



Moderator's Message

From ideas to vaccines, marriage relationships to building construction—everything goes through different forms of testing. Scripture speaks of the quality or genuineness of our faith as being proven by the test of fire, by shaking or by the impartial judgement of God himself.

The events of the past few months are proving to be a much more severe test to our faith, to our version of church and our belief in a sovereign God, than we had anticipated. Even the role and value of our conference is being tested. How important is this association of churches?

How much time and money are we willing to dedicate to the work of the conference and its various ministries? What benefits are there in being connected or in sharing our resources to accomplish things we can't do on our own? What were the things that called for this association originally, and do we still share the values and priorities of those who pulled us together in the first place?

These are all worthwhile questions to ask in this time of testing forced upon us by life's circumstances.

Though some pain is often associated with this kind of testing and evaluation, new life, relevance and passion for the cause can also be outcomes in the process. I'd like to urge the EMC family to link arms and embrace the testing to our faith, to our way of doing church and the look of our conference, believing that good things we could not see before will come from this season of our lives.

Barry Plett



Nominations

Moderator (1)

- Barry Plett, Blumenort

Board of Church Ministries (3)

- vacancy
- vacancy
- vacancy

Board of Leadership and Outreach (2)

- Ed Peters, Island Gospel
- vacancy

Board of Missions (2)

- Phil Hamm, Leamington
- vacancy

Board of Trustees (2)

- Ruth Penner, Aberdeen
- vacancy

Nominating Committee (4)

- Alvira Friesen, REMC
- Dave Kroeker, SbEMC
- vacancy
- vacancy



Choosing to Discuss

Meetings. Zoom conversations. Emails. Formal dialogues. Question and response. Human beings seem to be the only creatures who accomplish difficult tasks by the to and fro of debate, challenge, criticism, rebuttal, and exchange of insight. We keep each other honest. We give each other a new way to see. We poke holes in each other's pet illusions. By it all we become more like Jesus: humble, piercing in our insight, and assured in our work.

Discussion and Discernment

The BCM has sought to help churches with difficult conversations by providing materials in *The Messenger* and in other ways. This project started in 2019 and continues through 2020. As part of this, Pastor Kevin Wiebe is writing a special column series on conflict management called *A Path to Peace*.



DARREN AND BARRY PLETT

Women as Pastors

Locally and wider, the EMC is talking about whether women should serve as pastors. We must discern what we understand the Bible to teach about how men and women relate in our homes, communities and churches. This must then be lived and proclaimed as good news. At convention brothers Darren and Barry Plett demonstrated how to fight in a healthy way. See their video on the EMC website.

Playing it safe?

Our summer ministerial day in Taber encouraged EMC churches to be places for tough questions and doubts. Churches need apologetics, philosophy and theology in their walk with Jesus. Our speaker, Paul Buller from Calgary, said men, though not only men, are disillusioned with churches who only play it safe intellectually.

What topics or trends need to be addressed?

The following question was posed to delegates at the November Conference Council: "What are the topics or trends that are affecting us; but as churches we have been unwilling or reluctant to address?" Several themes emerged.

Church and Culture: Delegates said we are living in post-Christendom and culture looks different than it once did. How does the church respond to this shift? How do we live counter-culturally? How do we respond to gender confusion, sexual sin, euthanasia (MAID), and mental health?

Roles in Leadership: Work is being done within the conference on what women in leadership looks like. Delegates asked how can we communicate this better and what does the role of men in leadership mean?

The Next Generation: It was reported by delegates that young people are disengaging from the church. How do we encourage them to be committed? How do we address biblical illiteracy? How do we listen to their heart and not just the surface questions?

What's on the table going forward

Two other topics that rose to the surface in 2019 are on the agenda for EMC: spiritual renewal and questions on salvation, heaven, hell and judgement.



PAUL BULLER

Addressing Challenge and Loss

A cartoon in the New Yorker some years ago showed Adam and Eve walking sadly out of the Garden of Eden. Adam said, "Eve, we are living in an age of transition." And so it has been said ever since. God is unchanging, and eternal; we creatures change. We are born, grow old and pass away, leaving the fruit of our work for those who follow us. Along the way we take this path, and then that, seeking the best and wisest way to serve our Creator. Ministry in the EMC has changed in the past year. Change often feels like a loss at first, but we pray it opens the door to new opportunity. May God find us faithful with the days given to us.

Challenges Come in Sets

Charlie Koop, Director of Canadian Church Planting, retired officially at the end of 2019. His enthusiasm and love for Jesus and people was effective and he will be missed. Charlie experienced a heart attack in July, recovered well, but did not return to work.



With thought and prayer, the Personnel Committee decided to remove one full-time EMC staff position upon Charlie's retirement, in part because of finances. They agreed that the gifts and passion required were available among existing staff and **Gerald Reimer** took on the role.

Reshuffling roles, with a reduction in staff hours for church planting, missions, and youth was felt most keenly by the Youth Committee.

In December, Executive Director **Tim Dyck** underwent heart surgery and was on medical leave until mid-February 2020. During that time **Layton Friessen** served as interim executive director.

Diana Peters ended her service with EMC in the summer. Her skills and love for EMCers made her service of exceptional quality and she is missed.

Church and Church Plant Closures

Grace Community Church, an established church in Aylmer, Ont., closed. Grace has worked boldly and successfully to create a church climate that is welcoming for people who find it difficult to fit into "normal" churches. In recent years a decline in numbers and the loss of some key leaders made continuing difficult. On March 8, 2020, the Region 9 ministerial got together to bless pastor Randy and Gloria Fehr, pray with them, and help bring closure to this chapter. Other GCC leaders also shared.

After four years the **Living Faith Fellowship** church plant in Two Hills, Alta., closed. This Low German-speaking church family saw good potential in this community but lacked a long-term pastor to lead them. The volunteer leadership put in tremendous effort. Our thanks to them for their faithful service.

In Airdrie, Alta., the **Iglesia Emanuel** leadership decided to put that church plant ministry on hold. Some living in Airdrie have reconnected with the Emanuel church community.

Finally, the outreach in Dauphin, Man., initiated in 2013 by the Brandon and Portage churches, closed. Most involved in the ministry were seasonal workers and it never gained momentum. Our thanks to those in Airdrie and Dauphin.

As the EMC we need to plant churches boldly, help churches thrive, but also be willing to let go when a congregation has run their course. Individual congregations are not immortal, but the Church is and Christ will build his Church.

What's on the table going forward

How EMC works together has been a point of discussion for a number of years and changes have been made in response to what has been said. However, the COVID-19 crisis beginning early in 2020 may change the landscape beyond what any of us could have guessed. We are learning, and there is a lot yet to learn in our immediate and our more distant future.

Acting on Opportunity

Moderns think important people initiate, invent, and are proactive. But a disciple is more like a sheep. Sheep react and live lives at the beck and call of the shepherd. We don't know what the world will be like two breaths from now. Ministry is about being alert to new opportunities, noting a subtle shift in the wind, a gentle move of the Spirit in a slightly different direction. Wise people across our churches have sensed that our congregations now need spiritual renewal.

Kids and Students

Based on church reports, many find that kids programming, and student ministries are their most significant and effective efforts at outreach into the community. In some cases, kids and youth come almost exclusively from the community and unchurched families. Churches are actively engaging kids and youth in their communities.



Muslim and First Nations Initiatives

In 2019 the Board of Missions discussed and prayed about where to expand our mission base. Four options for expansion were presented to the delegates in July: a Muslim migrant population in Spain, urban church planting in Spain, placing teachers on First Nations reserves in Northern Canada, and ministry to Muslims in partnership with an EMC associate mission.

Delegates chose by a high majority ministry to First Nations and then, secondly, to a Muslim migrant population in Spain. Committees are now assisting the BOM as we explore these opportunities. Conversations are taking place with an associate mission agency about an opportunity in Spain.

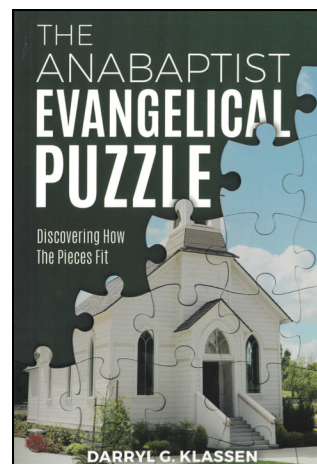
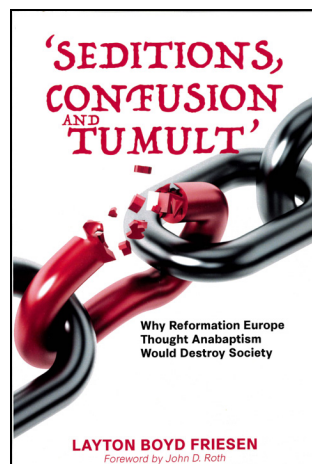
We are recruiting missionaries to work in these areas. Who is being called to serve cross-culturally? For more information about these two ministry opportunities, please ask.

New Books

When a seminary course he was to teach was cancelled, Darryl Klassen, DMin., turned his research into a book *The Anabaptist Evangelical Puzzle: Discovering How the Pieces Fit* (self-published in 2019), \$20. It has assisted conversations on Anabaptism and Evangelicalism.

A footnote in Layton Friesen's doctoral thesis alerted Terry Smith to Layton's Master of Theology thesis. The book was published in 2019 as *'Seditions, Confusing, and Tumult': Why Reformation Europe Thought Anabaptism Would Destroy Society*. It fills in more of the Anabaptist story. \$10.

Both books are available from the EMC national office and Amazon.ca.



What's on the table going forward

A church planter among Arabic-speaking people in Winnipeg, Man., was introduced to the EMC Church Planting Task Force late in 2019. His theology and way of doing church and church-planting seem to be a good fit for EMC. The Task Force is working with him to see where the Lord leads us.

Adjusting our Course

G.K. Chesterton said, “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; that is, you must be always having a revolution.” To be faithful to Jesus with the age-old obedience of Christians means constantly redoing, renewing, repenting, going back again and doing it better with the wisdom now of hindsight. To stay faithful to Jesus calls for this kind of perpetual revolution. It takes a lot of creativity and courage to stay the course.

Planting Lessons We Are Learning

The Church Planting Task Force recently sent out a survey to our church planters to assess how they experienced our ministry partnership in 2019.

We learned that a growing number were involved in or interested in **bivocational ministry**. We noted that accountability is important to them and us, which includes three formal reports each year. We learned that supporting a salaried pastor is a challenge that, in some situations, has led to congregational disunity, pastoral burnout, financial mismanagement, and perhaps even stifled growth.

For new immigrants, the idea of full-time, **salaried pastors** can be a new and offensive concept. New immigrants are often employed in minimum-wage jobs while living in a more expensive society and sending funds to support their extended family. The Church Task Force is looking at options such as bivocational ministry, pastoral coaches, tent-making partners, foster churches, and adjusting the subsidy program. This need has been identified for church planters in general. We invite your prayerful, Spirit-led wisdom.



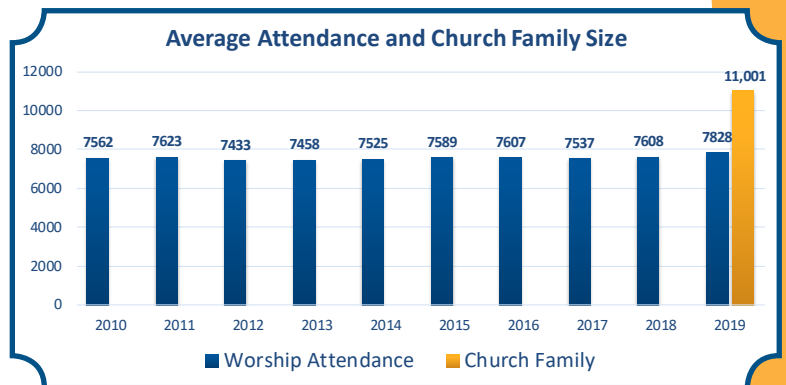
Mediation:

This past year **Janet Schmidt**, a trainer in conflict mediation, presented a two-part seminar on how to deploy mediation teams

to help congregations trapped in conflict. She emphasized leaders need to be aware and responsible for how they are coming across in conflict.

They sometimes insist they are coming across as loving when, in fact, they are not read that way. She also gave practical instruction on how to lead people in apologies. When do leaders need to apologize for mistakes made? More mediation tools will be shared in the future.

Church attendance does not mean what it did 10 years ago—people connect differently. Therefore, an average weekly attendance doesn't fairly reflect a church's actual family size. In 2019 we asked churches to provide both their family size and average service attendance. Both totals are shown in the chart. Interpreting the data is not straightforward.



What's on the table going forward

The National Youth Committee is in a visioning process brought on by reduced EMC staff time given to youth, extensive travel that prevented attendance at TRU (EMC youth leader training), and COVID-19. An apology was given to, and accepted by, the NYC for not being consulted on shifting staff positions. The NYC is evaluating and rethinking how to support EMC youth work in 2020 together with our national boards. They are revising their youth leader training strategy and have cancelled TRU this year, while encouraging leaders to attend local Canadian Youth Workers Community gatherings.

Celebrate

To celebrate our achievement is to sheepishly admit that what has been achieved before our eyes is surplus, gratuitous, more abundant, interesting and delightful than our work for it warranted. Our efforts should not have amounted to this and yet there it is! God has taken our fumbling level one attempt at painting and unfurled a masterpiece by the work of our hands. The only adequate response is festivity, gratitude and rest. God has been good to us. Praise his glorious Name!

We celebrate as the church because people turn and return to Christ, relationships are rebuilt and hope replaces despair.

Each year 10 to 12 churches welcome **new pastors**, and this can be exciting. Dan Cormie, for instance, became Braeside's pastor in June 2019, and when he accepted Braeside's call, the church he had planted decided to move also—a huge gift to the folks of Dakota Community Church, welcome!

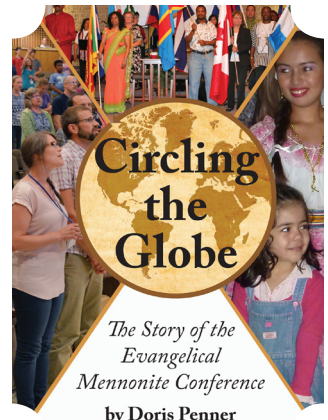


Jesus used the mustard seed to say that in Kingdom work something tiny can have a huge impact. The EMC loves our **smaller churches** who witness heroically in rural and urban communities. Aberdeen, Arborg, Birch River, Creighton, Endeavour, Hillside, Hudson Bay, Oak Bluff, Pelly, Sioux Valley, St. Thomas, and elsewhere are outposts of the Kingdom.



Pastoral couples love getting together to be encouraged and taught. We had great fun and camaraderie in November when Jacob and Arlene Friesen shared about developing a rich life of prayer in Jesus' presence.

Doris Penner's *Circling the Globe: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* traces how our church first moved for religious freedom and is now sending members around the globe in Christian service. The book was assigned by the EMC, yet her assessment and opinions come through. Available from the EMC: \$15 plus \$5.24 mailing.



Ruth Block joined the EMC staff in fall of 2019. She is skilled, energetic, and fits very well into the EMC team. She is a pleasure to work with.

In **Southeast Alberta** several church plants in Low German communities have developed into flourishing churches of committed followers with young families, local leaders, and a vision to serve locally and beyond. These churches, with the rest of Region 2, hosted the 2019 convention. They worked hard and well and were gracious hosts. Thank you!

EMC Missionaries sent out in 2019



ALEX REIMER

Alex Reimer began serving in Germany as an EMC Associate Missionary under Greater Europe Mission. He serves as a filmmaker and is member of Prairie Grove Fellowship Chapel.

Benny and Ester Fehr

and their four children, from Mount Salem, were sent to serve in Bolivia among Low German-speaking Mennonites. They are supported well from MSCC and other EMC churches in southern Ontario. They direct the Low German radio ministry in San Jose, seeking to reach individuals and families with the hope and grace found in Jesus Christ.



BENNY AND ESTER FEHR



Abundant Springs, held in May with the theme of “Everywhere,” saw 541 people attend from 24 EMC churches. Hundreds of students came forward as speaker Kent Martens asked them to commit to live their faith within specific relationships.



153 COTE CHURCH

Church buildings are just buildings, yet we need them and praise God for them. The 153 Cote Church, in Saskatchewan, has a building provided by the local band. It is being renovated.

EMC Ministers and church planters (with spouses) examined and approved in 2019

Ron and Gudrun Babel (Steinbach, Man.)
 Francisco and Margenis Herrera (Brandon, Man.)
 Jae Woong Park and Eun Kim (Arborg, Man.)
 Hyoun Jin Yoon and Jinhee Yang (Pelly, Sask.)
 Yemiru Tilahun and Zway (Ethiopia)
 Matt and Tanya Plett (Landmark, Man.)
 James and Janice Crawford (Taber, Alta.)
 Scott and Debbie Dick (Ste. Agathe, Man.)
 Bill and Beth Janzen (St. Thomas, Ont.)
 Joe and Jessica Penner (Leamington, Ont.)
 Lyndol and Coralie Fast (Kleefeld, Man.)
 Ivan and Yesenia Garcia (Winnipeg, Man.)
 Ben and Maria Dyck (Picture Butte, Alta.)

Convention 2019 highlights



ANDREW KAMPEN

- Juggling, really bad jokes, and really good singing from unexpected people were highlights of the talent show.
- Diverse, challenging topics were taught and discussed at meetings and workshops to make us a better church.

• Messages with depth came from conference pastor and theologian Layton Friesen.

• Mission reports shared the fear and uncertainty that can accompany work on the front lines.

• A communion service was held with more than 550 people on Sunday morning.



• As always, great music, great meals and wonderful hosts.

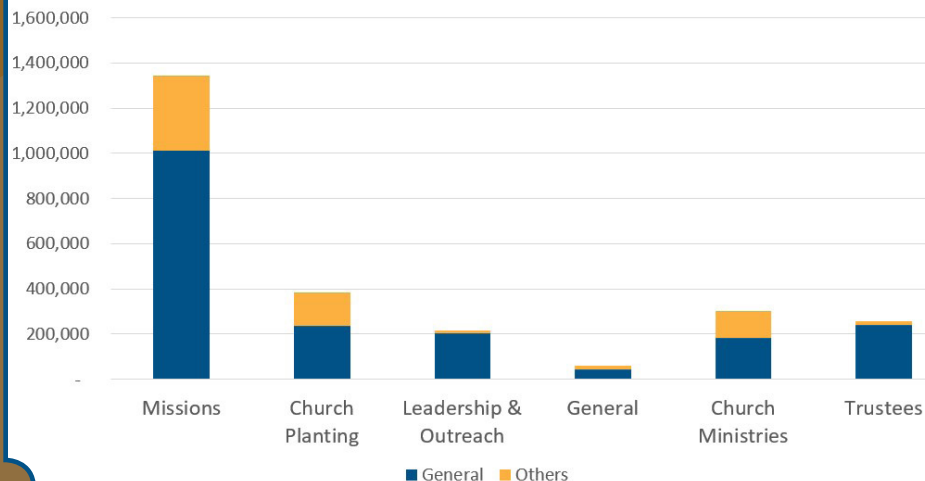
• A self-guided tour of the lovely and sometimes pungent southern Alberta—home to some of Region 2.

Thanksgiving

The writer of Hebrews reminds us to “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have” (13:5), stressing that the Lord’s presence is much more valuable than mere money. Every year, people in EMC churches prove this truth by giving generously to their local church. In turn, the churches contribute to the shared ministries of EMC. Thank you for this generosity, which contributes to the advancement of Christ’s Kingdom.

Yet contentment is not just for the individual—it can also apply to organizations. We, too, as EMC need to be content with the funds that our EMC churches contribute. The past few years we have witnessed a decline in giving to EMC ministries, and our boards and staff are making the necessary adjustments. In 2019, EMC had a \$108,000 deficit in

2019 General and All Funds Disbursements
\$2,567,213

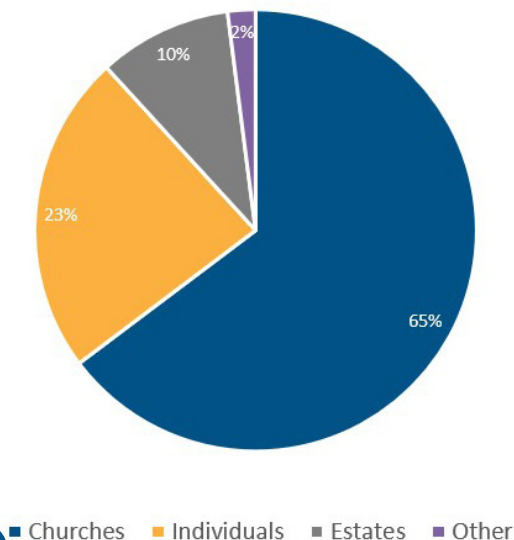


the General Fund. The financial shake-up in the spring of 2020 will likely present even more significant challenges and course corrections.

The chart above shows the expenses in 2019. The dark blue shows the General Fund’s expenses, while the light colour shows all other funds’ expenses.

The pie chart to the left shows where the General Fund revenue comes from to support these ministries: directly from EMC churches (65%), individuals (23%), estate funds (10%), and other income (2%).

2019 General Fund Revenue
Total Revenue: \$1,808,521



Several EMC churches were able to receive assistance in paying down their mortgages through the Church Building Grant Fund. In total, eight churches received over \$33,000 from this fund.

Due to the provincial order to close businesses in April 2020, we were delayed in our ability to conduct the audit of finances. However, we anticipate that the audited financial statements will be ready for approval by the date of Conference Council. The audit is being conducted by OnBusiness and the statements will be available upon request. Delegates will find a more complete financial report on the Conference Council website.

– Board of Trustees