and so on. What unfortunately

can sometimes happen is that our definition of “normal” creates an awkward and unwelcoming space for autistic people who do not look or act “normal.”


Part of the problem is that, without us necessarily being aware of it, our sense of what is “normal” corresponds to our sense of what is good. A friend of mine, who suspects she may be autistic, becomes quite anxious when sitting through a church service. She also has lived and worked in the world of academia. I asked her about her experiences of having to sit still and listen to sermons or lectures in each of these settings. She said: “In academic lectures, it feels like if I can’t handle them, I am incompetent. If I can’t handle a church service, it feels like I am a bad person. Both hopefully aren’t true, but feeling like a bad person feels worse, I think.

I think most of us would agree that the ultimate good that we strive for as followers of Jesus is not culturally “normal” behaviour but rather lives transformed by the Spirit at work in us. The function of the church is to become a place where everyone is given the opportunity to flourish. *That* is the way in which transformation can begin to take place. In 1 Corinthians 12:21–25, the apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians that listening to and caring for the needs of *everyone* in the church is an essential part of what it means to be the body of Christ. He says:


... Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.... God has put the body together ... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (1 Corinthians 12:22–25)


### **Creating a welcoming space for autistic people**

We as Christians, then, all need to be committed to creating a community that is more welcoming for those with disabilities and, in this particular




**Part of the problem is that, without us necessarily being aware of it, our sense of what is “normal” corresponds to our sense of what is good.**





**Allowing autistic people freedom to recuperate in their own time may be a gift we can give them.**



case, autistic people. Ann Memmott, an autistic autism professional, says this: “most autistic people experience ‘shutdown’ brain events if exhausted beyond our limits. This means that, when too overloaded ... our brains may stop us talking and maybe moving” (“Welcoming and including autistic people in our churches and communities”). In order to help reduce the amount of sensory overload that autistic people experience in church, Memmott suggests providing a quiet space for people to retreat to when needed and avoiding bright and flickering lights.

Due to their need for structured environments, the spontaneous nature of some church activities can also be highly challenging for autistic people. Autistic author Daniel Bowman Jr. describes growing up in the church. He found that spontaneous church activities (e.g. popcorn prayer, socializing over coffee) placed him in a constant position of wondering why he could not just “roll with it” (*On the Spectrum*). He says this: “If it’s already been a long week, I may need a Sabbath that includes ... staying home from church.” For

those of us who place a high value on attending church every Sunday without exception, we need to realize that we could be placing an unspoken but very real burden on autistic people. Allowing them freedom to recuperate in their own time may be a gift we can give them.

One of the challenges about trying to address the needs of autistic people in our congregations is that, just like any other group of people, there is significant diversity among autistic people. For one pastor to try to decipher the needs of those who are autistic in his or her church could be an overwhelming task. It also may be very difficult or impossible for autistic people to speak up on their own behalf. One way in which our churches could support autistic people and their caregivers is to become advocates on their behalf, so that they do not need to carry the burden all on their own.

### **Still more work to be done**

This article has by no means included all the important areas pertaining to autism and creating welcoming churches that need to be



## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Autism Canada. “History of Autism.” <https://www.autismcanada.org/history-of-autism>.

Autism Self Advocacy Network. “About Autism.” <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/about-autism>.

Batshaw, Mark L., Nancy J. Roizen, and Louis Pellegrino, eds. *Children with Disabilities*. Eighth edition. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2019.

Bowman, Daniel Jr. *On the Spectrum: Autism, Faith, and the Gifts of Neurodiversity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021.

Hays, Richard B. *First Corinthians*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, Ky: John Knox Press, 1997.

Memmott, Ann. “Welcoming and Including Autistic People in Our Churches and Communities.” July 2019. <https://truodiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Autism-Guide-2019.pdf>.

Ommen, Armand Léon van. *Autism and Worship: A Liturgical Theology*. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2023.

Public Health Agency of Canada. “Government of Canada Launches Framework for Autism in Canada, Canada’s Autism Strategy, and National Autism Network call for applications.” November 1, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2024/09/government-of-canada-launches-framework-for-autism-in-canada-canadas-autism-strategy-and-national-autism-network-call-for-applications.html>.



addressed. However, I hope it can help to begin the conversation and guide you and your church toward asking important questions around this topic. For autistic people and neurotypical people to live together as one in our churches, there is work to be done, and it will not be easy or straightforward. But if we can move forward in the right direction, acknowledging our mistakes along the way, then I believe we can become more like the

sort of unified body of Christ that we are created to be.

Stephanie Fast works as a teacher and studies at Providence Theological Seminary. She attends Blumenort Community Church. This article comes from a paper submitted for a course she took called Theology of Disability.



# Jesus' attitude to disability:

*A pastor's thoughts as a mother of autistic children*

By Dani Caldeira

**JESUS, WHEN HE** walked among us, had many truly transformative and intense encounters. These stories have always touched me deeply, as I recognize the wisdom, gentleness and humility of Jesus—our God. Without a doubt, among so many encounters described in the Bible, two stories move me even more profoundly, likely because of my own journey—first professional, then personal.

One is the man with a physical disability at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15), and the other is the man with a disability who was lowered through the roof by his friends into the house where Jesus was teaching (Mark 2:1-12).

In these two encounters, Jesus shows us:

1. That a person with a disability has autonomy and will—"Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6).

2. That a person with a disability is not some angelic, sinless being, but

like every human, is also in need of forgiveness—"Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5).

Jesus gave them a voice; and I learn so much from this!

I've been working with people with disabilities since 1992, specializing in this area of education. In fact, even as a young child, long before I officially began working in the field I felt called to this and spent many hours being close to people with disabilities, teaching and learning from them.

Throughout my life, I've come across people with physical or intellectual disabilities who were not given the right to their only possible autonomy: the autonomy of choice—even in matters of faith. Many didn't even know what they believed. They just followed their parents' path. Some attended evangelical churches as if they were invisible—never baptized, never led to a confession of faith. They were simply there.

When I became a pastor in 2010, many began to bring their spiritual questions to me and surrendered their lives to Jesus through our ministry, because they realized we were giving them a voice.

After 20 years in the field, I was drawn even deeper into this world: in 2011, my prince Matheus (Teteu) was born—he's non-verbal and diagnosed with level 3 autism spectrum disorder. Twelve years later, my oldest daughter Gabriela (Gabby), now 24, also received a diagnosis—level 1 autism. She is a high-functioning young woman capable of living an almost "typical" life. Her "milder" traits, like in many girls, masked the diagnosis for many years. But her life has always come with challenges to be understood and respected.

Even with such glaring differences, I see similarities between the two in terms of diagnosis: hypersensitivity to sounds and crowded environments,

**No one is more or less holy because  
they have a disability. We must  
create adapted opportunities for  
interaction and integration.**

self-regulating stereotypes, meltdowns when emotional overload is intense or when there's a break in routine. There may be more, but the limits of my son's communication skills prevent us from fully understanding his thoughts and feelings. My daughter even jokes with him sometimes, saying, "I understand you, baby," as she affectionately calls him.

As a pastor and active churchgoer, I faced another challenge up close: accessibility.

We've made great progress in architectural accessibility—ramps, elevators, accessible bathrooms—enabling physical access to church spaces. But in my personal and professional experience, accessibility goes far beyond architectural adjustments. True accessibility means giving people "voice" and the autonomy to choose. It means helping them actually belong.

How many people with disabilities are actively involved in different church ministries? What about accessibility for people who are blind or deaf? Do churches have Bibles in braille? Is anyone trained in sign language? When it comes to intellectual disabilities, are preachers and ministry leaders adapting their messages using visual tools and simplified language that is easy to understand? And what about people with autism—where needs are both specific and highly individualized?

I've visited churches where my son couldn't even enter the service due to loud volume and low lighting. That

environment works for many—but not for all. Some individuals find physical touch and spontaneous social interaction—such as "greet the person beside you"—extremely challenging.

I'm not writing this article to give a list of steps or a formula, because no universal model exists. I'm also not criticizing churches that maintain liturgies designed for "typical" individuals—because I know it's difficult to meet every need.

My invitation is this: Let's look at our faith communities the way Jesus did—with individualized attention, seeking ways to improve fellowship and participation for all. I often say that true inclusion is rare—almost utopian. If you mix oil and water in a glass, you'll see both substances clearly separated. They're in the same space, but not truly integrated.

For me, true inclusion begins with equal love and mercy. No one is more or less holy because they have a disability. We must create adapted opportunities for interaction and integration.

We don't need to "sacrifice" everyone by conforming entirely to the needs of a minority. But we can adapt things to improve participation for everyone.

For example:

Could services be held in well-lit environments with lower sound volume?

Could we offer different types of seating—sofas, armchairs, even mats—for those who struggle to sit still?



Matheus and Gabriela, Dani's children

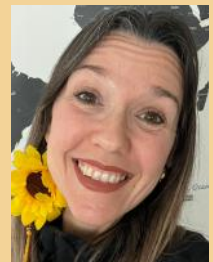
Could we allow people to communicate their needs through visible signs (if they wish), like: "I can't shake hands," or "I get anxious when someone talks to me without preparation"?

And, of course, educate everyone about the different types of disabilities and the respect they deserve.

I believe the church should organize events and seminars to talk about disability—giving families and people with disabilities space to speak for themselves. Offering them visibility and a voice is already a powerful step toward following Jesus' example.

The challenge is great, I know (I have my own difficulties adapting our ConneXion services to my son who, at the moment, only accepts being in the car). But Jesus never said the journey would be easy. He promised he would walk with us and guide us every step of the way.

Dani Caldeira has served as a pastor at The Connexion in Arborg, Man., since October 2023, having served previously as a pastor in Brazil. In addition to her pastoral work, Dani is an actress, singer, educator and theatre director, with a career in the arts and education that has spanned from 1992 to the present and complemented her ministry.





# SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE ZIONISTS?

By Michael Zwaagstra



---

**Editors' note:** This article summarizes some of the arguments for and against Christian Zionism. Michael Zwaagstra will be teaching a full intensive course on this topic at Steinbach Bible College with weekly evening sessions beginning September 18. To find out more or register, go to [www.sbcollege.ca/upcomingcourses](http://www.sbcollege.ca/upcomingcourses).

---

**IN GENESIS 12:1-3**, God told Abram (later renamed Abraham) to leave his home and go to a different land. Not only did God promise that he would make Abraham into a great nation, but he also declared that all families of the earth would be blessed through him.

On the one hand, this passage is quite straightforward. It marks the point where God shifts his focus from broader humanity to carrying out his work of redemption through one group of people—the Jews. As we know, Jesus Christ was a direct descendent of Abraham. While Jesus was

Jewish himself, as were the original 12 disciples, God's plan of salvation extends far beyond the Jews. That is what God meant when he said that all families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

Up to this point, Christians can all agree. However, disagreements arise when we ask whether God intended for the specific land promises made to Abraham and his descendants to continue forever. In other words, did God give modern Israel to the Jews? To ask this question another way, should Christians be Zionists?

## Debating Zionism

Zionism is the belief that modern-day Jews have the right to a homeland in the biblical land of Israel (Palestine). Interestingly, it is entirely possible to be a Zionist regardless of one's religious beliefs. Many people are Zionists because they affirm the deep historical connection that Jews have with the land of Palestine and recognize that the ongoing persecution of Jews throughout

world history makes it imperative that they have their own homeland.

Christian Zionists accept these points but take them a step further. They believe that the land promises made by God to Abraham were unconditional and have not been cancelled. They also emphasize that God has separate plans for Israel and the church. Many, but not all, are pre-tribulation dispensationalists who assert that God will rapture the church from the earth prior to the Great Tribulation. In their view, the millennial kingdom described in Revelation 20:1–6 where Christ reigns on earth for 1,000 years will be the ultimate fulfillment of all the land promises made to the Jews.

Along with popular literature such as the *Left Behind* series, there is plenty of scholarly literature that defends Christian Zionism. For example, *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East* (2018) edited by Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser is a collection of essays by well-known scholars such as Old Testament theologian Walter Kaiser, theology professor Craig Blaising, and New Testament theologian Darrell Bock. This book celebrates the founding of modern-day Israel in 1948 and outlines a biblical case for Israel's right to exist.

However, not all Christians are Zionists. Many scholars, such as late British theologian and evangelist John Stott, hold that the land promises made to Abraham were never intended to continue in perpetuity. Rather, these promises are fulfilled spiritually in the church. While this perspective is often called replacement theology, proponents usually prefer to call it supersessionism. In their view, the church supersedes Israel as God's chosen people because it is made up of

both Jews and Gentiles. Whether Israel exists or not has no impact on the ability of the church to carry out Christ's commission to make disciples of all the earth (Matthew 28:18–20). Since there is no longer a need for a Jewish nation-state, supersessionist Christians point out that the modern-day nation of Israel is no more unique or special to God than any other nation.

Gary Burge, a New Testament professor at Wheaton College has emerged as one of the most articulate critics of Christian Zionism. His 2010 book, *Jesus and the Land*, goes through the New Testament and argues that the Bible rejects the notion that modern-day Christians must support Zionism. Burge's book was endorsed by notable evangelical scholars such as New Testament theologian Craig Blomberg, Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann, and New Testament theologian I. Howard Marshall.

Both Zionists and non-Zionist put forward many biblical arguments for their respective positions. They've also published extensive critiques of the other side. Let's look at each position, starting with Zionism.

### The case for Zionism

Supporters of Zionism typically begin by pointing out that God's covenant with Abraham included a specific land promise. For example, when Abraham and Lot separated after arriving in the land of Canaan, God told Abraham to look northward, southward, eastward, and westward. All the land Abraham could see was given to him and his descendants forever (Genesis 13:14–15). Notably, the same land promise was repeated to Isaac (Genesis 26:3) and Jacob (Genesis 28:13–15). If this land promise was not meant literally, it's odd that God would repeat it multiple times to multiple people.

The same land promise is also repeated in prophetic passages such as Isaiah 27:12–13; Jeremiah 31:5, 12; Ezekiel 36:28; Joel 3:18; and Amos 9:14–15. It's important to consider how these land promises would have been understood by the authors and the recipients of the time. It strains credulity that these promises were not to be taken as literally referring to specific geographical territory.

**If this land promise was not meant literally, it's odd that God would repeat it multiple times to multiple people.**



When we look at the New Testament, we find no explicit statement that these land promises to the Jews have been altered or abolished. In fact, when Jesus' disciples asked him immediately prior to his ascension when he would restore the kingdom to Israel, Jesus did not rebuke them or tell them that their theology was wrong. Rather, he explained that it was not for them to "know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). In other words, while the disciples were wrong to think that the Jewish land promise would be fulfilled in their lifetimes, they were not wrong to look forward to a future fulfillment of that promise.

Add to this the numerous times that the Apostle Paul makes it explicitly clear that the Jews retain their unique status as God's chosen people. For example, Romans 9:4 states of the Israelites, "Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises." In addition, Romans 11:25 says that "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in." In other words, we can look forward to a great revival among the Jewish people at some point in the future.

Finally, Revelation 11:1-3 describes a temple of God in which two witnesses of God will give powerful testimony at some point in the future. Since the last Jewish temple was destroyed by Roman armies in AD 70, the author of Revelation is apparently describing a future temple in Jerusalem. This is only possible if the Jewish people retain effective control of the land of Palestine. Hence, fulfillment of the land promise to the Jews is necessary for future events to unfold as predicted.

### **The case against Zionism**

Skeptics of Christian Zionism are quick to point out that the Old Testament land promises to the Jews were conditional on obedience (Deuteronomy 29:18-28). Joshua 23:15-16b goes so far as to state, "But just as all the good things the LORD your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the LORD your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given

you. If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them."

Simply put, while the messianic promise that was fulfilled in Jesus endures forever, the specific land promises to the Jews were explicitly conditional on obedience. After hundreds of years of nearly continual disobedience, God judged the Israelites and sent them into exile. While the Jews eventually returned to Palestine after their exile, never again did they fully regain their independence.

In addition, the New Testament authors make it clear that the land promises to Abraham should be understood in a spiritual sense rather than a literal sense. Hebrews 11:8-10 states that Abraham was looking forward to living in a heavenly city rather than an earthly city. Later in the same chapter, the author explains, "Instead, they [Abraham and his descendants] were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them" (v. 16). Thus, Christian Zionists are missing the point when they insist on a literal interpretation of a promise that has been fulfilled spiritually in the church.

Lest one doubt that the land promises made to the Israel have been fulfilled in the New Testament church, note what the Apostle Peter said when he wrote a letter to Christian believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were

**Christian Zionists are missing the point when they insist on a literal interpretation of a promise that has been fulfilled spiritually in the church.**

not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9–10).

The recipients of Peter’s letter would have noticed that he was quoting from Exodus 19:5–6 in which God told Moses that the Israelites would be “my treasured possession” and “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Clearly, Peter is taking the Old Testament promise that God made to the Jews and reinterpreting it as being spiritually fulfilled in the New Testament church.

### **What is at stake today**

Whether you are a Zionist or not has a huge impact on how you make sense of current events in the Middle East. When the nation of Israel came into existence in 1948, it faced immediate hostility from surrounding nations who strongly opposed its creation. There is considerable debate over the rights of the Palestinian people and the way they were displaced to clear the way for the Jews to take control of the territory.

The brutal attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, in which approximately 1,200 Jews were killed, and the military response by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza—leading to many civilian casualties—has done much to reignite the debate over Zionism. Unsurprisingly, Zionists tend to take Israel’s side in these conflicts while non-Zionists focus more on the plight of the Palestinians. Canada is not immune from this polarization, as we see from competing rallies and protests regarding this issue across the country.

Clearly, Zionists and non-Zionists cannot both be correct. In the end, the land promises to Israel are meant to be taken literally, or they are not.

Like the ongoing debates over other theological issues such as creation vs. evolution, Calvinism vs. Arminianism, and infant baptism vs. believer’s baptism, we can expect disagreement about Zionism to continue for many years to come.

However, while both sides cannot be right, it would be wise for all Christians to at least acknowledge that there are good reasons why Christians of good conscience can read the same Bible and come to different conclusions on this issue. Neither Zionists nor non-Zionists have a monopoly on biblical truth, nor does it make sense to doubt the sincerity of Christians who think differently.

Whatever position you take on the Zionist debate, make sure that you are not closed off to listening to people from the other side. Zionists would do well to remember that even if it’s true that the biblical land promises continue today, this does not give the current Israeli government a blank cheque to do whatever it wants to the Palestinian people. Similarly, non-Zionists must be careful not to allow their opposition to Zionism to ignore the real persecution that Jews have faced throughout history. Whether the Bible teaches Zionism or not, one must not be too quick to dismiss the legitimate political aspirations of Jewish people today.

Finally, we are not responsible for ensuring that biblical prophecy is fulfilled. God will carry out his plans for both the church and for Israel in the way that he sees fit. It’s also important to remember that for many people, especially those who live in the Middle East, this issue has real consequences for their everyday lives. That alone is a good enough reason for us to handle this topic with care.

Michael Zwaagstra is a public school vice-principal, deputy mayor of Steinbach, and adjunct professor at Steinbach Bible College. He is a member of Steinbach Menonite Brethren Church.



**Whatever position you take on the Zionist debate, make sure that you are not closed off to listening to people from the other side.**



# Is your profession needed overseas?

**GOING THROUGH HIS** late teens and early adult years, our son wrestled with the sense that God was inviting him into full-time Christian ministry while at the same time he was seeing an opportunity to use his videography and editing skills in the marketplace. How, he wondered, could both come together—and was it even possible? Or would he have to abandon one for the sake of the other? The Lord opened the door for him to do both as he spent nearly the entire year of 2023 serving overseas on mission doing discipleship and leadership development as well as using his videography skills.

While the history of our EMC Missions program has focused on planting churches among people groups where few or no other evangelical churches exist, from our beginnings we have always seen our overseas workers bring with them some type of professional skill to help bridge gaps. Whether it has been in teaching, medicine, nutrition, radio, flying or technology (and the list goes on), our missionaries have looked for creative ways to engage local communities.

When I was accepted by the EMC Board of Missions to serve in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1992, I wondered what professional skills I was bringing. I was called a church planter but because of years of “preparation” in my home church and community teaching Sunday School, singing in a quartet, counselling at Bible camp, farming, carpentry and so much more, I had skills to bring to Mexico, and these allowed me to build trusting relationships with many people.



Andrew Reimer (left) on set while filming in Ireland.

But having professional skills does not automatically mean you are ready to serve overseas. According to Catalyst Services, a missions mobilizer resource based in Pennsylvania, when churches are looking to send professionals overseas to do mission work, they need to consider both the worker and the community they will serve. Would the skills they have benefit the local community? Does it provide employment for the local people? Is the work transferable to the local culture? Are the workers equipped to give sound biblical teaching? Are they unbiased when it comes to engaging with other ethnic groups? Does their profession allow them time to do ministry beyond work hours and,

perhaps most importantly, give them an avenue to share the gospel?

Scripture is filled with stories in both the Old and New Testaments of how God used people and their professions to evangelize people and grow the body of Christ. Paul the tentmaker, Deborah the nurse, David the shepherd, Nehemiah the cupbearer, Peter the fisherman, Simon the tanner, Matthew the tax collector, Lydia the purple cloth business owner, Luke the physician, and so many more.

If you are wondering whether your profession can be used in global ministry, invite the Lord to show you and talk to your pastor about what this could look like in your journey.

---

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

---



## EMC Missions introduces four new faces!

**FOUR NEW NAMES** and faces will start showing up on EMC lists and publications over the next few months. On June 6 and 7, the Board of Missions had the privilege of hearing Jayda Brandt, Jenny Klassen and Mark and Gillian Wiewel share about their calling into missions. All four were formally accepted as EMC associate missionaries.

**Jayda Brandt** is from the Blumert Community Church. She has spent the last few years at the University of Winnipeg getting her teaching degree and completed her final practicum at a school in Bangkok, Thailand. She fell in love with the country and started exploring the idea of teaching at a Thai school long-term—but not a missions school. As she tells it, every time she added that caveat—“not the missions route”—it felt more and more wrong. She visited Grace International School, a missions school in Chiang Mai, and found her new home. Over the last months she has asked for prayer to develop a missions heart, and by the time she left for Thailand on July

20, that missions heart shone brightly. She is serving with TeachBeyond and teaching Grade 1 at Grace International School.

**Jenny Klassen** is originally from Saskatchewan. As a young university student, she felt called to more, and participated in a one-month trip to Japan through Multiply (MB Mission). Falling in love with Japan, she knew she wanted to go back, and a number of years later she signed up for Multiply's longer mission trip, called TREK. With travel shut down at the time, she spent her ministry time in Winnipeg, volunteering with a number of ministries, including Inner City Youth Alive (ICYA). With her heart for the people on the margins, she fell in love with ICYA and the community they serve, and she stayed on as a full-time worker. Since joining ICYA full-time in 2021, she has become an active member and leader at Many Rooms Church Community. At ICYA she is the youth discipleship coordinator, and she spends her time mentoring and discipling teens and young adults.

**Mark and Gillian Wiewel** have been working toward missions since feeling a call as teenagers. The last few years have been spent intentionally preparing for life and ministry overseas, as Mark completed his teaching degree and Gillian her TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) degree. Along with their young son Oliver, Mark and Gillian left for Prague, Czechia on August 11. Sent by Ridgewood Church and serving with TeachBeyond, Mark will be teaching Grade 6 at the Christian International School of Prague, which provides a biblical education for missionary kids (around 30 percent of the student body) and expat students from around the world, and Gillian is looking forward to building relationships in the community.

Each of these missionaries has a page on our website where you can learn more or sign up to receive their newsletters. Find it at [www.emcmissions.ca/missionaries](http://www.emcmissions.ca/missionaries).

— EMC Board of Missions



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Jenny Klassen



Jayda Brandt



Gillian and Mark Wiewel, with son Oliver

# From pulpit to paddle: Winnipeg pastor inspires faith-filled adventures

St, Vital EMC  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

**A WINNIPEG PASTOR** and adventure seeker is sharing some tips and tricks to have an 'EPPic' summer.

As of April 1, 2025, Pastor Paul Epp stepped into his first lead pastor role at St. Vital EMC.

"I was an associate [pastor] for about nine years before that," says Epp. "One thing I said in my interview was, 'I know I'm looking for a job. But I'm also looking for a new church family for my family.'"

Epp and his wife, Laurel, have been married for 14 years, and the couple is no stranger to tragedy. They have three daughters, two on Earth and one in heaven.

"Nova is nine, and she has mild cerebral palsy, so that's a bit of a challenge for us. Zalia is six, and we have Soleil, who passed away last August, stillborn. We talk about her all the time, and we're planning a birthday party for her in about a month from now."

Epp is doing a series of sermons this summer called Anchored: Holding Fast to Truth in a Drifting World.

"This week I'm prepping a sermon called In the Beginning ... God? We're going to look at the first two verses of the Bible. We'll study and go through questions, such as, 'How do we know that's true?' We'll try to put on our thinking caps and love God with all our minds to explore some of those evidences that are there."

**"We'll try to put on our thinking caps and love God with all our minds to explore some of those evidences that are there."**

– Paul Epp



SYLVIA ST. CYR/PNN

Epp grew up on a strawberry farm near La Salle, with a river nearby where he learned to fish. This was the beginning of his love of nature and wildlife.

"One of my favourite hobbies is wildlife photography, outdoor adventure photography, going on canoe trips and guiding them. I have my big heavy zoom camera on my neck often. We've had wolves howling close to us, we've had bear interactions, and all sorts of fun stuff."

Epp often finds himself with his family in one of Manitoba's Provincial Parks, canoeing, hiking, taking photos, or just taking in the view. His Instagram includes photos of these adventures.

"My motto is 'Life of Adventure.' So, how do you pursue adventure in your everyday, but also weekends?"

Epp has taken a few silent retreats in nature where he encountered God in multiple ways, including watching nearby wildlife. He encourages people to just get outside and see all the beauty of God's handiwork in nature.

"You don't have to break the bank to go on an adventure. If it's fishing, you don't always need a boat. Just a cheap ol' pickerel rig and some worms. My daughter and I fish from shore, and she plays with the worms the whole time we're fishing. I get to chill and relax, and we wait for the bells to ring. I let her reel it in."

– Sylvia St. Cyr

This article was originally published at [chvnradio.com](http://chvnradio.com) on July 10, 2025. It's reprinted with permission.



# True North

Abbeydale Christian Fellowship  
Calgary, Alberta

**IN A WORLD** of uncertainty, instability and constant change, stability, security and consistency are sought and valued. Hebrews 13:8 “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” and John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth and the life” make it clear that Jesus is absolutely our unwavering True North. While the magnetic North pole shifts, the True North remains consistently stable and fixed.

This summer’s VBS at ACF focused on trusting Jesus, the only True North. With the help of various animal characters, relevant Bible truths were reinforced and the 67 attending children were immersed in life-changing faith formation activities. Crew leaders led their smaller groups of children in a rotation of stations such as the Wild Bible Adventure Station, the Imagination Station, Glacier Games, the Sticky Scripture Station, Tundra Treats and Compass Closing, learning and experiencing that Jesus can always be trusted.



Many hours of work went into decorating the church for its summer VBS program.

Visually, the entire church building became a mini ‘True North’ complete with northern lights, ice bergs, grizzly bears, a bush plane, nesting bald eagle, dog sled, camp site with a canoe and an actual 15-foot by 22-foot log cabin, just to name a few decor items. About 35 volunteers during the VBS week as well as several others involved in prop prep, set-up and take-down were involved.

Several of ACF’s recent baptismal candidates and membership transfer individuals referred to their personal journey from a perceived correct path

to trusting in Jesus upon searching for the truth.

Ajab Sultesa, born and raised in a Muslim family, but wanting to know the truth for himself, started reading the Bible and made the decision to trust in Jesus. He is now actively involved in the ministry of spreading the light of God’s Word.

Through Christian friends at school, Aynalem Gondel was able to see the difference between religion and a real relationship with Jesus and realized that his was the true path.

Kullee Berhanu needed and wanted a deeper relationship with God. The more she sought him and read his word, the more peace and calmness she experienced, even through uncertain and difficult situations.

Other baptismal candidates were Abigail Berhanu, Mugisa Byaruhanga and Alex Milton. Their testimonies (how they determined to set their compasses to the True North), are available for listening to/watching on ACF’s June 15, 2025, YouTube stream.

– Ivy Plett



Pastor Chris Hughes stands with June 15 baptismal candidates (left to right) Mugisa Byaruhanga, Alex Milton, Kullee Berhanu, Aynalem Gondel, Arab Sultesa, and Abigail Berhanu.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

# Fun and meaning intermingles at church camp

Kleefeld EMC  
Kleefeld, Manitoba

**THE ANNUAL KLEEFELD** EMC church camp took place from May 30 to June 1, 2025, at Roseau River Bible Camp. Church families settled into camp cabins or set up their campers on the grounds in preparation for a weekend filled with fun things like zip lining,

swimming, horseback riding, and more, interspersed with meaningful worship sessions, good fellowship, and delicious meals. Thanks to all who organized and helped to make the event a success.

The highlight of the weekend was the baptism on Sunday morning. Friends and family filled the chapel to support and listen to the testimonies

of the five baptismal candidates, after which everyone filed down the banks of the river to witness the occasion. Participating in the rites of baptism and membership reception were Henry and Brenna Berg, Emily Moule, Caycie Rogalsky, and Niki Siemens. May the Lord bless you richly as you continue to serve and worship him.

– Louella Friesen



Niki Siemens (left) and Emily Moule (right) are baptized by pastors Lyndol Fast and Greg Klassen. Other candidates (not pictured) were Henry and Brenna Berg and Caycie Rogalsky.

## Blessed by arrival of interim pastoral couple

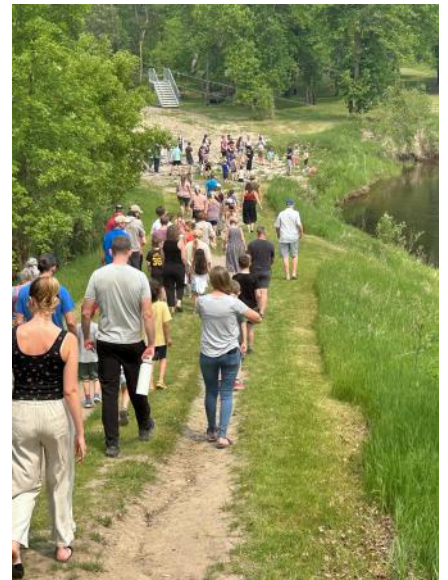
Morris Fellowship Chapel  
Morris, Man.

**THE FIRST WEEK** of July is over and so is VBS. This is an annual event and once again we had many youngsters attending. On Friday evening we had a closing program with many parents and other family members present to listen to the wonderful message of what had been taught throughout the week.

We have been blessed with Jeff and Laural Ann Plett taking the interim pastoral position in our church!

Each summer Chester and Ruth Bartel invite the church for a pizza party. On Sunday, July 13, 99 people arrived at their home. Chester heats up his outdoor pizza oven to more than 600 degrees. Everyone enjoyed the lovely evening.

– Lorne and Lorraine Loewen



Kleefeld EMCers head down to the river to witness the baptism of five candidates.



# Golf tournaments tee off toward a common goal

**UNDER A CLOUDLESS** sky with not a whisper of a wind, on the morning of June 12, 2025, 132 ambitious men and women, ranging in age from teens to eighties, gathered at the Fly-in Golf Course in Steinbach, Man., to rally together and support a common goal.

Nearly a month later and over 2,000 kms to the northwest, under heavily clouded skies and fierce winds, 65 different individuals gathered together at the La Crete Golf Course to support the same goal. These individuals clubbed and then chased a little white ball around a large acreage, trying to avoid water, sand, and trees and head toward a flag that proudly stands above a small hole in the ground. Once that little white ball has been deposited in the hole 18 times, an amazing feeling of victory comes over these individuals. The end result of that which they have been pursuing all day is an enormous

amount of money that gets sent to EMC Project Builders.

Both tournaments began with coffee and muffins in the morning, and all participants were also treated to a delicious all-you-can eat meal. The tournaments were Texas Scramble-style with a variety of contests throughout the course and numerous donated prizes given out. Together, these tournaments raised over \$78,000.

Project Builders has been raising money in various forms since 1973 and has sent over 3.5 million dollars to hundreds of projects in over 50 countries since then. In 2025, Project Builders set a goal to send over \$175,000 to 19 different projects in 14 different countries. If you are interested in learning more about Project Builders or would like to donate, check out their website at [www.projectbuilders.ca](http://www.projectbuilders.ca) where you can see a complete list and description of all the 2025 projects.

– Luke Bartel  
Project Builders chair



SBC golf team members celebrate at the Manitoba tournament.



The Alberta tournament saw some young participants come and compete.

Thank you to the many generous individual donors and to the sponsors (below) who support Project Builders through these tournaments!

## Manitoba corporate sponsors:

### Diamond

NDL Construction  
Penn-Co Construction

### Platinum

Arborg Home Hardware Building Centre  
KK Penner Tire  
Kleefeld Developments  
Lakeview Insurance  
Oakdale Farms  
RIVR Financial  
Vidir  
Westgate Enterprises

### Eagle

A & T Poultry  
Blue River Group  
Clearview Co-Op  
Fast Brothers  
Friesen Seeds  
Hydro Ag Supply  
Ledingham GM  
Lee & Kathrine Gregory  
MazerGroup  
Premier Building  
Reimer Building Movers  
Ron and Sharon Friesen  
Rosenort Agro  
Rosenort Motors  
Springwood Homes  
Steinbach Bible College  
Unger Poultry  
Wealth Planning Group  
White Willow Event Rentals

### Birdie

Acuity Marketing  
Blue Crescent Hotels  
Golden West  
Janzen Garage  
Keating Mechanical  
Leighlee Farms  
Merit Transport  
Racka Roofing  
Ringball Corporation  
Sandy Ridge Farms  
Santa Lucia  
Steinbach Christian School

### Par

Arborg Oil & Filter  
IDC Communications

## Alberta corporate sponsors:

Home Hardware  
Integra Tire  
Payless Mobility  
Pizza Place  
Preferred Electric  
Rempel Trucking



## An introduction to the book by a son of the author

*"We need a Grade 3–4 teacher who can speak German!"*

Forty-five years ago, the EMC was responsible to provide teachers for the Lucero school on the Tres Palmas Mennonite colony in East Paraguay. Sarah Martens of Kola EMC had been a missionary teacher there since the mid-60s, but most of the other staff were local Mennonites or Paraguayans. In 1979, Walter Kruse, Sarah's brother-in-law in Canada, learned of the need. German was his father's language and what Walter had spoken at home—but only until he had started school; then post-war anti-German sentiment kept the family speaking only English.

*Did he have enough German to teach in it? And what about community life in Low German outside of the classroom? Though his mother was Russian Mennonite, she hadn't taught him Low German. Fifteen years earlier, however, while Walter was earning his education degree from Brandon University, he met nurse-in-training Anne Martens at a young adults' church event. After being baptized at the Kola EMC early in 1967, Walter married Anne. Now that he was part of an EMC family, Walter*

***Did he have enough German to teach in it? And what about community life in Low German outside of the classroom?***



*learned Low German from his wife so he could understand what his brothers-in-law were saying at the gatherings.*

*So, strengthened by a sense of call to serve, hopeful that his grasp of German would be enough, and sent by the EMC Board of Missions, Walter and Anne and four young children flew from frigid Winnipeg to tropical Asuncion in March of 1980. During their two years of service, they were part of the EMC missionary fellowship, encouraged by field visits from mission board representatives.*

*Walter's early teaching career got him fascinated by the far north; now he was intrigued by the cultural landscape of Paraguay: the indigenous people, the Paraguayans (a mix of indigenous and European), and Mennonite settlers. The*

*observations he made were recorded in the form of letters mailed to Canada; he later edited them, took some literary liberties, and collected them in this book.*

*Walter and Anne returned to Paraguay for a year in the mid-90s, this time to the Chaco, and with only the son who was born after the first adventure.*

– David Kruse

**RIGHT FROM THE** first page of the book, which states the author is writing from a hammock with inkwell sitting at one end of the swing and a cowhorn cup of yerba at the other, one knows this will be a delightful read. *Desert Mailbag* is framed as a collection of letters sent from Paraguay to Canada over a period of three years while Kruse is on a teaching assignment. Essentially, they are 50 vignettes of life and culture in the storied Chaco and jungles of the South American country, written by a keen observer who sees everything as an adventure.

Some letters describe place, often in vivid detail, which transports the reader to Asuncion with its brick-walled streets and fires in the courtyards or the *fenses* used for recreational ranches on the vast plains or the houses set in the thornbush of Chaco (beautiful like “an outpost of Eden”). One can almost smell birds sizzling and dripping over glowing embers in preparation for lunch, see the reddish raised lines on someone's feet that denote hookworm tunnels and feel plus-40 degrees

continued next page

continued from p. 29

of heat as buildings and cars shimmer and bake in the sun.

Other letters comment on customs and culture of Paraguay—*yerba* gets a whole chapter—with a bit of history thrown in, as well as life on Mennonite colonies. The central and most intriguing part of the book is the experiences Kruse has and the individuals he meets—often described with a good dose of humour. Expeditions such as going fishing—which involved miles of travel along roads choking with dust only to arrive at a muddy water hole—hunting alligators at night with burning sticks for guidance, and attending a motocross race with spectators rushing onto the tracks at any time with no sense of liability, make for favourite campfire stories.

And it's obvious Kruse will find interesting any person he meets—take, for example, Diedrich, drafted into Russia's Red Army but escaped to serve with Germany; or Ivan, a ship pilot who doesn't trust any GPS except the stars; or visitors who came to the house for tea at 7 o'clock in the morning.

This book is like a series of short stories that can be read in any sequence and picked up when one has a few minutes of time to read something uplifting. Along the way, one may learn fragments of Paraguayan history (e.g. Chaco war between Paraguay and Bolivia).

Readers who wish to learn more about Mennonite settlement and struggles to adapt to local culture will be disappointed. The impression one is

**The central and most intriguing part of the book is the experiences Kruse has and the individuals he meets—often described with a good dose of humour.**

left with is that Mennonites are totally enmeshed in the culture of the country. There are few references that are distinctly Mennonite. One is a description of a typical Sunday on the colony which follows the same ritual week after week: early service in one of the five churches to avoid the heat, *yerba* on the porches with friends, noon meal, siesta, *faspá*. This book will also not enlighten the reader on EMC missionary work in Paraguay.

While there is a curious lack of comment on life in the classroom, one can assume that responsibilities were fulfilled successfully, and no doubt Kruse

entertained his students with stories of his own past in Manitoba—which included stints in carpentry, stone masonry, sign language interpreting (part of his assignment in Paraguay) and tree planting. He lived with his family in the Kola area for many years, then retired to Rosenort to live out his remaining time.

The book is available for purchase at Mennonite Heritage Village gift shop (Steinbach, Man.), online at <https://mennonite-heritage-village.com/product/desert-mailbag>, or by contacting the author's son at [vsskoromokh@hotmail.com](mailto:vsskoromokh@hotmail.com).



**SERVING FROM THE SOUNDBOOTH**  
- JEFF NEUFELD

 **THURSDAY EVENINGS 7-9:45**  
**OCT. 16, 30 AND Nov. 13, 20**

[WWW.SBCOLLEGE.CA/UPCOMINGCOURSES](http://WWW.SBCOLLEGE.CA/UPCOMINGCOURSES)



## EVA KROEKER

October 18, 1932–July 1, 2025

Eva Kroeker (née Warkentin) left us at the age of 92, meeting Jesus and reuniting with her sweetheart in heaven after a two and a half year stay at Rest Haven Care Home in Steinbach, Man.

Her family was her joy, and she will be deeply missed by her six children: son Bruce Kroeker (Clarice) and their children Jonathan (Jill), Sara (Dan Dacombe), Mandy, and Justin; son Bob Kroeker (Pat) and their children Joel (Laura), Stefan, and Chelsea (Calvin Eisner); daughter Sherri Hildebrandt (Ron) and their children Lindsay (Geoffrey Wright), Hanna (Cait McGinn), and Jessica (Kevin Penner); son Tim Kroeker (Cindy) and their children Christopher (Erin) and Shelly (Evan Plett); daughter Laurie Schellenberg (Lester) and their children Daniel, Josh, and Sam; and daughter Val Warkentine (Steve) and their children Anica, Sophie, and Madelyn; as well as 16 great grandchildren.

Eva is survived by her sisters Eleanor Rempel, Hilda Reimer, Margaret Sawatsky (Walter), Nita Friesen (Gord), Pearl Friesen (Larry), sister-in-law Wendy Warkentin, and her brothers John Warkentin (Alvina) and Jake Warkentin (Betty).

She was predeceased by her husband, Henry Kroeker, in 2016, and by her father John F. Warkentin, her mother Aganetha (née Plett), and

siblings Lillian, Rose, and Victor (also Barbara and Jimmy Peter at birth).

Eva had a deep and vibrant faith and passed it on to not only her own family but to others who were fortunate to have crossed paths with her. She taught her family to love others and to share generously – and she faithfully prayed for each of her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren by name every night.

Eva was creative, musical, sentimental, and had a quick and witty sense of humour. Even in her final days, she kept others amused with her snarky comebacks and funny remarks. She was intuitive and sensitive, fiercely

loyal with the capacity to love deeply. She loved her family so much, and even after her mental state was failing, she was always talking about wanting to plan the next family get-together.

In the past few years, Eva would ask over and over: “Where am I? Do you know where I am?” Now we can say, “Momma, you are Home. You will be forever missed.”

Eva’s Going Away Party was held on Thursday, July 17, at 2:00 p.m. at Birchwood Funeral Chapel in Steinbach, Man.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to Mennonite Disaster Service.

– The Family



## Shoulder Tapping

Please send all position ads (150 words or less), including pastoral search ads, to [messenger@emconference.ca](mailto: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](mailto:awoodworth@emconference.ca) or phone 204-326-6401).

### EMC Positions



#### 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](http://www.rosenortemc.ca). Please send your resume, cover letter, and references to [info@rosenortemc.ca](mailto:info@rosenortemc.ca).



#### 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](mailto:elder@hlcf-emc.org).

#### Senior Pastor: Community Bible Fellowship (Swan River, Man.)

Community Bible Fellowship (CBF) in Swan River, Man., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. The church's ministries include: worship, discipleship, hospitality, missions, youth, and children's discipleship.

We are seeking a Spirit-filled pastor with a servant heart to encourage and lead by example in all areas of ministry. Since, as a church, we value the contributions of each member, we want a leader who is able to train, equip and empower our members in ministry, and will preach biblical truth to develop spiritual formation and growth. A successful candidate will have a minimum of two to three years of biblical studies (bachelor's degree preferred) and would be willing to become credentialed with the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

Please send your resume to: [cbfchurchswanriver@gmail.com](mailto:cbfchurchswanriver@gmail.com).

#### Pastor: Morris (Man.) Fellowship Chapel

Morris Fellowship Chapel is a Christ-following, Bible-believing, family-friendly church of around 130 people in the small rural town of Morris, Manitoba. People of all ages are a part of Morris Fellowship, including children, young adults, adults and seniors. We are looking for a pastor to help with preaching, teaching, and building community in our church. This would include preaching on Sundays, teaching midweek Bible studies, personal visits and church community events. Contact Cliff Reimer, Pastoral Search Committee Chairman: [cliff0955@gmail.com](mailto:cliff0955@gmail.com).

**EMC Prayer & Work  
TEAMS 2025/26**

Consider joining a work or prayer team this winter and see for yourself the work our EMC missionaries are doing and how you can be a part of it! Check out the EMC Missions website for details.

Nicaragua  
October '25  
-FULL-

Bolivia  
January '26

Details: [emcmisions.ca/team](http://emcmisions.ca/team) (204) 326-6401

## Other Positions



### Executive Director: Youth for Christ (Landmark, Man.)

Youth for Christ Landmark is seeking an executive director to guide our mission of reaching the young people of Landmark with the hope and love of Jesus Christ.

Key responsibilities are: provide strategic leadership grounded in Christian principles; oversee day-to-day operations, budgeting, and staff development; foster a healthy ministry culture and team cohesion; build relationships with churches, community leaders, and donors; advance outreach programs that engage youth spiritually and practically.

Qualifications include: personal faith in Jesus Christ; leadership experience, preferably in a ministry or nonprofit setting; fundraising and community-building skills; organizational and communication abilities.

For more information or to submit your resume contact [board.landmark@yfc.ca](mailto:board.landmark@yfc.ca).



### Pastor of Youth and Young Adult Ministries: Niverville (Man.) Community Fellowship

Niverville Community Fellowship, part of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference, is seeking a pastor of youth and young adult ministries to join our ministry team as we seek to continue to action our mission of Making Disciples of Jesus as we Worship, Grow, and Serve in Love. The pastor of youth and young adult ministries will be a devoted follower of Jesus Christ with a commitment to Anabaptist faith and theology as expressed in the EMMC statement of

faith and a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. The role of the pastor of youth and young ministries is to introduce and disciple young people into a life lived for Christ by your example, teaching, and relationships founded in love. For more information or to apply please contact [hr@nivcf.ca](mailto:hr@nivcf.ca). Deadline for applications is October 31, 2025.



### 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](http://www.gospelfellowshipchurch.ca)) or contact us at [applications@gospelfellowshipchurch.ca](mailto:applications@gospelfellowshipchurch.ca).



### Social Enterprise Director; Radio Coordinator and Host: Mennonite Community Services (Aylmer, Ont.)

MCS, a Christian charity in Aylmer, Ont., serves people—from a Jesus-centred lens—with various programs: newcomer services,

radio, family supports and employment. MCS is seeking both a social enterprise director and a radio coordinator and host.

The social enterprise director will manage the commercial operations of the MCS Plaza and Aylmer Thrift Store along with other lease agreements, as well as oversee all maintenance and facilities management for MCS. The ideal person will have strong leadership and problem-solving skills, and a good understanding of business finances.

The radio coordinator and host would ensure that quality broadcasting occurs each day, that technical and radio equipment is functioning properly, and would prepare and file annual reports to the CRTC, Stats Canada and SOCAN. The ideal person would have strong technical skills, management skills and a background working within a radio station for at least three years.

The preferred candidate for either position would speak Plautdietsch (Low German). For detailed job postings go to [www.mcson.org/employment-opportunities](http://www.mcson.org/employment-opportunities).

## Welcome to recently hired pastors



**YOUTH PASTOR BOB ZACHARIAS** and his wife Laura  
*La Crete Christian Fellowship Church*

# Battling weeds of discouragement

**WHEN IT COMES** to my garden, I tend to miss the forest for the trees, or rather, miss the flowers for the weeds. I see my garden on the half-full side. Unfortunately, it's half-full of weeds and half-empty of produce.

I was challenged about my glum gardening attitude after spending two hours waging a fierce battle against the dandelions and other intruding enemies. I was nearly to my well-deserved lunch reprieve when I noticed several, tiny blooming snapdragons in gorgeous colors of purple and pink. I was delighted, but also amazed that I had spent nearly two hours working furiously in the garden oblivious to their existence. If I hadn't bent over for those last few handfuls of weeds, then I would have left my garden with the work accomplished, but the beauty missed. My attitude can easily fixate on discouragement. Grumbling about

the never-ending futility of capturing weeds and losing sight of the higher purpose. Not so with Caleb.

The Israelites were delivered from Egypt and miraculously provided for by the Lord. Then, the plot twist. Although Caleb and Joshua (two of the leaders sent as spies) beg the people to trust in the Lord's sufficiency to accomplish what he promised, the people—in rebellion—refuse to enter the promised land. This is followed by God's long punishment on the people—one sand-ridden year for each day the spies had investigated the land.

Caleb and Joshua also experience "the vast and dreadful wilderness" (Deuteronomy 8:15) but, while their peers perish, they enter the promised land alongside the sons and daughters of their own deceased demographic. And the 85-year-old Caleb is still eager to finish the delayed mission. He is

confident that the Lord will accomplish what he promised even after the decades-long delay. "Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said" (Joshua 14:12).

Caleb has kept his enthusiasm and resolve to accomplish the mission others feared. Caleb's unflinching focus reminds me again of Abraham who "did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Romans 4:20–21).

Here I am, battling weeds in a seasonal garden that refuses to grant me the mastery, yet I know my own heart easily fills with similar weeds—weeds of discouragement, doubt, and fear. I'm not quite the age of Caleb's first brave entry into Canaan, but already I grow faint over conquering the land. Isn't it good to have a faithful Saviour who daily intercedes for us? (Hebrews 7:25). To be "surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses" motivating me to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles" so that I too can finish the race (Hebrews 12:1).

The beauty that grows within my soul is not the fleeting, fading flourish of one tiny bloom lost in a sea of weeds. The great joke is on the weeds that haven't yet seen that they are already defeated.

**I was delighted, but also amazed that I had spent nearly two hours working furiously in the garden oblivious to their existence. If I hadn't bent over for those last few handfuls of weeds, then I would have left my garden with the work accomplished, but the beauty missed.**



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



# You might not be going to the best church

**IN RECENT MONTHS**, in addition to regularly attending my beloved Fort Garry EMC, I've visited Baptist, Alliance, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Mennonite worship services for various one-time events. I've then asked myself, am I at the best church?

In the past I've wandered far from my present church. I attended an Old Colony background church in Texas as a teen. As a young adult I wished my EMC church would just be charismatic for once. We worshipped for three years at Tenth Church, an Alliance congregation in Vancouver, and Kings Community Church, a small Baptist church-plant in Oakville. I had a phase where everything Anglican seemed better than what I had. Then I spent years living in the mind of a Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar. I wrote a book about what I learned from him.

And all the time I've asked, which is the best church for me? What church has the most biblical theology? The most transforming worship and liturgy? The most contagious evangelism? The most theologically profound architecture? The deepest philosophical foundation? The sweetest community between members? Who is just the least dysfunctional?

If I add all this up, Fort Garry EMC may not be the best church. And neither are the others. It might be as Stanley Hauerwas said about marriage; you always end up marrying the wrong person.

But perhaps "best" is not a Christian word when it comes to churches.

The Bible shows no concern that Christians attend the best church. Nowhere does Paul say, "if you are not growing in your faith, it's probably because you are not at the best church."

The question might be not, is there a better church, but rather, is this still the body of Christ? Here is a basic principle: being involved in a certain

people, which is almost the only such congregation available to her. She has little choice when it comes to church and would have sharp disagreements with some of its theology. But for her it's a gift that might not have been there.

There may be times to leave a church. Like in a rotten marriage, the human capacity to endure has limits.

**Perhaps "best" is not a Christian word when it comes to churches. The Bible shows no concern that Christians attend the best church.**

church should have *some* connection to Christ being involved in that church. We can ask: Does Jesus still offer salvation to this church? Is the blood of Christ still offered to atone for the sins of this church? Does the Spirit still give the Scriptures to this church? If Jesus is "attending" this church, why wouldn't I? And to be clear, in Revelation 2:5 Jesus threatens to remove a church's lampstand. I suspect then Jesus would no longer attend.

I often think of my daughter here. She lives overseas in a city of several million people with very few Christians. She attends a church of about 30

But being loyal to a congregation, even through difficult times, can be a powerful testimony to the faithfulness of God to his people. Can I show my congregation the long-suffering mercy and forgiveness that Christ has shown me?

*Faithful God, what anointing of the Spirit's power, what transformation of my character, what firing of your love, would empower me to match your faithfulness to my church? Could my life in your body here become a sign of your big-heartedness? Make my love the face of your lovingkindness, which you promised endures to the thousandth generation. Amen.*

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



# Serving as a spiritual practice

“**EVERYONE’S PLATE IS** full; some of us just have bigger plates.”

This quote was given to me by a couple in our church that have demonstrated a significant capacity to serve within the context of our church community. For a time, I was a part of the group that had big plates, and I was proud of the capacity that I had for service. Sure, I would intentionally try to avoid eye contact with the Sunday school superintendent for July and August hoping that they would fill their teaching roster before they saw me. But, like many of us, I grew up with the understanding that the church needed people to serve, and it was our duty to fill as many of the needed positions as possible.

But what does it mean to serve as a spiritual practice? Yes, this may mean volunteering to teach that grade

5–6 boys Sunday school class (your kids min director would be excited), but I want to suggest that service starts long before we step into ministry opportunities. Service involves us viewing our time, gifts, abilities and energy as offerings to live out the two greatest commands: to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbour as yourself. Service, in its essence, is a choice to put God first and to elevate the needs of others to a place of prominence in your life; at times being willing to sacrifice your own wants and desires.

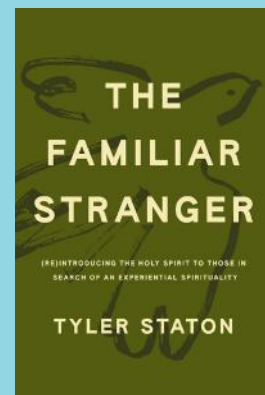
Acts of service can bring benefits and satisfaction, but if we serve for the perceived benefits, the benefits will always fall short of our expectation. However, if we offer our gifts, ability and, maybe more importantly, our availability to serve others as an act of worship

## RESOURCE CORNER

### *The Familiar Stranger* by Tyler Staton

*“In a generation that is seeking to experience God as they learn more about God, this book gives an opportunity to explore how the gifts of the Holy Spirit are taught in Scripture and practical ways that we can practice and “eagerly desire” (1 Corinthians 14:1) these gifts. I have found this book challenging, refreshing and transformative for my thinking surrounding the work of the Holy Spirit.”*

— Mo Friesen



that acknowledges all that God has done on our behalf, we will be drawn into a deeper, more reliant relationship with God. I have experienced the power and nearness of the Holy Spirit in times of serving others. Also, some of my closest friendships have been forged in the crucible of shared service. Serving others opens our eyes to the needs and, often, the injustices experienced by others. Service grows our empathy, compassion and love for those we choose to serve.

This is one of the greatest ways we can invite the next generation to grow in relationship with Jesus; invite them to serve with you. Model consistent, Holy Spirit led, and biblically informed care for others. This goes beyond simply telling the youth group that they need to set up chairs for the potluck or asking them to do what you think is beneath you. Participate in this important discipleship activity with them. Model what it looks like to sacrifice your wants and desires for the sake of others.

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NLT). Let’s follow Jesus’ lead and choose service.



Mo Friesen is EMC’s Director of Next Generation.