



A PUBLICATION OF THE EVANGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE

The Messenger

Volume 63 No. 6 November/December 2025

ARTIST
PROFILE
P. 5

COMPASSIONATE,
QUESTIONING AND
MESSY: THE APPEAL
OF PROGRESSIVE
CHRISTIANITY
P. 6

IS JOY POSSIBLE
WHEN FACING
A TERMINAL
DISEASE?
P. 10

CHAPTER 45:
FINDING MY
STORY AS A
YOUTH WORKER
P. 15

WHAT GOD-
WITH-US
MEANS FOR
OUR WORK OF
DISCIPLESHIP
P. 17

The EMC I see

BY NOW MY coming retirement is old news, but maybe not to everyone. In any case, it is nearly upon me—this is my last editorial. You will continue to see my imprint for one or two more issues but then it will fade. Before I go, I want to share what I think I'm seeing in the EMC.

It is nearly twenty years since I began working at the EMC office in a part-time administrative assistant role. At the time I loved the EMC the way one loves their family—it was the conference I was raised in, as was my family going all the way back. But as often happens with those from the inside, I took it largely for granted but didn't necessarily think very highly of it. I didn't think we were all that impressive.

Maybe I speak prematurely, but as I've interacted with EMC leaders and at EMC/church events lately, I sense a new or renewed energy for theological depth in EMC.

In particular, while commitment to missions was big, our ability to engage culture was, in my opinion, not big. Much of our focus seemed to be our own history or distinctives, the history of our missions, or a story about trusting God in suffering. While these are good things, I longed for us to contribute to Christian thinking more widely. We always seemed to me to be just on the edge, and even a little outside of the Christian whole.

That's not precisely true or fair but it isn't entirely false either.

Maybe I speak prematurely, but as I've interacted with EMC leaders and at EMC/church events lately, I sense a new or renewed energy for theological depth in EMC. Even more encouraging is that it is paired with a desire to speak to culture

thoughtfully, with grace and with honesty, while resisting the polarization around us. I hope it is also, going forward, paired with a commitment to EMC and I'm encouraged there as well. There are more EMC students at our Bible college this year than have been there for quite some time. (For those who didn't know, Steinbach Bible College is our EMC-supported college.) Both pastors and non-pastors are studying at a post-graduate level.

In the past few years, I have also seen congregations handle conflict with a grace I haven't always seen in the past.

That means that, though we live in a time of considerable turmoil, EMC is wonderfully grounded in Christ and in our faith, which means we are well-placed to minister to our communities. That's a good time to leave.

My prayer for us is that we have a deep and abounding trust in God that will hold regardless of the conditions around us.

— Erica Fehr
Managing Editor



Welcome to Scott Marble

SCOTT MARBLE HAS been hired as EMC's new communications director.

He lives in Mitchell, Man., with his wife Nicole and seven-year-old daughter Stella. Nicole currently works with Steinbach Bible College as the Pursuit director.

He has served with Youth with a Mission (YWAM) in Alberta, and as communications manager and then as discipleship pastor at Emmanuel Evangelical Free Church (EEFC) in Steinbach.

Look for more information to come through the *EMC Today* newsletter (sign up at <https://www.emconference.ca/subscribe>) and in the January/February 2026 issue of *The Messenger*.

CONTENTS

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2025

FEATURES

- 5 Artist Profile**
Bringing Spirit-enlightened imaginings to life
By Nita Wiebe

- 6 Compassionate, questioning and messy: the appeal of progressive Christianity**
By Ruth Friesen
Finding room to faithfully explore the questions of our current culture.

- 11 Is joy possible when facing a terminal disease?**
By Kathleen Grift with Geralyn Wichers
Is there hope after diagnosis with ALS?

- 16 Chapter 45: finding my story as a youth worker**
By Jodie Hartung
A life transition makes space for a new calling.

- 18 What God-with-us means for our work of discipleship**
By Dustin Asham
A walk through Matthew's Gospel.

COLUMNS

- 22 Global impact**
Tag-teaming through spiritual battles
By Gerald Reimer

- 34 His light to my path**
Psalms 119 praise
By Karla Hein

- 35 Further in and higher up**
I don't seem to have a personal relationship with God
By Layton Friesen

- 36 Inspiring faith**
Listening as a spiritual practice
By Mo Friesen

DEPARTMENTS

- 2 Editor's Note
4 Letters and Notices
23 Global Focus
26 Local Focus
29 News
31 In Memory
32 Shoulder Tapping

LOAVES AND FISHSTICKS BY STEVE EDWARDS



The Messenger

Volume 63 No. 6 November/December 2025



MANAGING EDITOR
ERICA FEHR



EDITOR
REBECCA ROMAN

PUBLICATION AND PURPOSE

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

Phone: 204-326-6401

messenger@emconference.ca

www.emcmessenger.ca

ISSN: 0701-3299

Publications Mail Agreement Number:
40017362

Second-class postage paid at Steinbach, MB

COPYRIGHT

The articles printed in *The Messenger* are owned by *The Messenger* or by the author and may not be reprinted without permission. Unless noted, Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

SUBMISSIONS

Views and opinions of writers are their own and do not necessarily represent the position of the Conference or the editors. Advertising and inserts should not be considered to carry editorial endorsement.

Letters, articles, and photos are welcome.

Submissions should be sent to
messenger@emconference.ca.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

Print subscriptions are free of charge to all members and adherents of EMC churches in Canada. For those not associated with an EMC church we suggest a donation of \$20.00/year..

To sign up for the email newsletter
or submit an address change,
email messenger@emconference.ca.

ADVERTISING

The Messenger does not sell advertising, but provides free space (classified and display) to enhance our Conference, its churches, boards and ministries; inter-Mennonite agencies and educational institutions; and the wider church.

Ads and inquiries can be sent to
messenger@emconference.ca.

Letters and Notices



Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Financial Reports

January–September 2025

	General Fund 2025	General Fund 2024
Income*	1,408,575	1,249,870
Expenses	1,625,646	1,398,834
Excess/Shortfall	(217,072)	(148,964)

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).*



From the web

www.emcmessenger.ca

“Personal, hope-filled and Spirit-empowered:
the appeal of charismatic evangelicalism”
p. 6, Sept/Oct 2025 issue

Steven, this is a Spirit-filled article! Thanks for your graciousness, thoughtfulness and commitment to the truth of our eternal Triune God.

– Glenda Friesen

“What do we mean when we ask
about our value?”
p. 2, July/Aug 2025 issue

Thanks, Erica. I remember about 50 years ago, asking my Dad what was more important, who we were or what he did. He paused for a moment and then answered, “Who we are, but we don’t live like that.”

– Irma Janzen

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.

For letters by e-mail, the writer’s name and e-mail address are deemed to be an electronic signature. The writer’s mailing address is to be included in e-mail correspondence.

Bringing Spirit-enlightened imaginings to life



AS A CHILD, I was often told, “Wow, Nita! You have a wild imagination.” Which, upon reflection, could have either been a compliment or an insult! As a believer, and an image bearer of God, my goal in my imaginings is that the life-giving nature, the truth and beauty of God would be made manifest in my work.

George Bernard Shaw said, “Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last, you create what you will.”

Imagine! A trinity of imaginative process! The mind conceives an idea. “Let’s make a world!” The body cooperates. It impels the breath, the wind, the spirit within it to travel outward over the larynx. The wave escapes the giver and moves something out there to become something else. Poof! A new creation! It all started with an imagination.

Granted, our imaginations can be misguided. It seems that the creatives in Noah’s day who were spearheading metallurgy and musical instruments had God’s censure, because “every imagination of the thoughts of [their] heart[s] was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5 RSV).

Hmmm. Perhaps the flood wasn’t so much about the Nephilim as it was about ill-spent, destructive imaginations, spawning expressions



Nita Wiebe, a member of Portage Evangelical Church, works on a piece of stained glass art in her studio.

which eroded, rather than upheld the beautiful. Anyway, God washed that canvas.

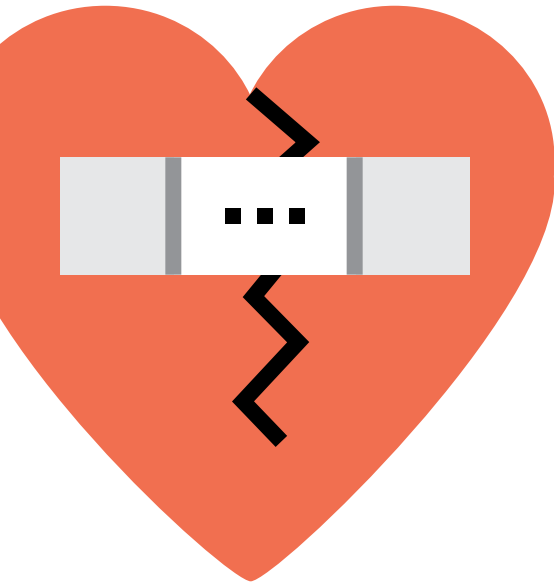
My canvas these days is stained glass. I have long loved this medium. As a child, I stood in wonder inside a colour-soaked sanctuary in which artists enlivened stories I knew with heaven’s light streaming through glowing panes. (Why are churches now so blackened? I guess so you can see the PowerPoint. Too bad.) Let there be light! Backlighting to bring transparent glass to life. Front lighting for the opaque. Rippled, bubbled, streaked and patterned glass—each one its own personality. Each one dead in the darkness, springing to vibrancy when cleaned and infused with light through a sun-lit window, or with the tiniest candle behind.

I’m still enamored with light on glass; therefore, my oh-so-clever designer name is N. Lighten Designs. I’m not creating huge church windows, but I still hope to inspire awe. The biggest ka-ching moment for me is when I lift one of my pieces out of the box, hold it up to the window, and see someone’s face light up as the glass suddenly leaps to life. Let there be light!

– Nita Wiebe



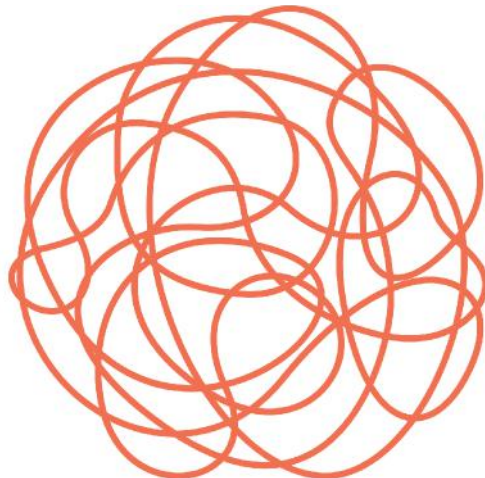
About the cover: In the Bleak Midwinter, adapted from original design, designer unknown, copper foil technique. This is a piece made in celebration of Christ’s advent, when a great light came to guide those who walk in darkness.



COMPASSIONATE, QUESTIONING AND MESSY

*the appeal of
progressive Christianity*

By Ruth Friesen



ISTOCK

Editors' note: This is the fourth in a series of six articles exploring some of the theological variation we find in 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.

Progressive Christianity is probably the most difficult of the series and we are grateful to Ruth for being willing to write on the topic.

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

WRITING ABOUT THE appeal of progressive Christianity is a daunting task. Daunting because it is not a clearly defined movement—and what is commonly referred to as progressive Christianity does not have a long history like the other forms of Christianity discussed in this series.

Instead, progressive is a word tossed around by both supporters and critics without a clear definition of what they mean. By what standards is something considered progress? Compared to what is something called progressive? In realms outside of theology, I am thankful that my doctor does not practice medicine in the same way my grandparents' doctors did. I am grateful that I am not driving a Model T Ford. I appreciate the ability to communicate easily with my smart phone but am concerned about society's dependence on technology and how that impacts the development of younger generations.

What is progress? We do not offer sacrifices like Jesus and the apostle Paul. We are no longer burning people at a physical stake for disagreeing with the teachings of the church. Were Jesus' teachings progressive in their day? Were the teachings of the early Anabaptists progressive?

That which is often considered theologically progressive is a movement of Christians who are wrestling with the faith they have grown up with and exploring what it looks like to be faithful to God when they disagree with some of the teachings of the church or some of the ways in which the church has lived out its faith.

Because of these questions, those labelled as progressive Christians have been seen as those on their way out of the Christian faith, those who don't hold to the authority of Scripture, and the legitimacy of their faith is sometimes questioned by those within evangelical circles. So, to write about the appeal of progressive Christianity raises fears that I will be labelled as

Those labelled as progressive Christians have been seen as those on their way out of the Christian faith, those who don't hold to the authority of Scripture, and the legitimacy of their faith is sometimes questioned by those within evangelical circles.

someone who doesn't hold to the teachings of Scripture and whose faith is suspect. Let me assure you that I hold to the EMC confession of faith. And like many other pastors in our conference, I try to hold a safe space for people to ask questions and wrestle with God and God's people, like the people of Israel in whose footsteps we follow.

Re-examination of faith

It is that wrestling with faith that leads some Christians to ask, “Are we getting this right?” They look at where their faith doesn’t make sense to them and ask questions to better understand how their experience of God and God’s people matches up with Scripture. Jesus was known for saying, “You have heard it said but I say to you...” Or to reframe that for today, “We have heard it said in our churches, but what does Jesus actually say?”

Christians who are sometimes labelled as progressive want to know if the teachings they wrestle with are accurate understandings of God’s words in Scripture or an interpretation by the church that needs to be re-evaluated in light of current theological and scientific discoveries. They want answers that make sense in today’s culture. I too want a faith that answers the questions of my children who go to public schools and their friends who did not grow up in the church.

Christians who are sometimes labelled as progressive want to know if the teachings they wrestle with are accurate understandings of God’s words in Scripture or an interpretation by the church that needs to be re-evaluated in light of current theological and scientific discoveries.

Move away from fear-based faith

One of those questions is why a good God would condemn people to suffer in hell. As a child I often came to my parents in the evening when I was supposed to be sleeping, terrified that I was going to hell. They would remind me that I had prayed to receive Christ and that my desire to please God meant that I had true faith. But that fear of hell morphed into a legalistic need to be good enough to earn my salvation. Evangelism was necessary to save people from hell even though it was a real struggle for me. As I have matured in faith, I have come to understand God’s deep love for me and see evangelism as an invitation to a relationship with God rather than a saving from hell.

Some Christians discard the doctrine of hell out of experiences like mine and emphasize God’s loving nature. I cannot ignore hell because I see that Jesus talked about punishment for those who choose not to walk in God’s ways, but some newer teachings about hell have helped me move away from an unhealthy fear of judgment to a trust that God sees all, knows all and will judge rightly and with mercy.

Passionate about the least of these

I loved studying the Bible, so after high school I went to Providence College for a degree in biblical studies and theology. Field education requirements at Prov meant I had to volunteer in some capacity each semester. So, I helped at an inner-city school in Winnipeg and walked the streets with Love Lives Here serving coffee and hot chocolate to prostitutes and homeless people. I interned one summer at Inner City Youth Alive planning small groups for girls and supervising at The Bridge drop-in centre. I also worked in a daycare and preschool for low-income families in Kansas. These experiences shaped my desire to assist people who were struggling and led me to pursue a social work degree at the University of Manitoba.

The concern for the poor and the orientation toward justice that I see among some “progressive” Christians appeals to me. They advocate for programs and services for those who cannot afford them. They work to break down barriers

of race and poverty. They draw attention to systems that benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor. They emphasize how systems such as government, healthcare, education and religious institutions have created and perpetuated injustices.

Acknowledgement of harm

Christians with a progressive bent also care deeply for wounded Christians. I am heartbroken when I hear of Christian leaders like Ravi Zacharias, Bruxy Cavey or Mark Driscoll who have wielded power in unhealthy ways and of churches who have enabled this kind of behaviour. I appreciate when churches acknowledge the ways the bride of Christ has hurt people and try to operate differently.

I feel the pain that spiritual abuse causes church members. I want my fellow Christians to find God's healing and am grateful for the efforts of churches that are intentionally sensitive to the trauma people have experienced within church settings.

Space for messiness

I have noticed those labelled as progressive tend to have space for messiness. They acknowledge they don't have all the answers and sometimes have more questions than answers. They try to be honest about the parts of them that are hurting, confused or broken. Grief is often messy, but the psalms model lament alongside praise. I have observed there is a willingness to publicly express lament in progressive-leaning churches. This gives others permission to acknowledge their own pain, their disappointment with God and their doubts.

To me, this echoes Scripture's description of biblical characters that clearly paint the heroes of faith as imperfect people. It also frees me to experience God's grace rather than trying to earn my salvation. It lets me know God loves me even when I sin and am living out of brokenness.

When with progressive believers in Christ, I never feel a need to defend my call to pastoral work. I am accepted as a pastor without raised eyebrows when I share what I do for work.

Warm welcome

Christians who lean toward the progressive side of the religious spectrum are committed to making sure that everyone is invited to the table of God and feels safe enough to respond to that invitation. They pay particular attention to the voices that have been silenced because of their propensity to ask hard questions or because of their gender, race or sexuality.

When with progressive believers in Christ, I never feel a need to defend my call to pastoral work. I am accepted as a pastor without raised eyebrows when I share what I do for work. There is never a need to clarify that I am the pastor, not my husband. My gender is simply not an issue. Paul's words ring true that in Christ there is not Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, for we are all one in Christ. I can speak freely with progressive leaning Christians without fear of how my words will reflect on other female pastors or without worrying that what I say and do will become the example for why pastoral roles should be restricted to men.

There is much discussion among American progressive Christians about race and how to undo systemic

injustices. The voices of theologians of colour are valued and effort is made to listen to perspectives in theology that represent the reality of a multi-ethnic, multi-racial bride of Christ. Much of the conversation in the U.S. focuses on the experiences and academic work of black pastors and theologians. When I hear these conversations, I sometimes substitute Indigenous for black in the conversation because of our Canadian history. I believe we can learn to listen better to our Indigenous Christian leaders and learn from their rich experiences.

I want my brothers and sisters in Christ who are gay or trans to feel the love of God through the bride of Christ. I also want those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community but who don't know God yet to feel that they can come like Zacchaeus and find the same welcome Jesus offered to him. I observe that happening to a greater degree among progressive leaning churches as many members of the LGBTQ+ community and their family and friends find a nonjudgmental welcome there.

I have not read a queer theology that convinces me to shift my understanding of God's intention for marriage being that of one woman and one man, but I value the openness to discuss what it means to have bodies with sexual desires, what it looks like to steward our sexuality in healthy ways and the work that is happening so that the church can be a place where fellow LGBTQ+ siblings in Christ feel loved and cherished.

I want my brothers and sisters in Christ who are gay or trans to feel the love of God through the bride of Christ.

What are we called to?

As we have seen in this series on the appeal of various expressions of Christianity, there is much good in these expressions. As the evangelical church, we agree on the need to hold firm to good teaching like our Reformed brothers and sisters in Christ. We can incorporate liturgical practices in our worship. We can listen carefully to the voice of the Holy Spirit like our charismatic friends. So too, we can listen to the call for compassion voiced by progressive Christians.

A healthy church is already incorporating the very things our progressive siblings in Christ are looking for. We can listen carefully to the Spirit of God as we re-examine Scripture to see if we are being true to Christ's teachings. We can acknowledge the harm the church has done to its own people and the barriers it has raised for others seeking to enter the church. We can pay attention to the voices of those traditionally silenced by the church and be enriched by the diversity they bring. We can create spaces where our first response to difference and hard questions is not judgment but invitation to conversation—together, we can acknowledge our place as sinners in the hands of a loving God.

Ruth Friesen is the pastor for congregational care at Fort Garry EMC in Winnipeg. When not at church, she enjoys reading fiction, walking in nature, trying to regain her supremacy in Dutch Blitz over her three teenage children and attending a good classical or jazz concert with her husband Todd.





IS **JOY** POSSIBLE

WHEN FACING A TERMINAL DISEASE?

By Kathleen Grift
With Geralyn Wichers

IN 2022, I went back to college ready to fulfill my lifelong dream of becoming a nurse. We'd home schooled our four children, and the last child had completed high school. I was enjoying the new freedom.

I excelled in my nursing studies. However, I began tripping frequently and struggled to carry my backpack of textbooks around with me. The diagnosis arrived at the end of the second semester. ALS! How could it be? I was 49 years old at the time.

ALS—also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease—is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that leads to paralysis and death.

I became numb, scared to let my emotions erupt to the surface.

When I was studying, I would set a timer for 25 minutes of work and then would take a five-minute break. I knew I needed to allow myself to express the darkest of my thoughts and emotions to God. I set the timer for five minutes. For those minutes, I would cry all the heart-wrenching sobs that would come. When the timer sounded, I would gradually choke back the tears and let my breathing return to normal.

It was during one of these sessions of crying to God that the Holy Spirit brought a picture to my mind's eye.

I saw a wide-eyed little girl with blonde curls at the doctor's office. I saw the girl sit on her daddy's lap, clinging to him in terror as the doctor started a painful but critical procedure. The girl couldn't believe that her daddy wouldn't protect her from the terrible doctor!

The Lord showed me the father's eyes brimming with tears as he firmly holds his little girl so the doctor can do the procedure. The father had her best, long-term interests in mind. He stayed with her, tenderly and compassionately, and held her the whole time.

This has been a comfort to me ever since. I believe when we give the Holy Spirit space, he will give us similar forms of consolation.

Is joy possible when facing a terminal disease? If I am to live with indescribable suffering for the rest of my days on earth, is there any joy left for me? I believe the answer is a resounding "Yes!"

The promise of suffering

In John 16:33, Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Jesus suffered while he was here on this earth, enduring the pain of the cross for our benefit!

Paul is another example of great suffering, yet he was joyful! He was beaten, stoned and shipwrecked, according to 2 Corinthians 11:24–25. Yet he said, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance," Romans 5:3 (ESV).

How do we rejoice in our suffering and experience joy despite pain and loss?

Lament

Let's look at Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, about to face the cross. He takes three of his closest disciples and asks them to keep watch. Then he prays, "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

"An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:43–44).

Jesus lamented, crying out before the Father, allowing himself to fully express his immense anguish. In the book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, author Mark Vroegop describes lament as "[giving] a person permission to wrestle with sorrow instead of rushing to end it."



Jesus lamented, crying out before the Father, allowing himself to fully express his immense anguish.



One of the burdens to bear with ALS is that I don't have anyone else in my life with the disease. Mary also faced a lonely calling as the mother of God's Son.

This is what Jesus did. Instead of rushing to end his sorrow, Jesus broke down before the Father and poured out his sorrows, experiencing them deeply.

When Jesus grieved in Gethsemane, God comforted him, sending an angel to strengthen him. When we acknowledge and grieve our suffering and then surrender it into God's hands, it leaves room for him to comfort our hearts.

It is helpful to grieve, but it is not helpful to camp out in sorrow and lament forever. Jesus didn't stay in the garden of Gethsemane; he continued to the cross. He surrendered to God's will and received his Father's strength.

Surrender

As we approach Christmas, Mary, Jesus' mother, presents a wonderful example of a heart of surrender. I've pondered Mary's story a lot through the years—even before my ALS diagnosis—and I see some parallels in my own story.

One of the burdens to bear with ALS is that I don't have anyone else in my life with the disease. Mary also faced a lonely calling as the mother of God's Son. Granted, she probably had no inkling that surrendering to God would mean watching her son die a few decades later. I just can't fathom her watching her firstborn son die that awful, awful death on the cross.

Yet, when the angel came, she wasn't married. She must have known what could happen to an unwed mother yet she still surrendered to

this difficult calling. Even so, she says "*I belong to the Lord, body and soul*" (Luke 1:38 JB Phillips, emphasis added).

That level of surrender speaks to me. I'm glad that Mary stepped into obedience despite the personal cost.

The Bible says Mary treasured up things in her heart and pondered them: the things the angel said, the visit from the shepherds and—I imagine—the many little details God orchestrated to bring his Son into the world.

I liken this to how we can treasure and ponder God's words to us—whether his personalized words of comfort, or his word in the Scriptures.

Meditate on the Word

Psalms 1 teaches us that the one who meditates on the Word is blessed! Scripture is full of promises, truth and encouragement that God can use as "salve" for our wounded souls.

We need to collect these comforts, truths, and encouragements every day to have the strength to endure. We need to speak Scripture to our fears and doubts. When we are immersed in the Word, we allow God more opportunities to offer his comfort.

It's like oxygen for our bodies. We may not be able to control our physical health, but we can be fully saturated with the Word of God and be as healthy spiritually as possible—for our own endurance and strength and to be an encouragement to others.



An audio Bible is helpful for listening to Scripture throughout my day. I also have a peaceful scripture app that allows me to meditate on passages in calming ways. Scripture Typers is another helpful tool. It's a memory app that allows me to hide away God's promises in my heart, so that when I need them, they are nearby to renew my strength.

I like to call these my "truth pills" or even sometimes my "lie busters." Lies often manipulate our emotions. We need to speak truth to them! So, I've memorized verses like, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you" (Psalm 56:3 CSB). If it were possible to wear out a verse by reciting it over and over, this one would be!

Thanksgiving and an attitude of gratitude

Thankfulness is a helpful practice, one which God commands us to do. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Being thankful is a choice. Not feeling like giving thanks is no excuse not to do so! Just like we teach young children to say thank you, we adults can learn to give thanks even when it's

hard. Practice, practice, practice! We can grow muscles in this area if we do not give up.

Some ways I practice is with little thankfulness exercises or games—like listing the things I am thankful for from A to Z. Another is being thankful for things in the room from the top to the bottom—like the ceiling fan that keeps me cool, to the rug on the floor which keeps my feet warm.

I find it's important to say why you are thankful for something. This makes your gratefulness deeper than surface level words and closer to the heart of what they mean to you. It can be as simple as, "I'm thankful for the windows, because they let in light and give me a view!" Doing this causes you to count the blessings you still have and take your eyes off what you don't.

Another exercise is to challenge oneself to give three expressions of gratitude to your partner or caregiver each day. I appreciate receiving these expressions and I know that those around me do too!

Singing and listening to music

Well-chosen songs are useful in several ways. One is to bring scriptures to mind or even help us to memorize them. Another is to remind us of God's

character. A worship song which focuses on God's character, such as God's sovereignty or his love, can elevate our thoughts and take our eyes off ourselves and our troubles.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."

Look to the hope of eternity

There is hope in our present suffering when we look to our eternal future.

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Paul does not minimize our troubles when he writes this verse, and neither will I. ALS is a horrific disease. However, the eternal glory in store for us far outweighs this present suffering.

My husband Tony and I like to recall Francis Chan's illustration of this point: Chan stretched out a long white rope. At the end of the rope was a red piece of tape. The rope represented all of eternity, and the tape represents our time here on earth. In the same way, the days of suffering which seem endless today will be but a blip of time in light of eternity!

We can live our lives in a way that looks to eternity instead of the present. One day my body

will be restored, and I will spend every day in the presence of my Saviour. What joy that will be!

I don't think fixing our eyes on the future is escapism if we balance it with the knowledge that God still has a purpose for us here on earth. Peter says: "Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good" (1 Peter 4:19).

I don't know the plans that God is fulfilling in my life, but I do know that he is shaping me into the person that will dwell with him for all of eternity. I can endure this present suffering and even find meaning while looking to the hope of heaven.

We have this one lifetime to suffer for Jesus, to walk in faith, to lay down our lives as a sacrifice, and to serve the Lord. I want to hear "well done, good and faithful servant" when I reach my eternal home.

James writes "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12). Did you hear that? The crown of life is given to those who love the Lord and persevere under trial.

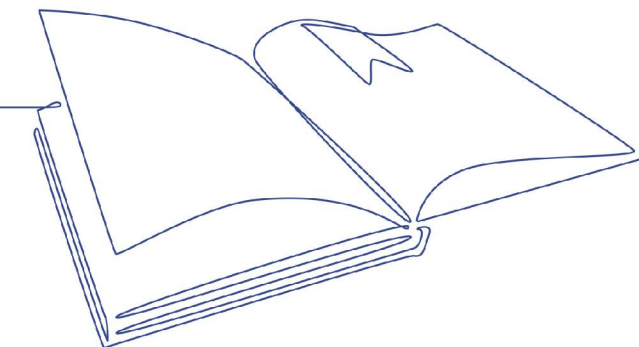
I encourage you to spend time thinking about heaven and reading the many Bible references to heaven. Whet your imagination on how amazing it will be to live in the presence of God—the source of all light and the One who calls the stars by name. To live in a place where no tears or sorrows will be present. Remember that "when we've been there ten thousand years ... we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we first begun!"



One day my body will be restored, and I will spend every day in the presence of my Saviour.

Kathleen Grift lives on an acreage near Anola, Manitoba with her husband Tony. Together they raised four kids and now raise bees and beef cattle.





Chapter 45

finding my story as a youth worker

By Jodie Hartung

WE'RE ALL TRYING to make sense of “our story,” “our purpose,” essentially, “who we were created to become.” But as I thought about telling you one chapter of my story, I found myself in an internal conversation.

Everyone has a story to tell, but does every story need a voice? Does mine?

Is there a lesson here worth sharing? Will it inspire and motivate?

Does it make sense to open the book on someone's journey and start at page 242?

“Chapter 45” in my story hit its stride as our family began to settle into church life at Evangelical Fellowship Church in Steinbach. My life was beginning to turn in a new direction. Our youngest son was graduating high school in the coming months, and I was walking through my daily “mom” routine, to finish well. I love firsts and lasts, and I believe both matter unequivocally in the story of life.

If memory serves correctly, it was January when our then youth pastor approached me to create some lessons for the youth group. I had spent years writing devotionals at our previous church, so creating lessons sounded like a wonderful challenge. I dove in!

When the time came to present these lessons, essentially teaching someone to teach them, it was decided that I would become the teacher. Yikes! That I had never done. Me, teach? I was usually invisible behind a screen, without even taking credit for the content I created, so this was well beyond my comfort zone or skill set.

But I thought....*okay, I could try.*

And so began my five-lesson journey into public speaking/teaching—and let me tell you, just because they were youth did not make it less daunting! Our church transitioned late that summer to a new youth pastor and, as I now had teaching experience under my belt, I was asked once again to create lessons through the fall season as everyone settled into their new roles. In addition to that, I took on teaching the youth Sunday School class, and various other bits and bobs along the way.

Again, the Lord did a challenging and abundant work in me. Not only through the time spent with him to develop a new fall youth series and teach weekly Sunday school lessons, but with building community with the youth, the leaders, and through that, the entire church. I had not only found a new home church, but a sense of family, belonging, and a deeper desire to spend more time with Jesus than ever before.

The sense of community felt to me the way the early church in Acts 2:42–47 is described: “A deep sense of awe came over them all” as they worshipped, met in homes, “shared their meals with great joy and generosity all the while praising God” (NLT).

In May 2025, I had another chance to say a new and scary “yes” to the Lord—I was blessed to be a seminar teacher at Abundant Springs. But seeing what sort of kingdom work was happening and joining in was a game changer! Youth are pursuing Jesus. They are asking questions. They are supporting each other. They are making a difference.

Jodie Hartung
teaches a seminar
at Abundant
Springs 2025.



ABUNDANT SPRINGS VIDEO SCREENSHOT

This is not a “public service announcement” (PSA) for “doing” things for the Lord. Rather, it’s an encouragement that when you seek the Lord for your next steps, he will often surprise you, challenge you, change and grow you into someone altogether new!

I thought launching my youngest into the world would mean my life would turn into more “grownup” pursuits. In reality, I collected a whole youth group, some who have graduated and become friends, some who are a delight to watch grow in their walks with the Lord, and some who have yet to age into the programs. You know how volunteering goes: when you give time, energy and love, the greatest beneficiary often is the giver, and this was no exception.

Frankly, there is nothing like watching those kids’ eyes come alive when they get what Jesus was teaching, what the Lord is saying, and when they hear Holy Spirit whispers—wow! If I can delight in watching these kids grow and ask questions, how much more does our Heavenly Father delight in us?

So maybe this isn’t a PSA about doing, volunteering, and finding ways to serve. But at the same time, serving can be a game-changer, a spirit-mover, a life-maker. Serving the Lord will change and grow you in the best of ways!

Even though your church’s yearly programming may be in full swing, there are

likely still holes to fill in the ministries in your church.

If you have a gift, use it!

If you have time, give it!

If you don’t know where to begin...ask your pastor, elders, or ministry leaders; they will have a good idea of where to direct you.

I promise your efforts will not be in vain.

You, in serving, are giving a piece of yourself to the Lord.

Don’t bury your treasure and hope for the best—let your light shine and multiply your talents.

It’s what we’re called to do!

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2 NLT).

As Jodie Hartung’s children grew, she had more time and space to create—and so created numerous devotionals and became involved in the teaching ministry in her church, Evangelical Fellowship Church in Steinbach, Man.

WHAT *GOD-WITH-US* MEANS FOR OUR WORK OF DISCIPLESHIP

By Dustin Asham

AS WE APPROACH another celebration of Christmas, we can expect many of the seasonal norms: the days are short and are only getting shorter, the weather has gotten cooler, and Christmas standards have already flooded the radio and most stores you might find yourself in.

Along with these changes comes the season of Advent, a season that invites the church to recall Christ's first advent and anticipate his second advent, his glorious return. It is a collective remembering that considers the start and finish points of the work of the church. There, between Jesus' first and second advent, we find everything the church does. We preach Christ crucified and resurrected while anticipating our own resurrection when he returns in glory.

In the next couple of months, we will likely hear this proclamation: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will

call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')" (Matthew 1:23). By quoting Isaiah 7:14, Matthew gives the title of "Immanuel" to Jesus. This title feels comfortable and comforting: God, the Creator of all things, lowers himself to be with his creation. God takes on flesh to be with us, to suffer on our behalf, and to redeem us.

The problem with familiar passages is that we may assume to know all there is to know about them and, because of this, do not need to revisit well-trodden paths. My invitation to you is to walk down this familiar path and choose to dwell on Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 in introducing Jesus. How might we consider Matthew's use of the "God-with-us" theme as an invitation to a Christ-centred view of discipleship? And, supposing that Matthew really is inviting us to this sort of discipleship, how might we live out this vision in our context?

GOD-WITH-US AS A PROMISE OF NEARNESS

The first Gospel is unique in its inclusion of the Immanuel prophecy, not just among the Gospels but among the New Testament as a whole. Matthew 1:23 is the only place in the New Testament that the word “Immanuel” appears. We might think this is only a minor inclusion—one that the other New Testament writers didn’t feel the need to use. While the word “Immanuel” appears only once, the idea of “God-with-us” is a theme right through the book. In his introduction, Matthew includes the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14—Mary fulfills the role of the virgin and Jesus is the child of promise. This theme returns at a variety of critical points in Matthew’s Gospel. Matthew 11:28–30 speaks of Christ’s nearness to those who “yoke” themselves to him. Matthew 18:15–20 includes a promise of proximity whenever two or three face conflict with a desire for peace, and Matthew 28:18–20 famously promises that Jesus will be “with you always, to the very end of the age.”

It’s this final promise that seals the significance of God-with-us for the modern church. God-with-us makes perfect sense when Jesus is physically with the disciples; the Great Commission, though, affirms that this nearness does not end in Christ’s ascension. Rather, Jesus assures us of his continued nearness. As the church proclaims and teaches the gospel, God is near to her.

Considering that this promise remains true today, what might God’s promise of proximity say about our work of discipleship, as well as our own spiritual formation? Matthew has already woven that into this book. In Matthew 11 and 18, both passages speak to God’s nearness in particular situations—and how that nearness describes a critical aspect of Matthew’s imagination of discipleship.

GOD-WITH-US MAKES PERFECT
SENSE WHEN JESUS IS PHYSICALLY
WITH THE DISCIPLES; THE GREAT
COMMISSION, THOUGH, AFFIRMS
THAT THIS NEARNESS DOES NOT
END IN CHRIST’S ASCENSION.

GOD-WITH-US AS DIVINE REST

This assurance of God’s nearness in discipleship is not an idea that begins with Matthew. In Exodus 33, Moses is speaking with God in the tent of meeting. In that conversation, God states that “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (v. 14). God promises this in response to Moses’ desire to have God “teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you” (v. 13).

Likely, Jesus has this exact exchange in mind as he turns to the crowd to say, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and *learn from me*, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find *rest* for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30, emphasis added). In Matthew 11, Jesus connects his closeness, his teaching, and Divine Rest, just as we saw in Exodus 33.

To experience Divine Rest, we need to draw near to Christ, to say “Yes” to his call. We might look to add rest or restful times to our schedules, intentional times of getting away or unplugging. While those are good things, they are not the root of rest. True rest comes from the proximity of Christ to us (we choose to “come to him” as he has already approached us) and submission to his teaching (taking up his yoke). We cannot focus on designing the ideal program or ministry plan to the point of losing sight of the One who desires nearness and draws near to his people.

We must ask: are we designing an environment that removes distractions and draws attention to God that people might draw near to Christ as he has drawn near to us? Or are we manufacturing an experience that merely imitates his rest? Jesus invites us to accept his yoke, to do the work he has set for us to do and experience his rest.

GOD-WITH-US IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT

Matthew 18 adds another situation where we can expect to find God's Presence. Matthew 18:15–20 is often quoted as two separate passages: one on church discipline (vv. 15–17) and another promising the nearness of Christ when groups of Christians gather (vv. 19–20). We ought to recognize that this section is written as it is for a reason. There is no break between these two pieces. Peter's question about forgiveness in verse 21 confirms that the prior verses also have conflict in view.

The promise of God's presence (v. 20) affirms that when members of the church face tension and conflict head on, God will be near them and will aid (v. 18) their desire to be reconciled to one another. Might it be that we should regard situations of conflict as holy moments? Not that the conflict itself is holy, but the moment is made holy by God's people saying "Yes" to God's call to reconcile to one another. When God's people choose to face conflict and, with grace and humility, work for reconciliation, we can expect God's presence to be there. God's nearness empowers us to lean into conflict and seek reconciliation. As the church joins in God's work of redeeming and reconciling creation to himself, we ought to expect that we will need to seek reconciliation to one another!



GOD-WITH-US AS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE

Matthew conceptualizes God's nearness to us as *the key factor* in the discipleship equation. The Sermon on the Mount, among other texts in this book, makes clear that there are expectations for disciples of Christ to act on. We are freed from a works-based theology that demands that we perfectly live out of the Law; we are incapable of it. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48) is possible only when we experience God-with-us.

Discipleship is fundamentally a quest to experience the transforming nearness of the God who has chosen to be near to us.



ISTOCK

GOD-WITH-US AS ABSOLUTE NECESSITY

As the church celebrates Advent once again this year, let us reflect upon Immanuel, God with us. In our desire to be discipled—to be redeemed and made whole—let us recognize the absolute necessity of the nearness of God. If it is the presence of God that we look for, then we ought to go to those places where God promises his nearness. As far as Matthew is concerned, God promises his presence to those who seek reconciliation in conflict, to those who accept Jesus' yoke, and to those who go into the world to proclaim the gospel.

In this season of recalling God-with-us, it is right for us to take stock of the relationships in our lives that need reconciliation and do our part in bringing wholeness to those relationships. It is also fitting for us to reflect upon how we are seeking spiritual formation. In all honesty, are we seeking the very presence of God or are we settling for an imitation that we can produce of our own effort? May we join Moses in saying, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Exodus 33:15). This Advent, let us be reminded of the gospel truth that God is very much with us, to the very end of the age, and that God calls all to draw near to him.

This is a challenging path to stay on with deep ditches on either side. On one side is the temptation to manufacture moments or experiences that imitate the true presence of God. We chase experiences and we are left wanting as the imitation falls well below the experience of the real Presence. On the other side, we are tempted to sit back and simply wait for God's presence to shape us, as though we have no part to play in our discipleship. Jesus' call is to approach him (Matthew 11:28), not to stay still. We are to learn and act upon his teaching. Fortunately for us, our feeble attempt to live out the teaching of Scripture is empowered by the God-who-is-near. It is exactly because God chooses to make himself near us that we can learn his ways and rightly bear his name. It's God's nearness that allows us to do the work that Jesus has given us to do and to respond well to conflict as it arises.

Dustin Asham, associate pastor at Ridgewood Church in Southeast Manitoba, is currently pursuing a Master of Theological Studies at Trinity Western University. He has a passion for teaching through experience, helping people

encounter faith in practical and transformative ways. Dustin and his wife, Cassie, along with their three children, enjoy outdoor adventures such as hiking, canoeing, and rock climbing.



Tag-teaming through spiritual battles

WHAT DOES SPIRITUAL oppression look like for believers? It can present itself in things like nightmares for both children and adults, nearly irresistible temptations, heaviness that feels like brain fog, trouble with breathing or with even being able to speak the name of Jesus. It can be random irritability with your spouse in things that make no sense, uncontrollable emotions, and the list goes on.

Does this look different depending on where you live or what you are involved in? For those who serve in prison ministry, they may talk about the darkness abiding in the hearts of the men and women who have perpetrated unspeakable evils. For those who work with street children or trafficking, the evil that is present can be sickening when they see how the innocent and vulnerable are abused. For those who work in countries or with people groups who have no knowledge of Jesus and in fact are walking in religious darkness, spiritual oppression can include team members with undiagnosed sickness, hearing or seeing demonic shadowy figures in homes, dealing with emotional or physical violence committed toward

them, or having curses spoken against them.

Jesus tells us that the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy, but he, our Saviour, comes to give life—abundant life. All Christians face spiritual oppression, some more and some less. So, how do we care for one another in this regard?

For our mission workers serving far from home in cultures that are often very secular and oppressive, these spiritual battles are often compounded by not having a strong body of believers around them, making them more vulnerable. Loneliness opens the door for the enemy to send discouragement, temptations, or a desire to give up. Not singing worship songs in your own

language and style with other like-minded people can prevent you from refuelling properly.

And then there are places where the enemy has had a foothold, a stranglehold on people's lives for generations. The soil of their hearts is rock hard, and the enemy has no intention of loosening his grip. It is into this darkness that the church sends our workers who need to use the Sword of the Spirit to introduce the light of Christ, against all odds. And it is these workers who repeatedly plead with the churches back home to pray spiritual protection over them and their loved ones. To pray for a softening of hearts. For eyes to see the light. For God to give courage to face the enemy and speak truth.

As we all face these battles, let us remember that we need one another to carry us, to bring victory, to be bringers of light and life to a world caught in the devil's hold. As you pray for protection over your loved ones, pray also for those far from home who face similar, yet different, spiritual oppression as well.

Jesus tells us that the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy, but he, our Saviour, comes to give life—abundant life. All Christians face spiritual oppression, some more and some less. So, how do we care for one another in this regard?



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

Small steps, bold faith at weekly Bible study in Amanecer

By Nancy Friesen
Mision Evangelica Menonita, Bolivia

ON WEDNESDAY EVENINGS, a teenage boy walks along his colony road carrying his Bible. One evening he runs into a group of his friends who have alcohol and are planning to party. They try to entice him to come with them, but he refuses. Later he runs into his former schoolteacher who asks him where he is going. It is unheard of to walk in the colony carrying a Bible. The teacher tries to dissuade him from going, but again, he refuses to listen and continues on his way.

This young man told us about these encounters he'd had on his way to our weekly Bible study in Amanecer. He also told us that he had to keep his Bible locked up because it was not safe out in the open. One day his older sister had come to visit and when she saw the Bible on his nightstand, she had taken

it and burned it. She told him that the Plautdietsch (Low German) Bible was not a true Bible and that the High German Bible that they use in church is the only right one.

About a month ago as I write this, the family suffered a tragedy when the boy's older brother was killed in a car accident. The brother had moved away from the colony, attended an evangelical church, and surrendered his life to the Lord, all of which made his family disown him. It was on a Sunday, after sharing his testimony in church, that he was killed. We prayed that his death would bring the family closer to God.

Wednesday night, we had quite the surprise. The sister, who had burned her brother's Bible, brought her husband and all their six children to Bible study for the first time. What amazing changes can take place in a person's heart when the Holy Spirit starts working.

It's been a year since I moved to Amanecer (Sunrise), Tres Cruces. After living and working in Villa Nueva for almost eight years, I had worked myself out of a job. MEM had decided to start a new ministry in the Tres Cruces area, focusing on the Old Colony people in the area. A piece of land was purchased, and the pioneering began. We moved three wooden houses onto the land, one for me, one for Benjamin and Bertha, the pastor couple, and the other would be used for church and school. We started church services, Bible study, and Sunday school.

I started school in February with four students, ranging from 8–13 years old. What a great experience it has been to teach these curious and eager young souls in three languages, in all subjects, at different levels—a true one-room classroom.

We are constructing a multi-purpose building to use for church and school, where we hope to have school in February 2026. We hear rumours of more families wanting to send their children and so we are preparing.

Sometimes we feel discouraged at how slowly things are moving here in Amanecer, but we should never underestimate what the Holy Spirit is doing in the hearts of the people. God's timing is always perfect, and our job is to just keep following where the Holy Spirit leads, one small step at a time.

Nancy works in Bolivia with Low German Mennonites through Mision Evangelica Menonita (MEM). She lives in Amanecer, Tres Cruces.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Four students gather to learn in Amanecer. EMC has a project to outfit the school in a new multi-purpose building; donations can be made at www.emcmisions.ca/projects/amanecer.

Grounded in faith, waiting on God

By Ellen Koop
Ethnos360 Aviation, Arizona

IN JUNE 2021, during the height of COVID, our phone rang with an unexpected question from the Ethnos Canada office: “Do you at Ethnos360 Aviation have any pressing needs? We have a donor who wants to contribute a considerable sum to a project that will have an immediate impact on the spread of the gospel.”

We had been praying about the urgent need for a Robinson R66 helicopter for Indonesia—an aircraft capable of reaching remote locations inaccessible to our Kodiak planes. Remarkably, this donor inquiry came before we had even made the need public. On the ground in Indonesia, a Canadian helicopter pilot was nearing the end of language training, and church planting missionaries were pleading for aviation support.

Fast forward to August 2025, and that desperately needed helicopter still sat in a container at our training centre in McNeal, Arizona, waiting to be shipped. Why was it still here after four years when we had prayed and fasted repeatedly?

We often think of prayer as a request followed by a swift answer. But what if the answer takes years? Are we willing to remain faithful like the widow in Luke 18:1–8, who persistently pleaded with the unjust judge until he relented? The parable ends with a probing question: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Will he find believers who give up after a few prayers—or those who pray without ceasing?

The Indonesian R66 with Theo (left) and Rocky (right), two Indonesian pilots who will be training to serve with Ethnos.



Ethnos360 Aviation serves pioneer church planting teams in the remotest regions of Brazil, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and the Philippines. These teams invest 20 to 30 years immersing themselves in language, culture and Bible translation to establish thriving communities of trained believers—equipped with Scripture and ready to reach neighbouring villages with the gospel.

But we live in a changing world. Global issues affect our plans. Supply chain disruptions, government paperwork, personnel shortages, health challenges, and many other factors lie beyond our control.

But as we wait on the Lord of the universe, we hold fast to Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 4:8: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair.” We trust God’s timing, his methods, and his grace to wait patiently by faith.

After raising the funds needed for three helicopters for PNG, the final one—ordered and paid for two years ago—is complete but still waiting at the

We often think of prayer as a request followed by a swift answer. But what if the answer takes years?

Robinson factory for an engine due to supply chain delays.

Finally! What a joy and answer to prayer it was to see the crane and truck arrive at our hangar at 9:30 a.m. on August 14 to load the helicopter container on the truck for its two-month journey to Indonesia. By the time of printing, it should have arrived.

October 15 update: On September 24, the third R66 for Papua New Guinea arrived here in McNeal to be prepared for overseas service!

Ellen Koop is an administrative assistant and part of the media department at Ethnos360 Aviation headquarters in Arizona; her husband Phil is executive director.

No electricity, no problem

By Albert and Edna Martens
Athletes in Action, Manitoba

EDNA, SIX VOLUNTEERS and I (Albert) had just arrived in Poplar Hill, when a construction worker came over to let us know we had “arrived at a bad time—the whole community has a black out.” There would be no power to the hotel—no fridge, no stove, no lights, no A/C—and our charter flight had just taken off! We were there to minister to the community in northern Manitoba from July 13 to 19, 2025.

“Come and stay with us at the construction camp,” Harry said, “We have a generator.” After talking to the other team members, we followed Harry to the camp, about one kilometre from the Poplar Hill community.

About 16 mobile trailers were hooked together creating two dorms with over 100 bedrooms. We walked down the lengthy corridor (4 trailers in length), to the room Edna had

chosen near the common kitchen. The bedrooms were small, with a single bed, a small desk and a small closet.

As we toured the town in a borrowed van, we talked to everyone who looked like they were “experts on power” and the answer to our question about electricity was “tomorrow.” Tomorrow the answer was tomorrow. Six hydro poles had burned in the fires north of their community.

The community store had a small generator, but it could only power their cash register, so Edna used her phone flashlight to look for bread in the pitch-black building. The store was selling perishable food at 90% off or the dogs would have gotten most of it.

Our team was versatile and decided that they could do Bible lessons and meet people without electricity, but on our third day the power was back, and we moved to the hotel.

Kaylee, Aimee and Jordyn ran the VBS program, and we organized a

short run with about a dozen children. Three NAPS (Nishnawbe Aski Police Service) officers willingly helped, escorting runners with their police truck—the finish line was a yellow “Do Not Cross” tape.

Chris organized a men’s breakfast with 40 men attending. Dwayne gave the devotional and had opportunity to have a lengthy chat with one of the men after the breakfast. He also hired a local fisherman to take him fishing on Stout Lake. Spending seven hours on a remote lake is another way of getting to know someone and to share your faith.

Don and I went to do an anointing prayer for a couple with a seven-year-old son who was disabled from meningitis as a baby. This was a very emotional experience.

The whole team participated in radio ministry.

Bobby, who came to know Jesus last year, asked us to come and dedicate their new house and their family to the Lord. Five of us went to his home where we dedicated each room and the family—including little Gianna who slept through it.

The last evening, we did the traditional fireworks off a small rock island on the Berens River, about half a km away from shore, where there was no danger to the children or of starting a forest fire.

The Lord blessed us with a tremendous team, and despite the surprise at the start we had one of the best “camps” ever.

Albert and Edna Martens minister to First Nations communities and to runners.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

The Poplar Hill team at the airport: the pilot, Albert Martens, Don Wiebe, Dwayne Koop, Kaylee Koop, Chris Lerm, Edna Martens, Amy Friesen, and Jordyn Bergen.

Much thanksgiving for building expansion

Pansy Chapel
Pansy, Manitoba

GIVING THANKS FOR our new spaces has been an ongoing highlight of the year. It is indeed a precious thing to gather as one family (since February) instead of feeling fragmented by two

services. All the new meeting rooms are well utilized as we entered a busy time with our Sunday school and youth programs.

Perhaps the next biggest reason to give thanks, as we look back, is the baptism service. As usual, it happened at the creek, this year on June 15th,

with a rejoicing outdoor crowd of several hundred. Thirteen people were baptized—a mix of youth and adults. As each of them shared their testimonies we felt along and were challenged to keep praying for them. What a privilege! May we be found faithful.

— Betty Barkman

Pansy Chapel congregants give thanks for the building expansion that has allowed them to gather at a single service since February 2025.



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Stony Brook Fellowship adds pastoral position

Stony Brook Fellowship
Steinbach, Manitoba

WE ARE SO excited to have Andreas Warkentin join our staff at Stony Brook Fellowship (SBF) as our community life pastor in September 2025. Andreas is married to Bianca; both were born and raised in Brazil before moving to Canada in 2023 to attend Bible college. They have three children: Benny, Noah, and Sophia. They have been a part of SBF since 2023. We are so grateful to have them in our midst!

— Lisa Bergen

Andreas and Bianca Warkentin are surrounded by their children Noah (back left), Benny (back right), and Sophia (front right).



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Service in Mexico brings together multiple generations

Kola EMC
Kola, Manitoba

IT HAS BEEN over six months since our church sent out a team of 14 participants to Guadalajara, Mexico, to serve with Israel and Sandra Chavez Plett. What we planned to be a youth trip turned into a multi-generational service team with 12-year-olds to 50-plus-year-olds involved.

While in Guadalajara our team worked on adding tin to a structure in the community space outside of the church. We also fixed up Sunday school chairs, ran a women's craft evening, helped sell clothing at the market and deep cleaned the thrift store located at the church.

In the late afternoon/evening our group ran a two-hour English program for children in the community. This was the main project we planned to do in Guadalajara. Running an English program from scratch involving



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

children with all different levels of English and age groups made each of us a little nervous—especially when only one of us knew a little Spanish. But the Lord provided us with excellent translators who conveyed the message of Christ as well as our English program to the kids.

Each day we tackled a different theme in English: food, farm animals,

What we planned to be a youth trip turned into a multi-generational service team.

chores around the house and parts of our body. One of our team members took the themes and connected them to Bible stories which we told the kids as well as any parents who were watching.

We had fun singing, doing crafts, and playing bingo, hide and seek, parachute activities and memory games with the kids. On the last day, each one of our group members expressed the joy they felt working with the kids program, helping Israel and Sandra with their connections in the community, and following the call God placed on us to go.

– Alida Martens



A multi-generational team from Kola EMC ran an English program for children in Guadalajara, which included parachute games (above) and singing (photo at top right).

Congregation inspired by stories of life change

Morris Fellowship Chapel
Morris, Manitoba

ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, it was a pleasure to have a group from Adult & Teen Challenge come to serve us. We enjoyed testimonies from a few of them. It was so wonderful to hear about the way their lives have been changed, and they gave reports about how their lives have been saved because they were able to leave their addictions. One said that so many of his family and friends had died due to overdose. Derek Neufeld gave the main message, and it was a good challenge!

The congregation is currently looking forward to the Thanksgiving meal, to be held on October 13.

At the last membership meeting it was decided to have Greg Carpan come on as a second pastor. Greg and Sophia (Bartel) Carpan and their little son have moved from Saskatchewan after graduating from Bible school over there. So now we are doubly blessed.

We are happy to see Brian Klassen able to attend services after having a rough time with both legs being amputated. Now he has a wonderful way of transportation with an electric wheelchair. He and his wife Sandi have passed the test of learning how to conduct dialysis in their home, making it so much easier than having to drive to Winkler.

On a recent Sunday, a group of singers visited the Red River Valley Lodge. It was good to have the seniors join in

the singing. Pastor Jeff spoke about the man that was helped through the ceiling to reach Jesus for healing. It is always good to get involved with outreach!

— Lorne Loewen



Upcoming Courses January 2026

Thursday evenings 6:30-9:15 p.m.
Theology of God, Prayer and Community
with Layton Friesen

Thursday afternoons 1:00-4:00 p.m.
Ministering to At-Risk Youth
with Kent Dueck, ICYA

January 24-25, 2026
Mental Health First Aid
with Jonathan Tyler

Jan 30-31, 2026
In the Image of God: A Biblical Theology of Human Nature
with Pierre Gilbert

Register at www.SBCCollege.ca/upcoming_courses



PHOTO SUPPLIED

Baptism service on September 7, 2025: Robbie Shultz (second from left) with a friend (far left) and pastors Greg Carpan (second from right) and Jeff Plett (far right). It was a wonderful service with a message from Pastor Jeff and songs from the group Fearless.

A sweet aroma

AJAR OF honey, just a jar of honey. And then again, it wasn't. It was an offering of appreciation. On the evening of the 50th anniversary celebration of Radio ZP-30, La Voz del Chaco Paraguayo, in Filadelfia, Paraguay, an older lady, a regular listener, gave what she could. She had travelled far from home, from the south near the Argentine border, to present the station's director Egon Doerksen with this personal gift.

Radio ZP-30, as many readers may remember, was an EMC missions project back in the 1970s and 80s. The station came about through the thoughts, ideas and efforts of EMC missionaries working with Indigenous communities surrounding Mennonite colonies in the Paraguayan Chaco. Diedrich Lepp, a translator of Scripture into the Lengua, or Enthlît, language, and Frank Kroeker, also involved with outreach to the Indigenous communities, led the efforts to provide a means of communication with and to the many families and small communities in the vast, barren Chaco.

And now it was time to celebrate God's faithfulness throughout 50 years of programming. I had the privilege to represent EMC Canada and be a part of the weekend of festivities and

thanksgiving this past September 13 and 14. The celebrations started with a Saturday evening mass gathering of listeners who were treated to music from a number of groups from surrounding Indigenous communities. There were notes of congratulations, reports, testimonies and a generous amount of praising God. Sunday morning a German church service was dedicated to thanksgiving, to sharing some history, and to solidifying ZP-30's commitment to continue bringing good news to listeners far and wide.

It was heartwarming to see the board and staff of the station commit to boldly present God's Word and its truths to listeners, along with news, agricultural updates, educational programming and personal messages and greetings. I was impressed how listeners, who through technology experience a rapidly changing world, continue to rely on ZP-30 as their friend, their work companion, their trusted source of information.

My family lived in Filadelfia where I worked at ZP-30 from early 1989 to mid-1994. From that experience I had a sense of how important the reliable and faithful voice of ZP-30 was to the many families and communities from



PHOTOS SUPPLIED

Abe Giesbrecht with a plaque presented to EMC at the 50th anniversary celebration in appreciation for its involvement in the life of ZP-30.

inside Argentina to the south and into Bolivia to the north. Today, native language speakers in Spanish, Guaraní, Enthlît, Nivaclé, Ayoreo, Portuguese, German and Low German continue to provide programming that's informative, educational and comforting. Professional counselling services are provided for listeners to contact through a variety of means. Outreach teams travel to remote regions on a regular basis to meet with groups of listeners, some who consider the ZP-30 programming their church.

So, ZP-30 continues to be a sweet aroma, somewhat like that jar of honey is a sweet, sacrificial gift, one of many expressions of appreciation from the station's many listeners in the ever changing and developing Paraguayan Chaco.

— Abe Giesbrecht



Some of the musicians participating in Saturday evening's 50th anniversary celebration.

SBC is repainting but not repenting

IN HIS BOOK *Orthodoxy*, G. K. Chesterton wrote, “If you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want it to be white you must be always painting it again.”

This is relevant to the work of staying faithful to the good news handed over by Jesus to his apostles, and it’s

why confessions of faith need revising at least once a generation.

The Steinbach Bible College (SBC) board asked the faculty to review our college’s 1966 Statement of Faith and rewrite the wording based on what our four supporting conferences saw as the core of our testimony together.

We consulted with conference leaders and gave careful thought to each of the convictions in the Statement. What words would express the ancient and hopeful news we have been called to proclaim in this hour?

We wanted to repaint but not repent of our convictions. Read over our core convictions in our new Statement of Faith at sbcollege.ca/what-we-believe.

– Layton Friesen, SBC academic dean



◀ Screenshot from SBC website.





Giving Tuesday

Consider...
 ...your community
 ...your church
 ...your conference!

www.emconference.ca/give





The **monthly missions prayer calendar** is being replaced with an

ANNUAL WALL CALENDAR

Sign up or learn more at
www.emcmisions.ca/calendar
 or by contacting the EMC office
info@emconference.ca,
 204-326-6401
 440 Main St, Steinbach, MB R5G 1Z5



CATHERINE THIESSEN

1939–2025

Catherine (Cathy) Thiessen went to be with Jesus on Sunday, July 20, 2025, at the Rest Haven Care Home in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Cathy will be lovingly remembered by her six brothers, six sisters, and ten in-laws. She was predeceased by two sisters and three brothers-in-law; as well as her parents, David and Katarina Thiessen.

Cathy was born in Steinbach, Manitoba, on December 1, 1939. Cathy spent her childhood on a farm in Blumenhof, Manitoba. At the age of 14, she moved with her family to Riverton, Manitoba, where they built a farm and developed farm land in the Washow Bay community. She worked hard helping her parents raise her younger siblings as well as working on the farm. As she grew up, she took various jobs to help support the family.

As a young adult, Cathy attended Steinbach Bible Institute and then completed her LPN training. After some time spent nursing in Manitoba, she went to Mexico to work as a nurse for three and a half years at the Quellen Colony.

From there, she attended Rio Grande Bible Institute to learn Spanish.

After language school, Cathy spent 24 years in Chihuahua City and seven years in Soto Maynez as a church leader and pastor. In Soto Maynez, she pastored five small rural churches.

In January 2005, Cathy retired and moved to Blumenort, Manitoba. While living in Blumenort, she continued to find numerous opportunities to help and serve people: within the local Spanish-speaking community, teaching Sunday school, and helping neighbours and family members as she saw needs.

After her dementia diagnosis at the age of 79, she moved to Menno Home in Grunthal and after that to Rest Haven Care Home.

The family expresses their deepest gratitude for the loving and compassionate care Cathy received at both of these homes.

– The Family



VENUS COTE

1960–2025

Venus was born in Saskatchewan on July 23, 1960, to her parents, the late Robert Badger and Charlotte Cote. In addition to her parents and grandparents, Venus was predeceased by her sister Donna Cote.

Venus is survived by her sister Beverly Cote, her Auntie Elvira Cote,

many nieces and nephews, cousins and numerous friends.

Venus was accepted by the EMC Board of Missions in 1989 to serve as an associate missionary with Northern Evangelical Mission in Nova Scotia. In 1998 she moved to Fredericton, New Brunswick, to continue her ministry under Northern Canada Evangelical Mission until the day of her passing.

Venus lived a life of radical love and spent her time caring for those around her. Whether it was visiting the sick or elderly, cooking in the kitchen at Arrowhead Native Bible Center (ANBC), bowling or watching soccer with friends, or investing in the youth at Saint Mary's and Oromocto First Nation, she sought to be a light

to everyone she encountered. She was always excited for Tuesday night Bible study where she fervently prayed for members of the community. It was her passion to tell everyone about the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, Venus passed away at the Doctor Everett Chalmers Regional Hospital on September 27, 2025, at the age of 65 years.

Venus was a faithful servant of the Lord and brought joy to every gathering she attended at EMC events, such as conventions or missionary fellowships. She has fought the good fight and has been taken into the arms of her beloved Saviour.

– The Family/EMC Missions

Shoulder Tapping

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

Additional EMC Openings

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

EMC Positions



Associate Pastor of Discipleship: Rosenort Evangelical Mennonite Church (Rosenort, Man.)

Rosenort EMC is seeking a passionate and servant-hearted associate pastor of discipleship to join our ministry team. This newly created role offers a unique opportunity to shape and strengthen discipleship within our church family, helping people

grow in faith and live out the gospel in their daily lives, all within the context of a growing and vibrant rural community in Manitoba.

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

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



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

High Level Christian Fellowship (HLCF), located in northern

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

job description is required, please contact James Connellan, board chairperson at elder@hlcf-emc.org.

Other Positions



Lead Pastor: Douglas Mennonite Church (Winnipeg, Man.)

Douglas Mennonite Church (DMC) is seeking a passionate and visionary lead pastor to guide our congregation through an exciting season of reawakening, exploration, and renewal. Located in the North Kildonan area of Winnipeg, we are a community hungry for biblically rooted, fresh expressions of faith.

The lead pastor called to our church is one who is deeply rooted in theological teaching, pastoral care, and church leadership. Demonstrating a deep love for Jesus, you will shepherd our congregation with humility, integrity, and unwavering commitment to the biblical authority of Scripture, ensuring that our church functions as a living testimony to the glory of God.

We are seeking someone with pastoral experience, a deep knowledge of Scripture and commitment to its authority, strong communication and relationship-building skills, emotional maturity, proficiency in digital tools for ministry and administration, M.Div. or equivalent theological education (preferred) or undergraduate ministry or biblical studies training (minimum). For a detailed job description, go to <https://www.douglasmc.ca/employment-opportunities>.

To apply, please submit your confidential expression of interest including resume and cover letter to: careers@douglasmc.ca.

Are you interested in

TEACHING ABROAD?

Bolivia May & June Short-term

more details at emcmissions.ca/short-term



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 or contact us at ourbethelpastoralsearch@gmail.com.



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.



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

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

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



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

MCS, a Christian charity in Aylmer, Ont., serves people—from a Jesus-centred lens—with various programs: newcomer services, radio, family supports and employment. MCS is seeking both a social enterprise director and a radio coordinator and host.

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

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

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

Welcome to recently hired pastors

ASSOCIATE PASTOR
GREG CARPAN and his
wife Sophia
Morris Fellowship Chapel

COMMUNITY LIFE
PASTOR ANDREAS
WARKENTIN and his
wife Bianca
Stony Brook Fellowship

Psalm 119 praise

IT'S UNLIKELY THAT the writer of Psalm 119 walked around with a thesaurus in hand. I also realize that my reference to a thesaurus dates me to a pre-Google era. Yet, the psalmist had an impressive repertoire of words to describe God's law: testimonies, commandments, statutes, rules, precepts. A hundred and seventy-six verses of beautiful variety.

Gradually, the verses have been moving from my short-term memory into the long-term (and hopefully deeper yet into my heart!). As I've listened to the words over and over, they have changed from ancient words to current prayers. "Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having

stomach. As I drove, my phone spontaneously connected to the truck's audio system and started blasting music. The song was one I had downloaded for my Sunday school class. "God is omnipotent. All-powerful, mighty and strong. Unstoppable all the day long."

I listened on repeat during the 20-minute drive, the truth forming a firm foundation for me to place my disordered thoughts. The day was hard, but God's competent control and care over all things was firmly secure.

And why shouldn't we continue to be a joyful people amidst the challenges we endure? We have the greatest peace for this life and the best promises for the next. "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith" (notice the past tense, we *have been*) "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we [rejoice] in the hope of the glory of God" (current rejoicing in future hope). And if that wasn't reassuring enough, Paul continues, "Not only so, but we also [rejoice] in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Romans 5:1-5).

In a year's time, you could ask me for a memory work update. I'm unsure how far I'll have progressed through Psalm 119, but I do know I will have acquired more endurance and hope along the way.

Convincing my reluctant, aging memory to dust off its skills was one thing; convincing it to keep "thy word" and "your precepts" in the right verses was a completely different challenge.

Partway through the summer, I was inspired to memorize the passage. Two stanzas per month would easily complete it in a year. I found a word-for-word music playlist on Spotify to complement the attempt and bravely started. I was confident that I *could* do it. I had memorized other passages of Scripture and even the book of Philipians back in college. Convincing my reluctant, aging memory to dust off its skills was one thing; convincing it to keep "thy word" and "your precepts" in the right verses was a completely different challenge.

my eyes fixed on all your commandments" (Psalm 119:5-6 ESV). A prayer as relevant to a Canadian mother folding laundry as to the Jewish psalmist who first wrote it.

It's not the only time that I've been impacted with the truth, softening my heart and reminding me of his presence as the hours slip slowly from day to day. This past spring, an ambulance was scheduled to move my mother into a hospice. My sister and I planned to help bring a few belongings into her new room. It was the kind of drive into town that leaves a dull ache in the pit of your



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

I don't seem to have a personal relationship with God

ONE OF MY spiritual heroes growing up was my neighbour, the late Cornie B. Friesen. Cornie had a beautiful, personal way of conversing with God. He would relate conversations of prayer in detail: "I said to God, and then God said to me...." In envy I once asked him whether he could teach others to have this kind of personal interaction. "No," he replied, "This is a unique gift that God has given me. It's not for everybody."

How thankful I am for Cornie's wisdom at that moment! I have never had those to-and-fro dialogues with God, and Cornie invited me to see my faith as something I could be content with as a gift from God.

I sometimes hear people testifying to times they felt God was near and times they felt God was distant: "Today I feel close to God." "Last summer I felt God was distant." I can rarely say either. God and I just don't seem to be waxing and waning. Each day, my connection with God seems about the same as the last.

I am rarely guided by God in decisions the way others report being directed. God never told me to become a pastor, marry my spouse, or go to school. God certainly never told me to live in Winnipeg. God is rarely my spiritual GPS.

I know that God does speak directly to some people, especially prophets. Moses, Ezekiel, Mary, Paul and Cornie had personal conversations with God or his angels. The psalmists talk about feeling far from God and feeling near.

And the church has always had mystics who testified to ecstatic experiences of desolation or consolation from God.

But none of this seems to happen to me.

So, if you are like me, confident that you are God's child but not experiencing him as personally as others do, may I share what I have learned over the years?

1. God never promises that all his children will have the same experience of him. God gives to each their relationship with him. That's fine.

2. God does not expect you to take courses or read books to learn to hear him in this personal way. Cornie was right: God does speak that way to some people, but not because they mastered some technique or spiritual skill.

3. You can harm yourself spiritually by constantly straining your inner ear to detect some divine voice amid all your thoughts and then being disappointed. If you love God and he speaks to you like to Moses, you will know.

4. Until then, relax and read your Bible. *That* you know is God speaking to you in a personal way. By the time Cornie died a few years ago, he could

God and I just don't seem to be waxing and waning. Each day, my connection with God seems about the same as the last.

recite the New Testament. He spent a lifetime on his tractor memorizing the Bible.

5. You can have the gift of divine *wisdom* without God speaking to you in this direct way. The Spirit gives wisdom through a life marinating in Scripture and loving those around you till it hurts.

6. If you don't seem to have that personal relationship, don't be dismissive of those who do. It's not because you are some kind of sophisticated intellectual. That's just arrogance.

The question is not, "How can I achieve someone else's relation to God?" but rather, "How can I faithfully make myself available to God within the relationship he does grant me?"

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



Listening as a spiritual practice

IT'S GATHERING SEASON and I'm wondering if you have your best stories and jokes prepared.

Early on in our marriage, my wife and I attended one of her extended family gatherings. It was a group I didn't know very well and so, as was customary, I made my way into the living room to join the other men. Shortly after sitting down there was a lull in the conversation and one of the uncles that I didn't know very well said, "Mo you're a funny guy, tell us a joke." I quickly tried to read the room and decided on my favourite Mennonite joke that used the smallest bit of Low German I could muster. I don't think I told it right or my Low German pronunciation didn't meet an acceptable standard and I haven't been asked for a joke since.

I have often laughed at that moment, but I realize

now that there was an amazing heart behind that request for a joke. It was an uncle trying to give me, the new kid, an opportunity to speak and have others listen. Let's face it, our tendency in many conversations is to listen just long enough to find our next story and then we eagerly jump in and share our story or important fact. We can easily spend an entire conversation "one-upping" each other.

Research from Barna suggests that younger generations are feeling significantly more isolated (Gen Z, 26%) than older generations (Gen X, 15%; Boomers, 8%). They also suggest that feelings of loneliness are higher among younger generations. When asked "How often, if ever, do you feel lonely?", the percentage that answered "frequently" were as follows, Gen Z, 28%; Millennials, 23%;

RESOURCE CORNER

The Open Generation

"Want to know more about Gen Z culture and their growing openness to spirituality in Canada? Here is a great research-based resource that helps to identify some of the unique characteristics found in younger generations."

— Mo Friesen



Gen X, 20%; Boomers, 8%. (<https://www.barna.com/trends/gen-z-emotions/>). In an era of loneliness and isolation, one of the gifts we can give is to listen well to others, asking follow-up questions and giving them even more opportunity to be heard.

Spiritually, this can also be transformative for our relationship with God. When I, as a follower of Jesus, listen to others, hear their questions, and acknowledge their perspectives, it creates a trust that invites others to ask about my perspectives and, potentially, the hope I have found in Jesus. Then,

as I listen, I can invite Holy Spirit to speak to me through the person I'm listening to. I have been amazed at the ways that God has given insight, has allowed me to recognize unspoken hurt, and has given me words of encouragement for the person I'm listening to.

Listening can also be used in our personal worship time with God: growing prayer time to include a significant time when we are quiet and invite Holy Spirit to communicate with us.

So, this holiday season, let's work on the spiritual practice of listening. Let's turn our attention to others and invite the Holy Spirit to help us listen for the purpose of building encouraging relationships with people and with our heavenly Father.



Mo Friesen is EMC's Director of Next Generation.