

# The Messenger

Volume 64 No. 1 January/February 2026

A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE



# abide

- 1 to remain; continue; stay.
- 2 to have one's abode; dwell; reside.
- 3 to continue in a particular condition, attitude, relationship, etc.; last.

MISSIONAL, FAITHFUL,  
AND WITH A DEEP LOVE OF  
SCRIPTURE: THE APPEAL OF  
FUNDAMENTALISM  
P. 6

WORK AND WORSHIP:  
EVERYTHING WE DO  
MATTERS TO GOD AND  
TO THE CHURCH  
P. 11

ABIDE IN ME: WHY THE  
CHURCH MUST NOT  
SURRENDER TO THE  
DIGITAL TAKEOVER  
P. 15

# Have you chosen a word for the year?

**WHILE I HAVEN'T yet participated in the practice of choosing a one-word theme to guide my year to come, I feel the draw. Resolutions and goals can feel rigid and restrictive, with a pass or fail element to them. According to bestselling author Gretchen Rubin, "A [one-word] theme is imaginative and adaptable. It's about direction, rather than success or failure."**

If I were to choose a theme for 2026, I feel I couldn't go wrong with the word "abide." I don't know about you but, to me, the events of 2025 felt tumultuous. And it would seem I'm not alone in this. For example, Pantone chose Cloud Dancer, a shade of white, as their colour of the year for 2026. They describe it as "a whisper of peace and tranquility in a noisy world."

In contrast to the noisiness of the world, "abide" conjures images of stability, a feeling of rest, a sense of being anchored in something—Someone—bigger than ourselves. The ESV translation of the Bible uses the word "abide" 36 times, most of which relate to humanity's

connection to God. Perhaps the most familiar reference is John 15:4, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."

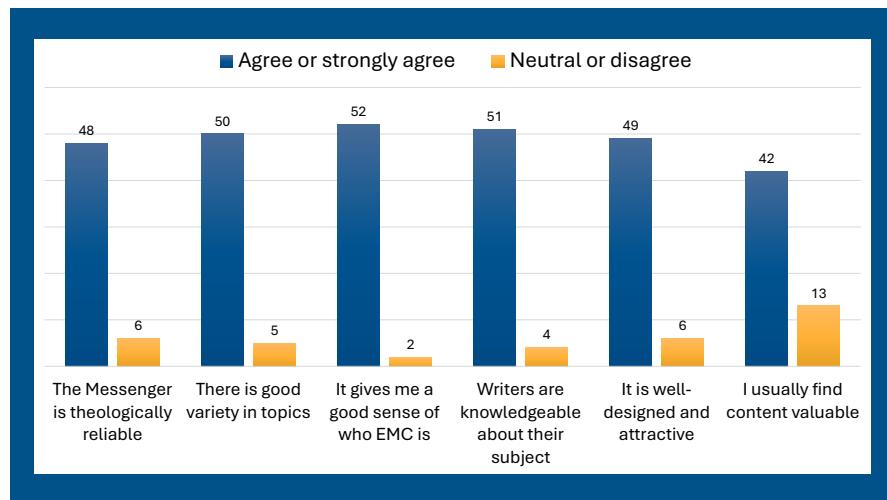
As you go through this issue, you may see a theme of abiding in our feature articles. While we may not agree with some elements of fundamentalism, we can see a desire for continued faithfulness to abide in the Word of God. And whether we're at church, work, or anywhere else, God's Spirit goes with us in all we do. We can also find ways to "abide in Christ and in the virtual kingdom" (p. 18).

How about you—have you chosen a word for the year? If so, we'd love to hear what it is and your reasons for choosing it. Send us a message at messenger@emconference.ca. Also, check out a snapshot of our readership survey results on this page. Thank you to all who participated!

—Rebecca Roman



## The Messenger readership survey results snapshot



\*57 people responded to the survey

## Island Gospel Fellowship sanctuary destroyed by fire

**IN THE EARLY hours of December 22, 2025, the Island Gospel Fellowship church in Burns Lake, B.C., had their sanctuary destroyed by fire.**

Read more about this story on page 23. Pray for the church congregation as they grieve and begin to recover from this tremendous loss.

—EMC

# CONTENTS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2026

## FEATURES

### 6 Missional, faithful, and with a deep love of Scripture: the appeal of fundamentalism

By Jeremy Loseth

For many individuals today, the term “fundamentalist Christian” may dredge up deep feelings and emotional reactions.

### 11 Work and worship: everything we do matters to God and to the church

By Glenda Friesen

How we go about our work is of utmost importance. As worshippers of God, working with integrity is not optional, it is mandatory.

### 15 Abide in Me: why the church must not surrender to the digital takeover

By Will Braun

Never owning a smartphone allows the writer to offer a unique perspective on the digital landscape.

## COLUMNS

### 20 Global impact How reading the Bible is encouraging me to make a ‘global impact’

By Gerald Reimer

### 34 His light to my path My defining personality redeemed

By Karla Hein

### 35 Further in and higher up Have you heard this preacher tic?

By Layton Friesen

### 36 Inspiring faith Sabbath as a spiritual practice

By Mo Friesen

## DEPARTMENTS

2 Editor's Note

4 Letters and Notices

21 Global Focus

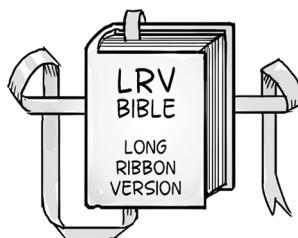
24 Local Focus

30 News

32 Shoulder Tapping

### LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS

MOST BIBLES COME WITH A BUILT-IN BOOKMARK, BUT THE ALL-NEW L.R.V. BIBLE FEATURES THE LONGEST BOOKMARK EVER!



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AND BEST OF ALL, THE BOOKMARK IS LONG ENOUGH TO MARK MULTIPLE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES. LOOK, NOW MATTHEW CAN MARK LUKE AND JOHN!



# The Messenger

Volume 64 No. 1 January/February 2026



MANAGING EDITOR  
SCOTT MARBLE



EDITOR  
REBECCA ROMAN

## PUBLICATION AND PURPOSE

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

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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  
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## CHANGE OF ADDRESS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

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To sign up for the email newsletter  
or submit an address change,  
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## 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  
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## Letters and Notices



Evangelical Mennonite Conference

## Financial Reports

### January–November 2025

	General Fund 2025	General Fund 2024
Income*	1,660,457	1,636,516
Expenses	1,970,677	1,737,384
Excess/Shortfall	(310,220)	(100,868)

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 the Sept/Oct 2025 issue

May these words bring glory and honour to the LORD our God and Saviour and be of benefit to readers of *The Messenger*. I read the letter by Jeff Thiessen in the September/October 2025 issue with the beautiful rainbow on the cover.

Seeing MCC mentioned a few times brought me fond memories of attending the VBS at their headquarters in Basel, Switzerland, in the 1950s. Our father Hans Gerber, a farmer who also served as a minister in the Schanzli-Mennonite Church, brought all kinds of veggies and fruits for their staff. I remember the close relationship we had.

### Guidelines for letters

Letters (250 words or less) are generally to comment on issues raised in *The Messenger*. The magazine reserves the right to edit letters for length, style, legality, and taste. It can refuse publication.

Our father was concerned, as he took part in MCC's work in Europe after World War Two, that all the relief work be done "In the name of Christ." He was much interested in sharing the gospel as well, adding a "Gospel of John" in the language of the grateful folks receiving help through MCC, for instance. Apparently, this was not permitted by the World Council of Churches.

"Should Christians be Zionists?" by Michael Zwaagstra also caught my attention. Our father helped save a Jewish man's life by smuggling him across the border into Alsace, France, where relatives lived. My answer to the question in this article would be contained in the statement of Craig L. Parshall who was at that time (January 2007) senior vice president for the National Religious Broadcasters. He said, "If we are to accept the whole written counsel of God, then rejecting Israel is not an option that has been left open to us."

– Mark Gerber  
Fort Frances, Ont.

### Appreciative of ‘appeal’ series

Thank you for the recent series on exploring the theological variation evident in the EMC. Most noteworthy to me was the recent study on progressive Christianity since I find myself in this stream in many respects and recognize that we are not all on this page. Ruth Friesen, the writer, expressed the specific tenets of these oft-controversial viewpoints in a way that was non-threatening and yet effective in explaining current approaches to faith and life which may be new to some among us.

As Ruth stated, people identifying as “progressive” in theological viewpoints are at times labelled “liberal” in

a pejorative sense. For me, it is more a perspective that recognizes that God’s mind is trustworthy but not always easy to discern in our current context. Thank you, Ruth, for having the courage to write on this difficult topic.

Thank you also to you our editorial team, Rebecca and Erica, on introducing this series, including this part, as not every one of your readers will identify with this perspective.

Erica, we also wish you God’s blessing upon retirement. Your many years of service to the EMC and the kingdom of God are appreciated. Shalom.

– Ron Penner  
Winnipeg, Man.



### From the web

[www.emcmessenger.ca](http://www.emcmessenger.ca)

“You might not be going to the best church”

p. 34, Sept/Oct 2025 issue

Layton, you made me laugh. You made me remember [with] delight Stanley Hauerwas’ works. His words in response to him being named “America’s Best Theologian” that “Best is not a theological category” come to mind with your words. “Best” of all (“greatest” of all?) you drew me to love and appreciate the local church as a working of the Spirit, focus on the presence of Jesus in her, and glorify the Father for her!

– Chris Hughes

## Grateful for outgoing and incoming EMC office staff

THE PAST NUMBER of years have seen significant staff changes in the EMC office. One of the consistent staff members for the past 19 years was Erica Fehr. She filled numerous roles in her time here, finishing as director of communications and managing editor of *The Messenger*. Erica retired at the end of November. She loved the written word and enjoyed working with authors and promoting voices of those that were often marginalized. Her experience and corporate memory will be missed as she moves on to her next chapter in life.

Also announcing his resignation is Peter Doerksen. Peter has filled the role of western ambassador for the last few years. Peter’s experience, calm demeanor, and warm personal

touch were appreciated by the western churches he connected with.

With the resignations comes some sadness but also excitement as new individuals are now drawn into these roles. Scott Marble has been hired as the new director of communications and began his role in January. Scott comes with extensive communications experience and just completed his Master of Arts at Providence in December.

This coming fall, Ed Peters, currently the pastor at Burns Lake Island

Gospel Fellowship in B.C., will take on the role of western ambassador. Ed has been involved in the conference at different levels and will bring his experience and existing relationships with the Region 1 and 2 churches to this position.

God has always been faithful in bringing people to Conference positions. Please pray for the staff as we seek to provide leadership and support to enhance the work of our conference.

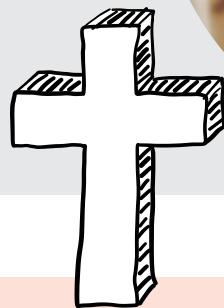
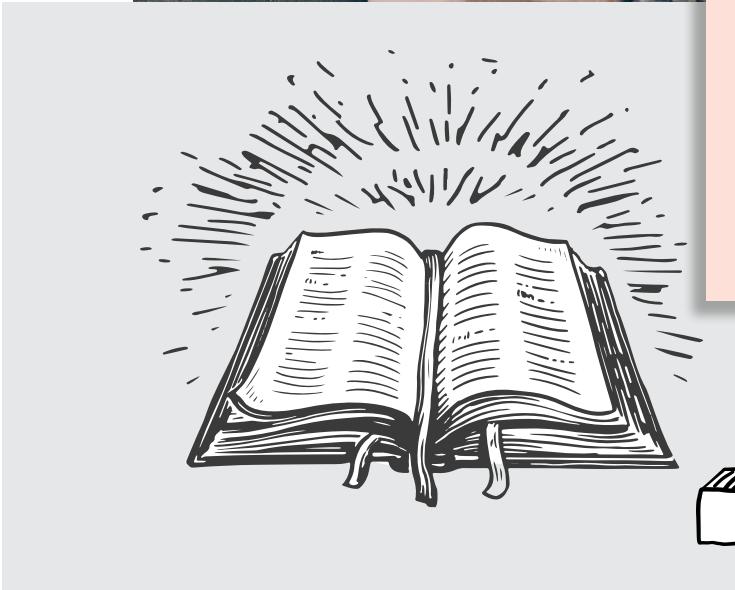
– Emery Plett  
EMC executive director



Left to right:  
Erica Fehr, Peter  
Doerksen, Scott  
Marble, Ed Peters



Missional,  
faithful,  
and with a deep  
love of Scripture



LIGHTSTOCK AND ISTOCK IMAGES



the appeal of  
fundamentalism

By Jeremy Loseth

**Editors' note:** This is the fifth in a series of six articles exploring some of the theological variation we find in the EMC. Our goal is to grow in our understanding of why certain theological positions are attractive to people in our churches, with the hope that this will help us have more informed conversations.

The next and final article will be on the appeal of the EMC's particular blend of evangelicalism and Anabaptism.

**THERE ARE CERTAIN** words that conjure up vivid images in our minds. For instance, if I were to say "heroic," I am sure that you have specific thoughts come to mind. For some it may be a firefighter pulling people from a burning building with little regard for their own lives. Others may think of Christian martyrs, both past and present, who have willingly endured persecution and death rather than deny Christ. For myself, I tend to gravitate toward the heroic imagery of D-Day soldiers storming the beaches of Normandy in 1944, advancing in the face of ferocious resistance. Perhaps I myself am heroic for admitting such a thing to the broader pacifist wing of the EMC!

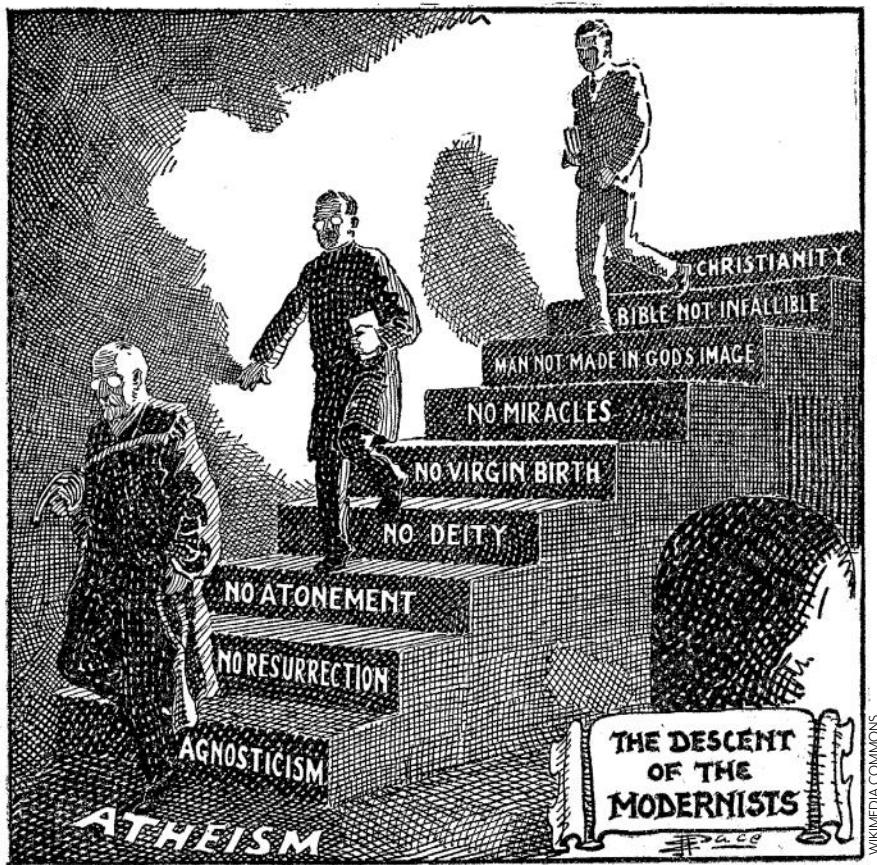
In the same respect, the term "fundamentalist Christian" can produce vivid images in our minds. For many individuals today, it may dredge up deep feelings and emotional reactions. Images of angry-looking folk protesting military funerals, of street preachers condemning the broader public to hell, or of narcissistic, legalistic, and abusive cult-like church leaders are common. Some equate fundamentalists with ignorance, which is sadly a reputation that too many have rightfully earned. Indeed, when those in media use the title, it is often in the attempt to paint the individuals in question as being extremists or radicals, or some other group that ought to be rejected outright.

Due to this negative stigma, many Christians distance themselves from the title "fundamentalist," and I cannot blame them given the current cultural perception. I personally know numerous individuals who have been completely turned off Christianity because of the teachings of some

While I may have distanced myself from adopting this title given the modern-day interpretation and definition, I am also wary of throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater.

of these fundamentalist individuals or organizations, and many more who have distanced themselves from the conservative side of the Christian spectrum. That is something that fills me with both sorrow and anger. I understand it personally as well; there have been times in my own life where I had profoundly negative experiences with strict fundamentalist individuals, and my emotional reaction was to cease to have any meaningful association with them.

Yet are we right to so readily abandon this designation? While I may have distanced myself from adopting this title given the modern-day interpretation and definition, I am also wary of throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. (This should not be a surprise given that I am writing an article defending the validity and appeal of fundamentalism!) However, to understand where I am coming from, I think it is worthwhile to go back in history.



"The Descent of the Modernists" by Ernest James Pace, a fundamentalist cartoon portraying modernism as the descent from Christianity to atheism, was first published in *Seven Questions in Dispute* by William Jennings Bryan in 1924.

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

### A brief history lesson

In the 19th century, a liberal theological line of thought emerged out of Germany, popularized by the scholar Friedrich Schleirmacher. It essentially stripped the miraculous out of the Bible by downplaying the Scriptures as being divinely inspired, reducing the Bible to a collection of human documents. This theology began to be adopted by more and more scholars of the day, and it began to influence many within Protestantism.

In response to this, a series of pamphlets was produced from 1910–1915 that argued for the “fundamentals” of the Christian faith. Initially there were five core theological positions identified: the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth, the historical legitimacy of Jesus’ miracles, Jesus’ bodily resurrection, and the substitutionary atonement of Jesus. In later booklets, the deity of Christ and his second coming were added, making at least seven historical distinctives that the early fundamentalists deemed essential Christian beliefs.

### Alignment with the creeds

Now, when I look at how fundamentalists were initially defined, it does not look or sound so scary and unreasonable. I do not think it is too far a stretch to say that most EMC constituents would agree with these things (or at least six of the seven).

In fact, a cursory look at church history shows that most of these defining points of the initial fundamentalists are found within the two major church creeds. These creeds, of course, are the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed. While I understand the EMC is not inherently creedal, Christian history put a lot of emphasis on these two, and Reformers like Luther and Calvin emphasized their importance to the Christian.

Both creeds explicitly affirm the virgin birth, resurrection, deity, and second coming of Christ, with the legitimacy of Jesus’ miracles being inferred (due to his resurrection). That means that five of the seven “fundamentals” of

historic fundamentalism are rather clearly stated in the two most important creeds the church has produced.

That leaves us with the two other points of historic fundamentalism to consider: the inerrancy of Scripture and the substitutionary atonement of Christ. With regard to inerrancy, it is abundantly clear that the early church believed in the Scriptures as being free from error.

### **Inerrancy of Scripture**

Clement of Rome, writing at around AD 100, wrote that the Scriptures were the “true utterances of the Holy Spirit” that were free from any “unjust or counterfeit character... written in them” (“The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*). Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that “the Scriptures are indeed perfect, since they were spoken by the Word of God and His Spirit” (“Against Heresies,” *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*). Many other writings from the early church support this sentiment, including those of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome, and particularly Augustine of Hippo.

Suffice it to say, the idea that the Scriptures were divinely inspired and thus free from error is an idea grounded in the Scriptures themselves (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21, Psalm 12:6) and defended vigorously throughout church history. I have no reason to believe differently!

### **Christ’s substitutionary atonement**

The substitutionary atonement of Christ is the most contentious and likely to be rejected of the seven. To most fundamentalists—particularly

If someone labels me a fundamentalist today, I doubt they mean that I am someone who adheres to these seven doctrinal points.

those of a Reformed persuasion—this is of paramount importance. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones once commented that he thought it impossible to fellowship with those who would deny this doctrine. J. I. Packer and Al Mohler have both said that a rejection of the penal substitution atonement (PSA) theory is a rejection of the gospel itself. Many others have made similar statements, staunchly linking PSA to the heart of the gospel.

While there are other atonement theories, I’d venture to guess that the nearly unanimous view within fundamentalist circles is penal substitution. Personally, I think the atonement is more complex than any one theory could account for, but I would also say there are some substitutionary elements within it.

### **Why I don’t call myself a fundamentalist**

If you have been keeping track, you can probably see I would check off six and a half of the seven central points of historic fundamentalism, with my only real quibble being the insistence on penal substitution as the only valid atonement theory. Does this make me a fundamentalist? Historically speaking, I would guess it would! Yet (if you recall from earlier in the article), I stated that I have distanced myself from adopting the title of fundamentalist. So, what gives?

Well, as I said before, today’s definition of a fundamentalist differs from that of the early 20th century. If someone labels me a fundamentalist today, I doubt they mean that I am someone who adheres to these seven doctrinal points. More than likely, they are attempting to paint me as an anti-intellectual, an isolationist, or an intolerant Pharisee who lacks the love and mercy that Jesus exemplified. I am not sure about you, but I do not want to be associated with that!

A good friend of mine recently told me that modern-day fundamentalism seems to be an attitude of extreme exclusion, meaning they draw a line in the sand and anyone who does not conform to their rigid ideas is dismissed outright (or condemned to hell). I agree with my friend; this attitude is a major reason why I can’t see myself as a fundamentalist today.

### **Still, there are things to appreciate**

However, that does not mean I cannot find things that I appreciate within modern fundamentalist circles. For instance, many of the fundamentalists that I know are deeply in love with the Scriptures. Not only are they consistently reading and studying the Bible, but many of them also excel at memorization. The ability to recall where and what a particular passage someone might

**The ability to recall where and what a particular passage someone might be talking about is very valuable when you are sharing or teaching about your faith.**

be talking about is very valuable when you are sharing or teaching about your faith. I have even heard members of other branches of Christianity laud the fundamentalist's love of the Bible, with a wish that same zeal would be found in their own tradition.

Something else I admire about the fundamentalists is their desire to educate their children. I know that this is not a trait that some will find positive, but we made the choice to homeschool our children three years ago. As my wife began sifting through possible curriculums, I came to realize there are far more than I thought! And many of the options come from the conservative evangelical/fundamentalist camp. While we may not agree with all the areas of emphasis and practice within some of these curriculums, it shows a genuine concern to raise up the next generation with a robust understanding of the Christian faith.

Many of the small Bible colleges that exist within North America were started by groups that fit the fundamentalist definition, and they produced hundreds of faithful missionaries and pastors over the years. For these kinds of things, I am truly thankful.

### **A source of hurt and blessing**

Ultimately, an exact definition of fundamentalism can be difficult to nail down. Because it is so often used in a derogatory sense, there can be a sense of shame attached to it. And we must be honest with ourselves: there are plenty of fundamentalists who have done reprehensible things and thus damaged the body of Christ. No doubt there are some readers who have experienced these unfortunate things for themselves, as I have. I have been hurt by the attitude and actions of a few people in the church who fit many of these negative stereotypes.

However, I have also been tremendously blessed and encouraged by people on the fundamentalist side of the spectrum. I certainly would not be who I am today if I had not gone to Sunday school with Mrs. Brad, whose strong emphasis on sword drills and memorization helped instill a love of Scripture in me. I would not be who I am today if it wasn't for the Bible college I went to, which was certainly grounded in fundamentalist ideals.

I would not be who I am today without the living example of Mr. Ens, whose entire life was in service of King Jesus, and whose walk matched his talk. I know of no one who could speak ill of the man, whether they agreed with him on all points of doctrine or not. His boldness in sharing the gospel, knowledge of the Bible, and his incredible prayer life were inspirational to a young and anxious me.

So, while I may not link myself to today's fundamentalism, I can confidently say that I would not be who I am now without the faithful fundamentalists who helped give me a foundation and love for my faith.



Jeremy Loseth and his family live in Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan, where he serves as the pastor of Pineridge Fellowship Chapel (EMC). He enjoys hunting, reading, and watching hockey.

# Work & worship

*Everything we do matters to God and to the church*

By Glenda Friesen

**"HERE'S A PHOTO** of my covid test," she emailed. "It proves I can't come to my piano lesson today." That may seem like a normal correspondence from a university student to their piano instructor, especially during the pandemic, but something didn't sit right with me.

My latest challenge at work was guiding this student to the realization that they would not be receiving university credit for their work that semester. I was navigating a tricky situation with

a student in the context of their tendency toward manipulation and deception. As a piano instructor, what was the most redemptive way forward? What would it look like for me to partner with the Holy Spirit's work in this situation, in this student's life?

If everything I do matters to God and to the church, how I go about my work is of utmost importance. As worshippers of God, working with integrity is not optional; it is mandatory.



Every September, Fort Garry EMC (FGEMC) launches into a new annual worship and preaching theme. This past year we took a deep dive into the theme "a whole and holy life." Present every part of yourself to God as an instrument of righteousness (from Romans 6:13).

We were helped by a Vital Worship Grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, allowing us to deepen our connection between the everyday work we are called to and our Sunday morning worship services. It has been an intensive year of focus, infused with a transformational sense of how important our work is to God and to the church.

1) We sent six FGEMC leaders to a work and worship seminar in

Tempe, Arizona, presented by the Institute for Mission, Church, and Culture.

2) We sponsored a one-day vocational leaders workshop at FGEMC for inspiration and strategic conversation of distinct categories on workers in our congregation.

3) We created a video installation called TTT = This Time Tomorrow. It is an electronic witness, photos of our congregants at work, displayed in our church foyer.

4) We created an electronic ministry map illustrating the places of work and leisure that our congregation is engaged in.

5) We engaged in a skill-mapping survey and assessment

with our congregation by Made to Flourish, an organization that empowers churches to integrate faith, work, and economic wisdom.

6) Several fabric artists, mostly from our congregation, designed and created a banner for our sanctuary that artistically reflects how our work is caught up in the majesty and action of the eternal Triune God of the Bible.

7) We commissioned a liturgical artist to create pottery vessels for our congregation's celebration of the Lord's Supper. These functional works of art promote visual expressions of Christ's primary, completed work on our behalf and our own secondary work and its produce on Christ's behalf.

8) As a church family, we created vocational prayer beads to support each person's journey toward work and worship integration.

9) We provided a book relating to work and worship, *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* by Canadian author, Gordon T. Smith, for each household to use for shared learning.

10) We hosted an experiential work and worship workshop for local church leaders, EMC and otherwise. Our speaker, Katie Ritsema-Roelofs, managing director of the Worship for Workers project with Fuller Seminary, was a valuable consultant throughout our Vital Worship project.

– Glenda Friesen

I recently heard a 23-year-old firefighter describe how he sees his workout regimen as worship. He has come to see how his diligence in building up his body's muscles is an act of worship. The next time he is on a call to help someone in distress, for example, he will be able to lift a person trapped at a difficult angle and get them to safety because of the integrity of his everyday work. This is how he sees himself as a coworker of God while he's at the gym.



Photos above (left to right): Fort Garry EMC worship leaders in Arizona; work and worship banner; volunteers hand out books gifted to congregants; work and worship display; creating pottery; a group from Many Rooms Church Community categorizes the work of their congregants at a workshop hosted by Fort Garry EMC.

All good work,  
&  
when done God's way,  
helps the world see God.

God is a worker. The first thing God reveals about himself in Scripture is that he is a creator and a worker. God chooses to work, and the work of his hands is good. According to Genesis, we were made to be workers to reflect the image of the ultimate Worker.

When speaking of humans as image-bearers of God, the writers of Genesis chose language comparable to that of the ancient near eastern kings, who placed statues and emblems of themselves in cities under their reign. These images represented the king's rule, reminding the people what the king was like. The work we do in our factories, homes, neighbourhoods, offices, schools, fields, airports, and so on, when done God's way, will show the world who God is, and will partner with the Holy Spirit in living out Christ's redemption here on earth. All human activity, the work of our hands, has potential to display the action and character of God. All good work, when done God's way, helps the world see God.

How do a piano instructor and a firefighter work as image-bearers of God? As God's image, we are created to worship God *and* to reflect God in the world.

Let's think of it this way. A healthy heart beats with a predictable rhythm. It draws blood in. It sends blood out. This diastolic and systolic movement, this gathering and scattering, is how the entire body receives life-giving oxygen.

Worship is the heartbeat of the church. Like a heartbeat, Christian worship has a life-giving and predictable rhythm. Like a heartbeat, it has a diastolic and systolic function.

Our Sunday worship service welcomes and gathers people in. Like the valves of a healthy heart, our doors open to draw people in for worship and then close to send and scatter people out into their week of work. In and out. Pull and push. The regular pattern of one day in and six days out. That rhythm is deliberate. It was designed by our Creator.

Gathered and scattered. Welcomed and sent. This is the heartbeat of healthy Christian worship.

If we stayed in one place, whether in the sanctuary or in the workplace, our spirits would begin to decay. This to-and-fro movement in God's Spirit is life-giving—it is oxygen.

### Gathered:

On Sunday morning, someone unlocks the doors, turns on the lights, puts out the bulletins, and prepares to welcome the people of God to a time of worship. We enter the sanctuary, carrying our whole lives into the presence of the Lord. We carry our tears and lament, our losses and our gains, our successes and joys, our very real struggles to live under God's instruction. We bring every interaction we've had this past week with friends, family, co-workers, neighbours.

We bring the first 10 percent of all that we've earned as a firstfruit offering. We gather to receive assurance, pardon, renewal, rest.

God, in his goodness, commanded a Sabbath rest to enjoy the work we have done. Somehow, the rhythm of the week feels just right. Every seven days I am ready to set aside time to delight in the work that God has accomplished in us and through us. Every seven days I am ready to image God by gathering with the people of God, looking back at the work we've done, resting in the satisfaction of the accomplishment. Every seven days I am reminded that my work is secondary, reflecting the completed primary work of Christ.

### Scattered:

When the gathered worship is over, the ushers will turn out the lights, put things away, and lock the door. Our encounter with God during gathered worship transforms us, renews our minds, and sends us into the world for six days of work.

As we leave, we carry the grace of Christ, the law of God, and the power of the Holy Spirit into the world. We are scattered into the world to love and serve God in a thousand different ways, through the circumstances of our life. Now we continue to worship God through the excellence of our work. We live out the church's story with creativity and integrity.

God has a story to tell, a Word to proclaim, empowering grace to offer, ongoing work to accomplish. As people who have experienced God's righteousness and transforming love,

**We are scattered into the world to love and serve God in a thousand different ways, through the circumstances of our life.**



we have the honour and responsibility to work alongside God. Flowing from our wonder at the beauty of God, our gratitude for the gospel of Christ, we find ourselves eager to work in partnership with God's good work in this world.

All work, done God's way, is valuable to God. Imagine the delight God takes in the work of a labourer building a house for those who need protection, the work of a lawyer seeking a more just world so that all people may thrive, the work of a grandmother teaching her grandchildren to bake bread in order to provide sustenance, and the work of a stay-at-home neighbour who watches out for the safety of the community.

Likewise, I felt God's delight in my work as I navigated the difficult situation with my piano student. Through the empowering grace of God's Spirit, I was able to guide us to the end of the semester in a way that honoured the student, the academic rigour and requirement of the university, and myself as the instructor. I offered my work to God in worship, learned valuable lessons through mistakes I made along the way, and enjoyed the outcome that brought honour to all involved. This work is part of my vocation before God.

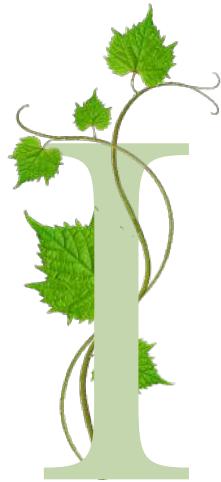
Glenda Friesen lives in Winnipeg, MB with her husband Layton Friesen. They have three adult children: a daughter, a son, and a daughter-in-law. Glenda is fulfilling the part-time role of pastor for worship and youth at Fort Garry EMC.



# ABIDE IN ME

*Why the church  
must not surrender  
to the digital takeover*

By Will Braun



## I DON'T HAVE a smartphone. Never have.

I've shied away from the topic for years, which people probably appreciate, but it does offer a perspective I want to share.

My lack of smartphone does not make me better than others. I know full-throttle phone addicts who are more present, patient and prayerful than me. Pope Francis apparently had 50 million Twitter followers.

But, while my status does not confer moral superiority, it does give me a rare viewpoint.

In a recently published fact sheet, the Pew Research Center reported that 91 percent of American adults say they own a smartphone (97 percent among those 18–29). That's up from 35 percent of all adults in 2011.

The extent of conformity is staggering: humanity is wired. It is hard to overstate the speed, extent and depth of this change. The internet, smartphones, social media and AI are fundamentally altering work, childhood, how people communicate, how brains work and more. There is essentially no meaningful resistance.

## To cast the first stone

We tend to defend and justify what we own and depend on. How free is a Tesla owner to think rigorously about the downsides of EVs? Can a youth pastor tethered to a phone help free youth ensnared in social media?

My choice to partially opt out affords a degree of freedom to question. For instance, I feel both free and compelled to say the church has—with

shockingly few exceptions—not addressed the reality and risks of the high-tech phenomena that have profound spiritual implications. For the most part, our response is a little blue thumbs-up to Mark Zuckerberg. We're on board.

Even hold-outs like me are still subsumed in the digital age. I've never texted anyone, and I only use social media for work and to look people up, but I still spend most of my working days and some of my leisure hours in front of a screen. I send emails, do a lot of searching, watch stuff, crave info fixes and listen to music on YouTube (though I like to think my tastes for old rock, new country and occasional worship music fluster the algorithms).

We're all in this together. And God is with us. John 1:16 says that "From [Christ's] fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (ESV).

## Five narratives

I pay attention to people's comments about digital tech, and I'd like to name five narratives I hear.

First, many people feel underlying dis-ease, sometimes intensely so. We know that no one dies wishing they had spent more time on their phone. No one feels deeply satisfied after inadvertently scrolling for a couple of hours.

As the writer of Romans says, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Romans 7:15).

A second, contradictory, narrative is giddiness about the obvious advantages of digital tech. Indeed, the web, phones and AI are borderline miraculous. We're rightly dazzled.

Third, while most people would hesitate to disclose addiction to alcohol, gambling or porn, phone addiction has become a clichéd confession, largely free of stigma.

Fourth, some people are dismissive, derisive and/or defensive in response to any tech non-conformity.

Finally, I hear endemic resignation. Alternatives are few, and resistance seems futile or self-destructive. Tech is required for jobs, playing on the soccer team, joining the prayer chain, meeting up with friends. Parents must choose between handing kids over to the algorithmic

principalities or condemning them to the social wilderness. Sometimes we do that which makes our souls cringe.

It's all far too much. Perhaps this accounts, in part, for church silence and compliance, though the opportunity for prophetic guidance and pastoral care is immense. Perhaps this is why the dangers of social media and the tech-industrial complex don't make the list of conservative or progressive issues.

### **The neutrality trap**

Despite my critique of tech, I reject blanket denunciation. We're too enmeshed for all-or-nothing arguments. Similarly, I see little use in blanket justifications. The fact that Zoom reaches shut-ins, phones make life safer for women walking alone and tech addresses certain disabilities in life-giving ways does not negate all critiques. The fact that my Indigenous friends use guns to provide food for their families does not justify all use of guns.

A trap even more insidious than simplistic denunciation or justification is simplistic neutrality. Many people are quick to say digital tech is just a tool; it can be used for good or evil.

Of course, every technology can be used for good or bad—guns, nuclear energy, paper—but that fact should not short-circuit the vital process of assessing the potential risks and values inherent in digital tech.

Technology is not neutral; it holds the likelihood of inequality. If a new technology—whether tractor or app—costs money, it tends toward disparity. The wealthier farmer was surely first to buy a tractor, and that tractor surely increased his advantage over his neighbours. Technology helps the rich get richer.

Stated differently, Tristan Harris and Aza Raskin—prominent tech commentators who run the Center for Humane Technology—say if a new tech “confers power, it starts a race,” and if “you do not coordinate, the race will end in tragedy.” It's not hard to see who's winning the race.

The internet was supposed to democratize communication, to even out the information playing field—everyone could use the new, neutral

tools. In many ways we can, so long as we submit to the platforms, some of them owned by the four tech giants (Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Sundar Pichai and Elon Musk) who sat just behind Donald Trump's family at his inauguration—closer to the presumed leader of the free world than even governors and senators. Do they want us to believe new tech is neutral?

When people use the neutrality argument to neutralize criticism, they defend a status quo increasingly presided over by massively powerful players who have one foot in our brains.

Again, rudimentary denunciation is not the point—understanding underlying dynamics is.

### **Blessed contradiction**

If digital tech carries inherent threats, and we've all somehow ended up on its bandwagon at spiritually dangerous speed and with no off-ramps in sight, how can we even start to think and act carefully?

I look to John O'Donohue's gentle words about contradiction. The late Irish poet and mystic said that if we have a desire for spiritual growth, we should attend to a contradiction in ourselves, to



**A trap even more insidious  
than simplistic denunciation  
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look on it kindly and to learn from it. He calmly walks back the history of thought that has led us to believe that something cannot be one thing and also something else at the same time.

Indeed, I know I can be both considerate and inconsiderate; I love both order and change; I am cell-free but could not live without the laptop beneath my fingers; the world is profoundly wayward and alight with wonder; people can be addicted and gifted; we can abide in Christ and in the virtual kingdom.

Attending to contradiction can slowly, gently clear a path out of resignation and beyond simplistic impulses. We can talk about being both dazzled and trapped, eager for the latest gadget but also wanting to put the brakes on change, grateful for daily emails from Richard Rohr yet afraid that screens are a net spiritual loss. The contradictions are not too big for God.

### **Anabaptist cousins**

We have in our extended faith family an unparalleled example of grappling with technological tension and change. The Amish are likely as imperfect as the rest of us, but, on this one point, I think we do well to draw on their example. I am aware of no group on earth that has been as

intentional and discerning about the adoption of new technologies as certain Amish groups.

Some people misunderstand the Amish as being frozen in time, rejecting all new technologies. In reality, they use a deliberate process to decide which technologies to adopt.

Some people dismiss the Amish as hypocritical for perceived contradictions (such as using a baler that is pulled by horses while powered by an engine), but this both misses the selective process and presumes that uncritical and rapid adoption of virtually all new technology is a superior choice.

Scholars like Donald Kraybill, Royden Loewen and Lisa Schirch have written about the coherence of the adaptive process of traditional Anabaptist groups. Kraybill, writing with two co-authors, sums up the approach to new technology as: "Go slow, be careful, and check with the community."

The mainstream approach is: Get whatever you can afford. Hope the parental controls work.

We tend to look only at benefits, without filling out the cost side of the ledger. The Amish do both, with communal, theological rigour. Theirs is a vital witness for those who have eyes to see. But few do, since the Amish challenge something almost too elemental to notice: the notion of progress itself.

### **Witness in a rare moment**

Yet progress is faltering, even as it hits overdrive. It's delivering techno-wizardry but not ever-greater meaning and mental wellbeing. It offers virtual reality while literally consuming natural reality.

We live in a rare moment. Christopher Lunsford, a 32-year-old, blue-collar, backwoods American who sings under the name Oliver Anthony, says, "We are the last living people in history to have experienced life before the digital age."

To what are we as the church called in this moment?

On an individual level, I want to say: take a social media sabbatical, get a non-internet mobile phone, unplug, look away, trade Bluesky for blue sky, find a way to ease off on that which draws



**Attending to contradiction  
can slowly, gently clear a path  
out of resignation and beyond  
simplistic impulses.**

you away from God, go cold turkey or just dabble. It is possible. God promises freedom and transformation.

At the same time, we want you to like, share and comment on our social feeds. The tension tugs at me, and I try to move toward the contradictions with trust.

In a practice that's less fraught with tension, this past summer I started lying on my back on the lawn for several minutes at a time. In the presence of God, I just lay there and gazed upward. It is the opposite of a screen: No corners. No edges. No bait. No pop-ups. Nothing to scroll to. Just: "Be still and know..."

It's slow, calm and ordinary. I imagine it unspools that which screen time winds up in me. It is my blue-sky antidote.

On a collective level, I say again that, though digital transformation has profound implications for humanity, the church is dead quiet. Conformity is quiet.

Yet the opportunity is vast. We can unflinchingly name realities, offer AA-style support groups, invite youth on wilderness outings, invite

grace, hold digital deconstruction workshops, trade binge time for visiting the lonely, call out the tech oligarchy and pray for deliverance. It's all in our wheelhouse.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is..." (Romans 12:2).

The digital reality is beyond overwhelming, but God is above it and beneath it. As much as tech has worked its way deep into our minds and lives, Christ abides in us and invites us to abide in him. So let us claim the freedom to carve out holy niches not found on Google Maps, niches in which we are prompted not by algorithms but by a still, small voice.



Will Braun lives on a small farm south of Morden with his wife and two teenage sons. In addition to playing in the dirt, he serves as editor of *Canadian Mennonite* magazine.



Leadership Conference  
March 13-14, 2026

# Surely I Am With You Always

## The Transformative Presence of Christ in Baptism and Communion

with Patrick S. Franklin, PhD

[www.SBCollege.ca/Leadership](http://www.SBCollege.ca/Leadership)

# How reading the Bible is encouraging me to make a ‘global impact’

**AS WE BEGIN another year, the world we live in encourages us to start new habits, set new goals, and accomplish new achievements. Whether this approach helps you or not, living with purpose takes intentionality, including engaging in spiritual disciplines.**

Is this the year you take your prayer life more seriously? Is it time to increase your tithe after years of inconsistent giving? Is there a new ministry opportunity to step into?

About 15 years ago, my wife Sandy and I began doing a “read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year” plan. With many versions available online, we’ve been blessed to read the Bible from beginning to end, sometimes using the same version, and sometimes different ones. Now, people have challenged me that while it’s good to read the entire Bible, there is a risk that it can become routine and—for that matter—shallow. And they’re right—it can become legalistic.

But ... that hasn’t been our experience! It has been such an amazing transformative spiritual discipline that has grown our understanding of God and his redemptive plan for humanity.

We have read chronological plans, connecting Old and New Testament plans, and front to back plans.

Here are five ways I’ve benefited from sticking with this discipline.

**1. I gain a firm foundation for my life of faith.** If I believe in Jesus and want to live with him as my life’s foundation, then consistently feeding on his Word can take me there. Inviting the Holy Spirit to open my eyes to his Word creates a foundation from which to not only survive but thrive in the years I have on earth.

**2. I see the redemptive thread of Christ’s work.** When you look for it, the redemptive thread of Christ’s work on our behalf is visible throughout the Bible. No matter what genre, the overarching theme of Scripture points to Christ’s sacrificial love for all his creation.

**Inviting the Holy Spirit to open my eyes to his Word creates a foundation from which to not only survive but thrive.**

**3. I fall in love with the person of Jesus.** While my intellect has been sharpened in terms of theological understanding, my emotions have been engaged by falling more in love with Jesus every year.

**4. I learn there is nothing new under the sun.** Solomon had it right. People throughout all ages have been fallen, need saving, have hurt one another, and have found healing. God remains the same throughout all time, and he is still in control, no matter what global events are taking place or what personal struggles we are dealing with.

**5. I am equipped for engaging the world around me.** The heart of God is missional. He pursues us. He sees us. He weeps for the lost. He is patient, kind, and just. And we are his ambassadors to continue the work that he began. My time in the Word has increased my passion, compassion, and vision for reaching the world for Christ. May his kingdom come, and his will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

If you are reading this, God has given you another year to continue building your foundation on Christ. Don’t miss this opportunity!



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

# Ministry as singer-songwriter a dream come true!

By Danny Plett  
TeachBeyond, Canada

I HAVE HAD the privilege of living out what I once only dreamed of as a young man. I remember asking God to make it possible for me to work as a singer-songwriter in a way that would allow me to provide for a family in a stable and healthy way. For more than thirty years now, that prayer has been answered, and I am deeply thankful.

This past September, I travelled to Europe for a twelve-concert tour in partnership with the German mission organization To All Nations. My son-in-law Brandon Post and two other musicians came as well. We shared the gospel of Jesus with audiences across Germany, working alongside local churches who faithfully shine the light of Christ in their regions.

Along the way, we met people who are hurting and yet courageously



Danny Plett's international band, a German Christmas, and one message: Jesus is born.

fighting to overcome addiction. We heard testimonies of victory over fear, sickness, sin and abuse through the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Many shared how the songs we sang had accompanied them through seasons of death, depression, as well as victory and rejoicing. Wherever I play, I pray with gratitude that God will use both the music and the testimonies to draw hearts closer to him.

From time to time, I receive letters from people who, years earlier, had said "yes" to Jesus through a song or a particular concert. Here is one such message:

"Hi Danny! In May 1999 you were in a neighboring town of mine. Before you sang your song 'Heaven,' you spoke about how wonderful it will be to be in heaven one day, and that Jesus has already prepared a place for everyone who believes in him. That touched my heart deeply. I was 13 years old at the time. I listened to the 'Heaven'

CD over and over again and realized that there was just one step missing. I gave my life to Jesus, and I have been walking with him ever since—the best decision of my life."

—M.

As I write this, I'm a few days away from once again travelling to Europe for another series of concerts. I will be sharing, in both word and song, about my own struggles with anxiety and depression, about the healing that is possible in Christ, about the forgiveness of sin we can receive when we say "yes" to Jesus, and about the freedom he brings in a world filled with darkness. I am deeply grateful to play even a small part in strengthening the church in German-speaking Europe using the gifts God has given me.

Danny Plett works with training and music ministry for TeachBeyond, serving various parts of the world from Canada. His wife Sherri works with international conference planning.



It's happening tonight. May the music point beyond the poster to Christ.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

# FOMO in Paris

By Laurie Rempel  
Avant Ministries, Canada

**FOMO.** I KEEP hearing that word, which stands for *fear of missing out*. It reminds me of another word loneliness. As Sheldon and I work in our member care role, people often tell us how lonely they are and how much they long for deeper friendships. I think FOMO and loneliness are pretty common. To be honest, I have struggled with them too.

A few years ago, I lived on a busy street in Paris. One morning after walking my kids to school, I was having a really nice conversation with two ladies and decided to invite them in for coffee so that we could keep talking a little longer. However, as we walked toward my apartment, they both declined the invitation stating they didn't have time that day. I was a bit disappointed, but took their word for it.

A few minutes later, as I took off my jacket, I wandered over to look out of my fifth floor window. I could see the regular traffic, a café, a Longchamp store, and people walking. Imagine my surprise when I noticed my two friends still chatting on the sidewalk for another five minutes! For a moment I was baffled and slightly offended to see them still there! I had some FOMO for sure.

Later on, I realized that for me a coffee break was 15 minutes long, but for my friends from another culture it was much longer! If they were to come to my apartment for coffee which I took the trouble to make and serve, they would also count on staying for at least one hour, maybe two or three. And, that day they didn't have time. They were not purposely excluding or avoiding me. I decided to invite them over at a better time for all of us, and we eventually had a lovely coffee date.

Going back to FOMO and loneliness: we were made with this longing to be valued, to be part of something greater, to be in beautiful relationships with others. In fact, we all really crave close relationship with God and his creation. Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician and philosopher of the 1600s said it well:

“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? Then he tries in vain to fill it with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself” (page 75 of Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*).

I like the way Pascal calls our FOMO and loneliness a kind of helplessness. Yes, we are helpless but how encouraging to know that God became completely helpless to take on all our FOMO, loneliness and emptiness. That is such good news!

God, please come and fill us again with wonder and worship and all the fullness of your Spirit (Ephesians 3:14–19)!

Laurie Rempel, with her husband Sheldon, serves in member care for Avant Ministries. After several years of ministry in France, they are now based in British Columbia, Canada.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Sheldon and Laurie Rempel across from the apartment in Paris where they once lived.

# ‘The loss is very real’: Island Gospel Fellowship’s sanctuary destroyed in fire

**DURING THE EARLY** hours of December 20, 2025, a fire was reported at the sanctuary of Island Gospel Fellowship (IGF), Burns Lake, B.C. By the time volunteers from the Fire and Rescue team arrived, the church sanctuary was completely engulfed in flames. Nevertheless, with the help of firefighters the firewall between the sanctuary and gymnasium held up, with the newer auditorium receiving only smoke and water damage. The fire was immediately deemed suspicious, and local RCMP announced on December 22 that a suspect had been arrested and charged with arson.

For the congregation of IGF, the loss is very real. Many memories and countless hours of volunteer work have been destroyed. Currently the congregation has dispersed among other churches in the area for worship. It is hoped that the smoke and water damage in the gymnasium and surrounding area will soon be fixed and we will be able to resume worship gatherings early in the new year. If this is not possible, the congregation will seek an interim gathering place.

This tragedy not only impacts our own congregation. The IGF facility has also served as a gathering place for various community functions and rentals. We hope that we will again be able to welcome the community to our facility.

Looking back on recent events, the people of Island Gospel have much to be thankful for. We are grateful for the heroic efforts of local firefighters and other first responders. Our thanks also go to local tradesmen who moved

quickly to pump water from the basement and restore heating and lights to the gymnasium, preventing further damage. We are thankful to other churches who have prayed for us and extended hospitality in offering the use of their facilities. We are grateful to the community of Burns Lake for their support, concern and love.

As a congregation, we believe that the church is so much more than a building—it is God’s people who gather to worship and serve the Lord. We also believe that God works in difficult times, strengthening his people so that all things work for God’s glory and our good. The fire at IGF is a sad event but, with God’s help, we will rise stronger than ever.

On Christmas Eve, the congregation gathered in the parking lot of the church next to the burned down structure. We lit candles representing our hope and prayer that the love of Jesus will shine in the darkness. We gave thanks for God’s provision and grace in this time of loss. We also prayed that God would bring healing to the young man who started the fire. We stand with his family who are grieving and confused by these events. They need our compassion and support as their loss is great.

The Gospel of John declares: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (1:5). It is our prayer to shine the light of Jesus despite our loss.

— Pastor Ed Peters



Island Gospel Fellowship’s sanctuary is engulfed in flames in the early hours of December 22, 2025, in Burns Lake, B.C.



IGF congregants gather on Christmas Eve to light candles as a sign of hope.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED

# Church faces challenges, but trusts God to lead

High Level Christian Fellowship  
High Level, Alberta

**THIS PAST YEAR** has been a season of transition for our church family. When Pastor Norm Bueckert resigned in 2024, we once again found ourselves without a pastor. Though we continue to be without one, we've come together as a congregation—sharing responsibilities, supporting one another, and trusting God to lead us through this time of change.

It has not always been easy, but through every challenge, we have seen God's faithfulness and his steady hand guiding us forward. We are so thankful for Peter Fehr, who has graciously stepped in to handle much of



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Benjamin Fehr at his baptism service, with his father Peter Fehr on the right.

the preaching and has led us through communion and other important parts of our worship services. His willingness to serve and his steady leadership have provided much-needed consistency during this time.

The elders have also stepped up in many ways, taking turns with preaching, visiting, and caring for the needs of the congregation. We are truly grateful for their dedication and faithfulness to the work of the church.

We also want to express our deep appreciation for Conference Pastor Andy Woodworth and the conference for their ongoing support, encouragement and guidance throughout this transition. Their prayers, advice and willingness to walk alongside us have been a great blessing, and they serve as a reminder that we are not walking this road alone. The partnership and care shown to us have strengthened our faith and encouraged us to keep pressing on in hope.

While we continue to face some challenges, especially with attendance not rising as much as we had hoped, we are encouraged by the signs of spiritual

growth that we have seen. We held a few baptism classes and celebrated several baptisms this year, rejoicing in those who have made the decision to publicly follow Christ. These moments remind us that God is still at work, changing lives and drawing people closer to him.

Financially, our giving has been lower this year, which is understandable as many families in the north have faced slower job opportunities. Even so, we continue to trust that God will provide for every need. He has never failed us yet, and we believe he will continue to supply what is needed as we remain faithful and keep him at the center of all we do.

Through it all, we are reminded that this is God's church, and he is the one building it. As we look to the future and continue to pray for the right pastor to join us, we hold on to the truth that God's timing is perfect. We have a great God: faithful, loving, and always present. As we keep our eyes fixed on him, we can move forward with confidence and hope.

—James Connellan

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# A time of exciting changes

Taber Evangelical Church  
Taber, Alberta

**ON JULY 7, 2024**, we had a welcome celebration for our new lead pastor, Quentin and Christina Unger, at Taber Municipal Park. We had watermelon and rollkuchen with *faspa* (a light meal).



We held our pastor installation service on February 23, 2025, in front of family and friends who came out in support. Peter and Martha Doerksen came to bless the Unger family as they celebrated. Our church leadership continues to seek guidance from the Holy Spirit as we work to meet the needs of the people in our church and community.

The church recently celebrated their 30th anniversary. Current pastor Quentin Unger (centre) is joined by former pastors David Wiebe (left) and Jim Crawford (right) on stage.

On June 8, 2025, a group of 25 men and women shared powerful testimonies of what the Lord has been doing in their lives, followed by their baptisms—some by pouring and some by immersion—at the Taber Trout Pond. It's a blessing and a privilege to witness their public statement of faith.

We celebrated our 30th anniversary on October 19 with a wonderful morning church service. Some people came and shared their experiences from the last 30 years, including past pastors. We had a Thanksgiving lunch to follow.

— Susie Quiring



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Peter and Martha Doerksen (representing the conference) join Taber church leaders in praying a blessing over the Unger family (kneeling).

## New members welcomed

Straffordville Evangelical Mission Church  
Straffordville, Ontario

**ON NOVEMBER 30, 2025**, SEMC had a baptism and membership reception! We baptized five individuals and then welcomed them as members, along with seven others, into our congregation.

— Amy Fehr



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Pastors Paul Penelton and Abe Berg baptize Jacob Dyck.

# ConneXion's 'mosaic' shows beauty of diversity

The ConneXion  
Arborg, Manitoba

**I HAVE ALWAYS** imagined Jesus walking among people, loving them, healing them, and valuing them regardless of their physical characteristics, culture, nationality, race, or faith. I imagine the kingdom should look like a mosaic, in which the combination of colours and shapes results in a beautiful work of art.

This beautiful work has been taking shape in our community, which we lovingly call the "ConneXion family." We have been connected by God. People who would probably never cross paths or sit at the same table—because of such different stories and journeys—do that every Sunday morning in our church.

We can behold the beauty of the mosaic that the Creator has crafted: people from Syria with their hijabs and accents rooted in their mother tongue (Kurdish), talking with people from Ukraine, searching in English for a common point to understand each other. At another table, we see someone from Kenya laughing during a chat with some Canadians and Brazilians.

In our summer services, we've experienced the warmth of friends from India welcoming us into their homes with their traditional food, and the next week we were learning to dance Kurdish with our beloved friends from Syria—after enjoying a delicious meal full of diverse flavors and colours.

In our monthly "life circle" gatherings, created to discuss everyday challenges and cultural differences, we learn so much from one another. We discover, for example, that in Syria,

Kenya, Canada and Brazil, there are many differences in how we nurture our faith, celebrate life, and even how we celebrate birthdays and conduct funerals.

And our interaction goes beyond simply being together. We learn and adapt: Brazilians love hugs—so let's hug. Syrians love to dance at their celebrations—so let's dance—and so on. Through this exchange, we become part of one another.

In our "breakfast with the neighbours," it's no different. I remember when Syrian women share their journey as mothers, while Canadian, Ukrainian and Brazilian women listen with enthusiasm, recognizing similarities. And it's okay if English isn't perfectly fluent. It's not a problem. In fact, it's not a problem even if someone cannot speak because of a disability that prevents them from doing so. We have the language of the body, the language of love, the language of

music and the language of the Spirit.

And what about our children? They all run, play and laugh as one people, even though their stories began in very different places and circumstances.

We seek to welcome everyone. For this, we have been called. We want more than just to receive people, we want them to feel they belong to this family. This family where the love of Jesus is pursued in practice: through hospitality, connection, and listening.

Therefore, when you walk through our door, be ready to be greeted with a warm "Welcome", or perhaps "Bem-vindo," "Bienvenido," "स्वागत है," "Ласкаво просимо," "Karibu," or "أَبْحَرْ."

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

— Dani Caldeira



PHOTO SUPPLIED

The ConneXion family consists of people from various cultural backgrounds.

# Family atmosphere a blessing at Prairie Rose

Prairie Rose EMC  
Landmark, Manitoba

**WE CONTINUE TO** be blessed here at Prairie Rose. We have many long-time members and attendees in our congregation, and this contributes to a close, family atmosphere. We have welcomed a few new families and individuals into our midst in the last year or two which is encouraging.

Every February, we host a Family Fun Night and invite the community to join us for hotdogs and chili, door prizes, children's activities and broomball. This event is a highlight for our church, and many from the community and surrounding area come to fellowship with us.

In May 2025, our senior youth (grades 9–12) went to Abundant Springs. They paired up with Heartland Church to rent a bus and made their way to Caronport, Sask., for a

January 2025  
baptism: Easton  
Dick, Isaiah Funk,  
Kaylin Klassen,  
Kimmy Braun and  
Brooke Reimer.



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

weekend of worship, growth and good times. From Prairie Rose, 16 youth attended.

We had five youth take the step of baptism and membership in early 2025. It is always exciting to see young people desire to commit to our church and make their faith public.

Another highlight for our church is our Vacation Bible School (VBS) program. Many children in the community participate, several of whom do not come from Christian homes. We are so grateful for the volunteers who take a week of their summer to pour into this ministry and into the kids.

Our junior youth (grades 7 and 8) participated in a mini missions week during last year's VBS week. They helped with the program and did some jobs around the building. This is a good way to develop a sense of partnership and belonging in a church.

In September, we got the ball rolling on a new church directory. We try to keep contact information updated

within our congregation as well as take photos, so that we can put faces to names, especially for those newer to our church family.

We held a missions conference November 7–9, 2025. Gerald Reimer (EMC director of global outreach) spoke to us about renewing our walk with Jesus, reviewing global needs and responding to the Great Commission. We collected donations for Give the Word, a ministry that is passionate about equipping churches, ministries and individuals for outreach, with Bibles designed for outreach.

We are so thankful for our church body and for what God has done and will do in the future. Through the years, we have had struggles as well as joyful times and God has been there through it all. All glory to him!

“I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds” (Psalm 9:1).

– Elnora Hildebrand



Ryan Rempel (from Give the Word),  
Pastor Mike and Gerald Reimer pose in  
front of the EMC display at the missions  
conference in November 2025.

# ‘For such a time as this’

Winnipeg, Manitoba

**IT WAS THE** last day of my children’s first week of school. Every morning, I walk with them to school and cry on the way back because I’ve discovered that crying warms your eyes, and you need all the warmth you can get when you’re walking in minus-forty degrees. That morning, I dropped the children off as usual and began the walk home. The tears came again, but this time they were not for warmth. They were tears of guilt, a deep aching guilt that I was walking safely in a peaceful country while my people were dying under bombardment and destruction.

We moved to Winnipeg after a very clear calling from God, and I never questioned my presence here. Yet, my heart remained in my country. I cried and asked God, *Why am I here and not serving my people, who are in dire need of service—spiritually, mentally, and physically?*

I came home and tried to stop crying, to live normally and support my husband in his ministry, but deep inside, I faced an inner conflict of guilt and the struggle to adapt to a new life far from home. The days dragged on, especially during the harsh winters, but the Lord’s work in the church my husband had planted encouraged us, and the kindness of the people of Winnipeg eased the difficulty of adjustment. Still, the turmoil in my heart did not go away and I was unable to do anything but pray.

As a family, we asked the Lord to show us how to pray for our region, according to his heart, and the Lord led us to pray that through all the



A typical Winnipeg winter scene is shown in this stock photo. Winter can be an isolating time, especially for refugees far from home and family.

suffering, he would open doors for my people to know him and encounter his love. We prayed faithfully and continued to serve where we were planted. The word of the Lord was growing in the church, and the services grew, but the turmoil in my heart continued, and the same question remained: *Is this all? Why don’t I feel at peace and why do I feel like there is more?*

Two years had passed and the situation in my homeland became extreme. There were killings, destruction, rape, and displacement. I kept praying with tears, guilt, inadequacy and a desire to do more.

Then one day, we received an invitation to help receive the refugees that Canada was about to welcome. I

couldn’t believe what I had heard. We rushed to volunteer, not only to ease the burden of guilt, but above all, it was a wonderful opportunity to tell them about the Lord’s care, love and salvation.

Suddenly, I understood that the Lord had answered my question. *Is this all, or is there more?* The Lord reminded me of Esther 4:14: “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (NKJV).

I don’t remember the first family we welcomed at the airport, but I still remember their joy at hearing someone from their own country greet them in their own language. I still remember how overwhelmed I felt from the responsibility of translating and

answering all their questions, including where they could find familiar foods and bread that tasted like home.

I had no experience in welcoming or helping refugees, but I had a strong desire and a calling from the Lord to do so. The Lord opened doors for me to meet many, many families from my country. I would visit the women, cook beside them, share their grief for our country, and cry with them because we missed our mothers and families. I would go with them to clinics, hospitals and markets, translating emails, messages and phone calls. Over time, some of them began asking us to pray for their needs and for their children who were still at war and in danger. The beautiful thing was that God answered their prayers, and they felt there was something special about this God.

After several years of serving refugees, we realized we needed to take time to follow up with them spiritually. I began organizing small gatherings in women's homes, and it was a special time where you could feel their spiritual thirst for knowledge, their faith in the power of prayer and their desperate need for the Lord to touch every part of their lives. After holding several meetings, one of the husbands told me, "We want a meeting for men as well." I smiled and said, "I will tell my husband." So, he began meeting with the men, but after several meetings, he decided it would be better to bring families together, which turned out to be a new church plant.

When I look back on those early days, I see how beautiful it is to submit to the Lord's work. You don't just serve by yourself, you serve with the Lord.

**I had no experience in welcoming or helping refugees, but I had a strong desire and a calling from the Lord to do so.**

You don't make plans, you follow the Lord's plan. You don't rely on logic, you pray and you wait for the Lord's work.

And so, when I ask again, *Why am I here, and is there more?* the Lord's answer is clear: I am here to help my people and to witness and minister to more people coming to the Lord than I have ever seen before.

Was it worth it? Was it worth leaving my home, my mother, my brother? Was it worth it to start over again, with all the exhaustion and uncertainty that brings? Was it worth it for my children to grow up alone, not knowing their extended families?

Of course it was. Because those who put their hands to the plow should never look back, and those who leave behind their earthly family are

compensated by the Lord, with many spiritual brothers and sisters.

Did I ever imagine I would serve my people in a foreign land? Did I know the Lord would use us to plant two churches here? Did I dream that I would serve in a church filled with people who come from a non-Christian background?

Of course not. But today, I see how the Lord used all the tears, the guilt, the distance, and the waiting, as part of his greater plan. And I feel the love, prayers and faith of the people of Winnipeg, who have become part of this story, this great work of God that began with a simple, tearful walk home from school.

Identifying details are withheld to preserve the privacy of the ministry.



**EXPERIENCE SBC: FEB 2 & MAR 16**  
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# Ministerial members engage on teens and purpose

**ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21**, Kleefeld, Manitoba, was filled with a spirit of faith as one hundred pastors, ministers, and ministry volunteers gathered for the annual in-person Ministerial Day. The staff and volunteers from Kleefeld EMC worked diligently to make this year's gathering memorable.

The morning session focused on *The Open Generation: How Teens Around the World Relate to Jesus*. Chris Schroeder from World Vision Canada presented the findings from a joint research project by Barna Group and World Vision, examining the noticeable shift in attitudes among youth and young adults toward Jesus, the Bible, and the church.

Three key takeaways from the presentation:

**1) How teens relate to Jesus** – 43% of Canadian youth indicate they are at least *somewhat* motivated to keep learning about Jesus throughout their lives.

**2) How teens relate to the Bible** – “On average, a teen who is engaged (holding a high view of the Bible and reading it several times per week) with Scripture has had four different people teach them how to read it.”

**3) How teens impact the church** – “Many groups of teens—including teens

of other faiths or no faith—are looking to the Canadian church—to Canadian youth leaders—to advocate for those in need and who are unjustly treated.”

After the lunch break, the focus shifted to increasing engagement within the EMC Ministerial by posing the conversation-starting question: “What is the purpose of the Ministerial?” The Board of Leadership and Outreach (BLO) outlined three main purposes: (a) to support, resource, and equip pastors and ministers for effective ministry within the local church; (b) to provide a framework for meaningful dialogue and decision-making on significant matters related to the work of EMC churches (doctrine, theology, social concerns, etc.); and (c) to foster an environment that encourages relationship building, collaboration, and ministry support.

Three areas of focus in the afternoon session:

**1) EMC Encourage** – A new event has been scheduled for EMC vocational pastors and their spouses for rest, renewal, and refuelling. Churches are encouraged to ensure their pastors and spouses attend this event in Gimli, Man., from May 4–6, 2026. Guest



Meeting attendees participate in a round-table discussion.

speakers will be Jay and Sharon Guptill (Made for More Ministries).

**2) Roundtable discussion** – Four questions were posed to participants for discussion, and their responses will be summarized and shared with the Ministerial members in the new year. The first three questions focused on the purpose of the Ministerial and potential ways to improve it or to better direct its efforts for greater effectiveness. The final question for discussion centred on realistic expectations of EMC credentialed ministers once they are credentialed.

**3) Sharing and prayer** – The day concluded with a time of worship, sharing, and prayer. We heard from many who spoke about matters of praise or prayer—both on an individual and church level. Small groups of men and women, sharing and praying for each other around the auditorium, culminated in corporate worship and a benediction, sending the members of the Ministerial back out into the world with the goal of advancing Christ’s kingdom culture as we live, reach, gather, and teach.

– Andy Woodworth  
EMC conference pastor



PHOTOS BY KARENNA PAULS  
Newly credentialed ministers are Pieter van Ewijk, Paul Penelton, Trevor Fleming and Dustin Braun. Not pictured are Steven Driedger, Abe Dyck and Murray Finck, who joined online. Those on stage are joined by Cameron McKenzie, BLO chair.

# Delegates vote to approve ‘visionary’ budget

ON NOVEMBER 22, 2025, EMC delegates, staff and guests gathered at the Kleefeld EMC for the fall Conference Council meeting. A big thank you to pastor Greg Klassen and his team for hosting the meetings this year. There was a lot of fellowshipping around good food and the atmosphere was welcoming.

A key part of the meetings was the decision to support the 2026 budget of \$2.2 million. After numerous questions and following discussion, the motion was put to the delegates and was passed with overwhelming support. It was an emotional moment as this budget is seen as visionary in moving the conference forward. The budget is both exciting (as EMC adds new young missionary couples to our staff and support for future leaders through scholarships and bursaries) and challenging (as it is an increase of 9% over 2025). The vote was a sign of strong unity in our

conference around the needs and costs of missions, leadership development, and church supports.

The entire meeting is available to be viewed on our website, but I would like to draw your attention to a few key presentations:

- Pastor Abe Berg (Straffordville) and Pastor Albert Loewen (Mount Salem) shared their experiences at the first EMC Equip event which was held in Region 9 (southern Ontario churches).
- Jen Kornelsen, of Many Rooms Church Community in Winnipeg, reported on Mennonite World Conference and the 500th year celebrations.
- President Dave Reimer reported on Steinbach Bible College and the new campus project.

**A key part of the meetings was the decision to support the 2026 budget of \$2.2 million.**

- Executive Director Emery Plett presented EMC Delegate 101 to remind and train delegates on how to be a delegate.

Prior to lunch, a farewell was held for Erica Fehr who has served the conference in different roles for over 19 years. Diana Peters, Board of Church Ministries chair, and Director of Global Outreach Gerald Reimer both paid tribute to the work she has done. At coffee time cupcakes were shared and attendees were able to reminisce with Erica.

Thank you to all the delegates that attended both in person and online. As the delegates left, I hope they went with a sense of optimism they can share with their churches as they report on the meetings..

– Emery Plett  
EMC executive director



PHOTOS BY KARENNA PAULIS

Erica Fehr’s retirement celebration was held during the afternoon coffee time.

Incoming Director of Communications Scott Marble and Diana Peters, Board of Church Ministries chair, visit during a break.



# Shoulder Tapping

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

## Additional EMC Openings

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

## EMC Positions

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

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

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

We are looking for a Spirit-filled pastor gifted in preaching, teaching, and reaching out to our community. It is important that the pastor can work effectively with other leaders in the church, community and conference. A successful candidate will have a minimum of two to three years of biblical studies (bachelor's or master's degree preferred) and would be willing to become credentialed/ordained with the

Evangelical Mennonite Conference. Please send your resume to: igf@telus.net marked "search committee."



### Youth Pastor: Westpointe Community Church (Grande Prairie, Alta.)

Westpointe Community Church is in Grande Prairie Alberta. Our vision is to glorify God through creating opportunities to draw people into community, to encourage, guide and equip each other to walk closer to Christ and be empowered to minister beyond. We are seeking a dedicated and passionate youth pastor to join our ministry team. This individual will play an important role in leading and overseeing our youth ministries while actively participating in Sunday morning worship services.

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

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

Interested candidates should submit

their resume, cover letter, and references to office@westpointecc.com



### 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.)

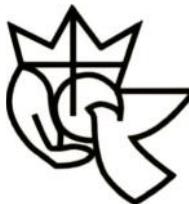
High Level Christian Fellowship (HLCF), located in northern Alberta, is seeking an interim pastor to bring preaching, teaching and leadership for building community within our church family of approximately 100 people. The interim pastor will also assist in providing visionary guidance and supportive direction as we review how we carry out HLCF's values, vision and mission. If this interests you or additional

Are you interested in

# TEACHING ABROAD?

Bolivia      May & June      Short-term

more details at [emcmissions.ca/short-term](http://emcmissions.ca/short-term)



information regarding the job description is required, please contact James Connellan, board chairperson at [elder@hlcf-emc.org](mailto:elder@hlcf-emc.org).

## Other Positions



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

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

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

children's church, children's and youth Sunday school, VBS, and all future children's ministry opportunities.

This person would serve as part of a team with Bethel's two co-pastors and youth pastor. To learn more about Bethel Church, go to our website [www.ourbethelchurch.com](http://www.ourbethelchurch.com) or contact us at [ourbethelpastoralsearch@gmail.com](mailto:ourbethelpastoralsearch@gmail.com).



### Actors and Crew Members: Interlake Christian Films

Interlake Christian Films invites Christian actors and crew members to join us in the production of a feature length animated motion picture and bonus material based on the life of Daniel. No experience is necessary, but we are looking for people who are passionate about the message of Daniel and his uncompromising stand in the face of opposition and who want to come together with others to share that message in the form of a Christian movie and bonus material. For more information and to watch a pre-production trailer visit [www.thedanielproject.ca](http://www.thedanielproject.ca) or contact Randy Hiebert at [rph@interlakechristianfilms.ca](mailto:rph@interlakechristianfilms.ca).



### 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).



### 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).

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# My defining personality redeemed

**MY (NONEXISTENT) ARTISTIC** career came to a definitive end at Bible camp. Each summer, my friends and I would carefully select the skills we wanted to participate in during our fun-filled week. The craft option was always the most desirable choice, in our juvenile estimation.

At the end of this particular week, however, I distinctly remember viewing the completed projects and beautiful handiwork of my fellow campers. They hadn't just slathered on paint and declared it finished. Instead, my peers had carefully added details, adapted blueprints, and created intricate masterpieces. While I had struggled to create a close-enough version of the original, they had thrived on every minute of creative opportunity. And in that defining moment, I knew this was not my skill set.

A similar experience occurred during piano lessons. "You aren't naturally gifted at piano," my music teacher stated in her direct manner, "but you practice really hard." This blunt statement was actually a freeing moment for me. I now had no unrealistic pressure placed on me to achieve musical greatness. Also, I learned that much can be accomplished by relentless hours of repetitive practice.

**Unless the Lord intervenes, I will never automatically transform into an extroverted optimist or a crocheter extraordinaire. However, the Lord has purposefully given me what I need to fulfill his will (2 Peter 1:3).**

I thought about these defining moments and my natural propensities (or lack thereof) because of a podcast I heard about personality traits. Jeremy Pierre says, "Christian growth is not about changing your personality, but about maturing your personality to better reflect the character of God. ... We waste a lot of time longing to be something other than we are, when Christ wants to do the miracle of displaying his character in who you are."

What a refreshing concept to accept and even *enjoy* the fact that the Lord knew what he was doing when he knitted me together in the secret place (Psalm 139:13–15).

Unless the Lord intervenes, I will never automatically transform into an extroverted optimist or a crocheter extraordinaire. However, the Lord has

purposefully given me what I need to fulfill his will (2 Peter 1:3). I don't have an excuse for lazy negligence as I am conformed to Christ's character, but I also have a responsibility to be content.

We recently watched a video of my daughter as an adorable little two-year-old. She was given a present sealed in plastic packaging. In the video, she is standing on a chair next to her daddy and eagerly looks up at me as I record. "My daddy help me," she repeats excitedly. She is absolutely confident that her toy is safe in her dad's hands. She knows that he will soon open it and will help assemble the treasured pieces.

I want a similar confidence that God is fitting together my simple service in the building up of his body (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12). It's not a contest to cross the finish line first with the best accolades and fan-base, but to be pleasing in his sight as we use our gifts together that "with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:6).



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

# Have you heard this preacher tic?

**HAVE YOU HEARD** this preacher tic? "I know we've all heard this story many times before but let me tell you about David and Goliath...."

Why do we preachers say this so often? It's a universal preacher tic. We feel the need to tell listeners that "you've heard this story many times." Start listening for it and next time you hear it, send your pastor this article.

This tic signals my insecurity as a preacher. When I bring up Moses again, I feel pressure from the crowd to impress them, to reveal some never-before-uttered truth that will surprise my jaded listeners. And when I begin to doubt whether I have anything interesting to say, I lose my nerve and quickly assure everyone, "Nothing new to see here."

This tic is a defeating habit. These are stupendous, life-changing stories that will transform whoever hears if they have ears to hear. But I need to manage expectations? To assure my listeners there is nothing they will hear now they've never heard countless times before?

The first problem with this tic is that it's not true. On any given Sunday there are new believers or non-believers present who have never heard of Bethlehem or Golgotha. Why not preach to them too? In fact, a simple way to instantly improve preaching is to preach only to those people: the young, the keeners, the un-initiated, and the ignorant. If the sermon would just ignore the old cynic who sits with arms crossed daring the preacher to impress him and would speak only to

those hearing the Word for the first time, the sermon would quickly sparkle for everybody.

Second, not only is the tic inaccurate, it's also unkind. It tells newcomers they are in the wrong place. "This sermon is for people who know these stories and if you do not, you probably don't belong here."

**On any given Sunday  
there are new believers  
or non-believers  
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preach to them too?**

Third, the tic feeds the dishonest arrogance of those listeners who think they know the Bible and believe that *this* preacher certainly will not move them with a new fact.

But fourth, and most importantly, the tic dishonours the living Word of God. It comes as an apology by the preacher for asking listeners to endure this story, yet again.

No! This Word has never before happened in this moment. Yes, George heard about Goliath five years ago when he went bankrupt, but yesterday he was told of a spot on his liver, and we need to do more tests. Melissa heard about Elijah and the widow when she was a poor student back in grad school. But this week she gave birth to her fourth child. Back in the 1980s Jack the sulky teenager did hear and fear the story of Herod's worms, but this week his son passed the bar exam and where do you think the boy got the smarts from? This person, in this situation, has never heard that story before, and needs it badly.

None of these people should be assured they have heard the story before. The Word is coming at them today with new power from a new direction to their newly cleaned ears. No preacher has the right to temper expectations. Every Sunday we are a whole new congregation.

The Word unfurled over a congregation is an unpredictable mystery. No one can guess what the Spirit will pull this Sunday from that trunk full of keys, knives, bandages, candlesticks, disinfectants and ointments we call the Scriptures. Least of all the preacher.

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

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# Sabbath as a spiritual practice

**WHAT DOES SABBATH** look like for you? I need to confess that I have not modelled Sabbath well to the next generation. Growing up, Sabbath meant not doing work—no yard work, no cleaning, no changing the oil. For farmers it meant no field work. To quote my father-in-law when talking about the struggle to not harvest on a beautiful fall Sunday, “If God gives good weather on Sunday, he will also give good weather another day,” and the combines would be parked for the 24 hours of Sunday.

I was in my 40s when I realized that many digital ovens have a “Sabbath mode” that restricts operation on a chosen day of the week. In my life, Sabbath has been a guilt-based practice that limits what I should and shouldn’t do, but has often

been devoid of significant spiritual meaning.

John Mark Comer, in his video series called *The Sabbath Practice*, introduces the viewer to four meanings for the word Sabbath. They are: stop, rest, delight and worship. Comer suggests following a rule of life that includes a 24-hour pause to Sabbath as a way to connect ourselves with the natural cycle of creation. Let me briefly explain these four.

“Stop” is the idea that we break from the activity of the week and be still, giving room to turn our attention to God. “Rest” causes us to consider and use this time to recharge and allow ourselves time to set aside our work, worries and anxieties. “Delight” means doing things that bring us joy, such as spending time with family, enjoying a hobby, or

## *The Sabbath Practice*

“Want a resource to help develop the practice of Sabbath? Explore *The Sabbath Practice* by John Mark Comer on RightNow Media.

— Mo Friesen



having coffee with a friend. We use this time to remind ourselves that God has created us to delight in him and his creation. Finally, “worship” means to take time to give glory, honour and praise to God, to celebrate Jesus’ gift of salvation and to experience the fullness of relationship with the Holy Spirit. I haven’t been good at this bigger picture of Sabbath. I have often stopped my vocational work, but replaced it with other work. I tried to rest, but because rest isn’t a regular part of my life, I find myself too exhausted

to really focus on delight. And in this exhaustion, worship can at times become a duty I struggle to find life in. This isn’t Sabbath, this is religion. Participation in Sabbath is about orienting our lives in a way that makes room for God.

Am I passing on a way of life or just a legalistic practice to the next generations? How about you? Sabbath, like many other spiritual practices, is better caught than taught. The next generations are watching us and learning about Sabbath from our lives. In a world filled with non-stop busyness and anxiety, God is offering us a practice that he designed to bring joy, rest, connection with God and others, and rejuvenation. Let’s practice Sabbath.



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