



**June 23, 2020**

## **Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary Report**

Things seem to be constantly changing in our world and yet some things stay the same. While the Seminary has engaged in a variety of new initiatives and learned to work remotely in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, it remains committed to teaching the good news of Jesus. There is, indeed, no other foundation besides the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ (I Cor.3:11).

Preparing leaders for the church and the world is at the center of our educational mission. During the past two years we have launched a revised Master of Divinity program. The MDiv is the most comprehensive pastoral leadership degree we offer and the revision sought to strengthen students' connection to local church leaders and the practical nature of church leadership. It also significantly reduced the units required in an effort to make the program more accessible and affordable.

Making a seminary education accessible and affordable was a key factor in developing our online, cohort-model program, the Master of Arts in Ministry, Leadership and Culture. The program brings students together for weekly synchronous class sessions and face-to-face each year for a brief residency experience. Students are required to be embedded in ministry which offers a place to practice what they are learning and to reflect on their experiences. Each works with a ministry coach, as well. We have set aside considerable financial aid money for our Mennonite Brethren students and a good group of them formed our fall 2019 cohort. We are also pleased that missiologist Alan Hirsch and author Danielle Strickland will be resourcing the upcoming cohort.

During this last biennium, the Seminary, through its Center for Anabaptist Studies, has partnered with USMB leadership and other church agencies to provide webinars on relevant topics. From theological issues to practical issues, the webinars provide a forum for MB leaders to gather and exchange ideas. In recent months, the webinars have explored how MB congregations are responding to the COVID-19 crisis and the work being done to address racial violence. Last year, Multiply consultant Bill Hogg offered a series on spiritual health for leaders and many signed up for a conversation on what it means to be evangelical and anabaptist. These kinds of initiatives are meant to help resource church leaders across our family of churches and so we have also begun to offer Spanish-language webinars.

The COVID-19 crisis spurred other initiatives, as well. Senior students in their final counseling practicum had their placement sites closed when the shelter-in-place policies were put into effect. Our counseling faculty worked to shift them to telehealth options and extended free services to both the Fresno Pacific University community and to local first responders during the first wave of the crisis. That effort to serve both our students and the community around us exemplifies the ministry orientation of our Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy program.

Our Center for Community Transformation has been actively supporting local non-profit ministries during this season and, like all seminary classes, moved its Spanish-language certificate program online.

These adaptations have pushed us to think creatively about how to shape ministry leaders for the future. Faculty members continue to be actively engaged in ministry through teaching (in English and occasionally Spanish), leading bible studies, preaching, counseling and writing. This extension of our work helps us practice the things we teach and that, in turn, helps shape and enrich our classrooms.

As Dean of the Seminary, I am grateful for the ongoing prayer and financial support we receive. It is significant and I am humbled by it. During this past season, the MOU with the US Board of Faith and Life has also been reviewed and renewed. Together, we are committed to ongoing conversation and partnership in the work we are called to as Mennonite Brethren.

And finally, one last “humble brag.” During the past season we hosted a comprehensive evaluation visit for reaccreditation by the Association of Theological Schools. We were delighted to receive a full ten-year reaccreditation period. That, too, was welcome affirmation of the work we do.

As we look to the future in these turbulent days, we can be certain of one thing. The God who has called us into new life will not abandon us or the church built on the cornerstone that is Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior. May that hope encourage us all.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Valerie Rempel".

Valerie Rempel, Ph.D.  
Vice President and Dean of the Seminary