

National Director Report

Over the past four years it has been my privilege to serve as the National Director for USMB. Over that span of time there have been many changes and unexpected challenges as well as many, many things to celebrate as God wonderfully works among us.

Over the past two years, we've gained several new member churches and lost eight due to closures. We now stand at 216 member churches, spanning across the U.S. Expansion in what has long been known as the North Carolina District resulted in re-naming that district as the Eastern District Conference.

I want to gratefully commend our USMB staff of Connie Faber (*Christian Leader* Editor), Janae Rempel (*Christian Leader* Associate Editor), Donna Sullivan (Head of Administration), Lori Taylor (Administrative Assistant and Webmaster), and J.L. Martin (Social Media Director, LEAD Pods), for all of their great work. Matt Ehresman coordinates the recordings and leads the interviews for our new LEAD Pods. These are hard-working, creative people and they make my job much easier. Please let them know how much you appreciate their effective efforts in serving our USMB conference. By the way, Donna Sullivan has now served USMB for 30 years. Thank you, Donna!

The USMB National Leadership Board continues to give solid leadership and oversight. This board has representatives from each of our five districts. Also serving on this board, as non-voting members, are five district ministers, USMB Youth chair, PDC Hispanic Council chair, president/CEO of MB Foundation and the U.S. representative of the Multiply Global Lead Team. Please continue to pray for our USMB Leadership Board as they serve our conference. I want to offer a special note of gratitude to David Hardt, our current board chair. David has served faithfully for 11 years and will now be leaving the board due to term limits. Thanks, David, for your great service to us!

USMB continues to provide a wealth of resourcing for our local MB churches and pastors. Many of these deliverables occur through the LEAD initiatives that include LEAD Coaching, LEAD Cohorts, LEAD One events, LEAD Consults and the brand-new LEAD Pods. These Leadership Education and Development programs offer tangible means for helping our MB leaders maximize their full ministry potential. We've partnered with several MB agencies to assist us in providing these valuable services and even more of these LEAD resourcing opportunities are being developed. We've seen many ministry leaders at LEAD One events over the past two years and dozens who have participated in LEAD Cohorts. Some leaders have been involved in a life-on-life coaching relationship through LEAD Coaching (we'd like to see more). We now offer podcasts through LEAD Pods—from MB leaders to MB leaders or "*the best of us to the rest of us.*"

In addition to LEAD, USMB provides 501c3 stability for our member churches, regular news and communication through the award-winning *Christian Leader*, online news updates through *C-Link and Snapshot*, and readily useable ministry ideas via the E-Idea of the Month. We also offer a comprehensive USMB website (www.usmb.org) and the USMB Youth website (usmbyouth.com). You'll find regular posts on the USMB FaceBook page as well as Twitter and Instagram. Make sure you're signed up to receive these valuable resources for up-to-date communications. USMB partners with the Center for Anabaptist Studies for the production of timely webinars for MB leaders about various topics. As you can see, USMB is heavily involved in providing a wide array of valuable resources and connection platforms for our MB family.

Additionally, USMB finances the national Board of Faith and Life, USMB Youth, the Historical Commission, Can-Am, ICOMB (the International Community of Mennonite Brethren), church planting assessments and training, church planter events, internships and other missions and ministry. USMB contributes to the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and sponsors an MCC and MDS board representatives.

The National Strategy Team (NST), created following the 2016 USMB convention, catalyzes new and creative ideas for USMB ministries. This team also utilizes the expertise of various people from our constituency to shed fresh light on important issues related to our local MB churches. Collaboration

among MB organizations is currently at a much higher level as we work together for mission locally, national and globally.

I'm so grateful for the many leaders with whom I have the opportunity to work. Our six district ministers (the CDC has two) are men who love Jesus and His church. They work tirelessly for the benefit of our MB family. As well, Jon Wiebe and MB Foundation are integral partners in ministry, supplying much more than just financial support, supplying our conference with substantive training about generosity. Our college and seminary presidents, Dr. Joe Jones (FPU) and Dr. Jules Glanzer (Tabor) and many others serve our MB family in ways that many people don't even realize.

The team of Multiply has experienced a tough past two years and now needs our support and prayers as they stabilize and continue to develop new churches throughout the world. I recently served along with seven others on the Multiply Task Force Review Team. A report from that team was recently delivered to the Multiply board of directors with considerable recommendations for moving forward.

USMB REALITIES

Support from our local MB churches has been mainly steady over the past four years but has recently seen a dip, including a 6% reduction in 2019. I humbly ask each church to prayerfully consider their USMB financial support. Currently, we have about 40% of our member churches supporting USMB. It would be great to see that percentage increase. I pray that we might continue to be a conference that is healthy, strong and in a financial position to offer even more as we serve our Savior together.

I continue to believe that some of the best days of MBs in America are ahead of us as we focus on our three core commitments of church multiplication/evangelism, intentional disciple-making and leadership development. I'm convinced that through God's power we *will* have increasing impact: together. We must be seeking the LORD, asking what he would have us do in order to have more of an effect in our communities. I and many others are regularly and fervently praying that we'll witness an amazing movement of God in America. If that happens, my prayer is that we as MBs will be right in the middle of it!

To that end, a new strategic plan for MB church planting in the U.S. has been under development over the past year and much of that new strategy will be communicated in the weeks and months to come. Suffice it to say that a huge piece of this new plan will include local MB churches being at the work of calling out planters and assisting by directly resourcing new church plants. In addition, district church planting boards will continue to hold a vital oversight role. Adding to this, a new 'Network' of invested churches are diligently planning to supply many facets of crucial church planting project management services in order for our MB family to effectively start new, vibrant, life-giving, reproducing MB churches.

Our nation is currently undergoing both a pandemic and pandemonium. Racial tension is at a peak. I appreciate the words from our newest USBFL pamphlet, *Race Relations: The Difference That Difference Makes*, "Differences of race, class, gender and culture are both acknowledged and embraced in the Gospel for the purpose of the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-21). God calls us to be reconciled in Christ, which includes His desire for us to be reconciled to one another, thus making the Gospel attractive to unbelievers (Eph., 4:1-6; 4:31-32; John 13:34-35). Loved together as one diverse, equal and united people, our differences can be both displayed and celebrated in the church of Jesus Christ. We are one royal priesthood, one holy nation—Christ's body with many members made up of every kindred, tribe, people and nation (1 Pet. 2:8-9)." My prayer is that we will listen, learn and truly live this out among our MB churches.

I'm so very thankful for the wonderful wife God gave to me—Janna. We've been married for 45 years now. She's always supportive and spends many days and nights alone as I'm on the road. She's a humble servant to our family that includes three grown children and their spouses and 13 grandchildren.

I'm grateful that we belong to Jesus and that Jesus is central in all we do. The U.S. Conference of MB Churches and all that entails—it *all* belongs to Him.

-- Don Morris