

Live: Annual Report 2021

We envision... influencing our culture as we dare to live our lives with Jesus Christ as Lord.

MODERATOR'S MESSAGE

The loss of human interaction. An increase in health risks. The loss of loved ones. Government restrictions that, at times, seem like over-reach and are often inconsistent. In the midst of dealing with these losses, I pray that we will not be distracted by the nostalgia of looking back at how preferable church and life patterns of the past were, or by the endless visioning and strategizing for the future of where we should be. There is a need for us to live in the moment, paying attention to the realities of this time and place, bringing the person and character of Jesus into all our present realities.

Many of us are suffering fatigue from the changes to church life and human interaction. We are surprised by the secularization of our culture and the marginalization of the church. Some clamour to defend our spiritual right to worship rather than hold in tension the calls to care for one another, comply with government authority and the meeting together for corporate worship. Let the words of Paul to the Galatians encourage us, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:9–10).

The "harvest" or benefit of doing the right thing day after day is often only realized a generation from now. May God help us to be faithful and not give up.

—Barry Plett, Moderator



Pastor Barry Plett
EMC Moderator



NOMINATIONS

Moderator (1)

Vacancy

Vice Moderator (1)

Darren Plett, *Pleasant Valley*

Board of Church Ministries (3)

Sarah Barkman, *Blumenort**
Gary Giesbrecht, *Coaldale*
Dwight Plett, *Menville*

Board of Leadership and Outreach (3)

Andy Woodworth, *Heartland**
Andrea Dyck, *Steinbach EMC*
Jared Schroeder, *Westpointe*

Board of Missions (4)

Carl Loewen, *Steinbach EMC**
Peter Rempel, *LCCFC**
Cheryl Giesbrecht, *Heartland*
Anthony Reimer, *Blumenort*

Board of Trustees (2)

Andrew Kampen, *Blumenort**
Cheryl Friesen, *Rosenort FC*
Abe Loewen, *Morweena EMC*

Nominating Committee (6)

Anna Plett, *Steinbach EMC**
Leonard Plett, *Treesbank**
Josh Muehling, *Fort Garry**
Vacancy
Vacancy
Vacancy

* DENOTES AN INCUMBENT MEMBER

Life Brought Loss

CHURCHES AND EMCERS

How are you doing? This comes right after “hello” in most of our conversations. To know how deep to go in answering is a social skill. But how is the EMC doing after this past year? The first response is that Jesus has died for our sins, we have been freed from the devil, and the Spirit lives in our hearts to bring us to our home in heaven. So we are doing just fine, thank you.

But really, how are we doing, you know with the pandemic and all? This has been a year of challenge, frustration, learning, surprising joy, and more challenge. Most of our churches have adapted well to the restrictions that we have lived under. Church ministries got creative, technology got upgraded and expectations were adjusted. This has been a year of grief in some of our churches: a number of our churches said goodbye to a significant group of members who died of COVID-19. This has been a year of conflict: some churches struggle long and hard with the politics of how to respond to government regulations. This has been a year of fatigue: pastors talk of an exhaustion they cannot quite put their finger on. It has been a year of surprising ministry: in all this turmoil, the Word has been proclaimed, the poor have been cared for and the good news of Jesus has been announced by EMCers in every part of the globe in spite of all that has happened—or maybe because of all that has happened.

MISSIONS

How do we adequately sum up 2020, other than “unknown?” This seemed to be our theme word for 2020 here in Spain. Will the boys get to go back to school to be with friends and teachers? Will they return to their futbol team? Will I, Rich, get to continue playing futbol and building on relationships that have formed over the past two years, will our church get to have a Sunday service again? How can we plan for any new ministries when we are not allowed to meet with anyone? Will we get to go on our planned home assignment this summer? All of these were left hanging in the balance.

One giant loss here in Spain was during Easter week. Normally the streets are alive with people waiting to take in the Easter processions. With this cancelled, we as a family took the opportunity to paint a picture, with a theme word, on a different window each day of the week depicting the story of Easter and attributes of God. This helped us as a family develop a much stronger appreciation for Easter and its importance to our faith. We trust this helped to plant seeds in those who saw the paintings.

While this time was difficult for various reasons, we were able to come out the other side stronger together as a family, with rejuvenated relationships and an excitement for what 2021 will bring.

—Rich and Joyelle Sayer,
EMC missionaries with ACTION in Spain



CONFERENCE



Churches that continued online services after reopening averaged **30% increase** in attendance than pre-COVID.

Churches that did not hold online services after reopening averaged **15% decrease** in attendance than pre-COVID.



Overall church attendance (online and in-person) **maintained levels** similar to 2019

70% of EMC churches began online services **for the first time** in 2020



Sundays with in-person services

2019	52
2020	37

NOTE: ATTENDANCE NUMBERS COUNT ONE ONLINE VIEW AS TWO PEOPLE

But Connections Continued

Matthew 19:26: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

MISSIONS

In October 2020 I arrived in Taber, Alta., for my very first home assignment. Just then more restrictions came into effect which totally threw off my advance scheduling.

Church visits were not what I had expected. Masks, distancing, no handshakes or hugs made it hard to feel that I was connecting. A couple of visits were cancelled, but the churches I did visit were such a blessing. People were very receptive and interested in what was happening in Bolivia. I joined one church service via Zoom, shared at both morning services in several churches and the entire Sunday School hour in another. We had a great time. My home church planned an evening event and I could take as much time as I wanted to share and answer questions.

I spent a lot of time trying to connect with people one-on-one. Even this was hard, but we improvised by meeting at a park or going for a walk. My time in Canada was not what I had planned, but it was a blessed time of meeting friends, old and new, and sharing about the wonderful work of the Lord in Bolivia.

– Nancy Friesen,
EMC Missionary in Bolivia

CHURCHES AND EMCERS

I didn't want to be a day camp, but that was the only box they gave me so I made a new box.

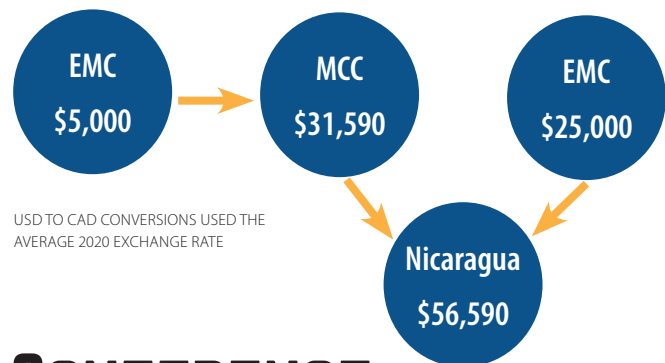
This is the story of how God grew a northern Alberta youth group from ten students on Zoom to over 100 attendees in less than a year. In the eyes of the government, day camp was the category closest to youth groups, and day camp restrictions limited us to 50 people including volunteers. Simultaneously the government was allowing faith gatherings to meet with 30 percent of their capacity—for our church that was 250. The hunger I saw in the eyes of the young people was not for more games; it was for the things of God, and I wanted to give life to that. I decided to reposition our youth program, not as a "day camp," but as a "youth church." I mirrored what we did to what was accepted for faith-based gatherings. It allowed for two things: 1. A more intentional environment. 2. Five times the capacity. Once it caught on in our community that there was a safe place for students to worship together, we went from ten people on Zoom in April 2020 to 120 youth between September 2020 and April 2021. Praise God for making a way!

– Garth Vion, Youth Pastor,
Westpointe Community Church

GLOBAL PANDEMIC RELIEF



NICARAGUA HURRICANE RELIEF



USD TO CAD CONVERSIONS USED THE AVERAGE 2020 EXCHANGE RATE

CONFERENCE

Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Political instability and conflict both contribute and the country is vulnerable to hurricanes, volcanos and earthquakes.

As in many countries, COVID highly affected the country in 2020 as schools and sports facilities remained open, and as government largely ignored the pandemic in the first few months.

The Mennonite World Conference's Global Church Sharing Fund supported 37 COVID relief projects around the world, one of which was in Nicaragua. The EMC contributed \$40,000 to this fund.

In November 2020, while the effects of COVID were still serious, hurricane Iota and Ita both hit landfall leaving major damage. MCC and three Anabaptist Conferences in Nicaragua spearheaded a project for those most affected, to which EMC contributed a total of \$30,000.

The Nicaraguan people and the FIEMN church conference say a sincere thank you for all of your generosity in 2020 and 2021. The donations were much needed and appreciated.

– Ken Zacharias,
Director of Global Missions

And We Still Saw Growth

CONFERENCE

Of the 12 church plants and ministry outreaches EMC currently supports in Canada, only three are primarily in English, and even those are a mixture of cultures and ethnicities.

Our newest work is Kingdom Life Church in Winnipeg, Man. In July 2020 we hired Ibrahim and Phebe as the church planting pastors of this Arabic-speaking church, with a focus on recent Syrian and Kurdish refugees. The Lord has opened up many doors for this family to assist immigrants in practical ways, like finding a doctor, or give spiritual nourishment in an unsettling time when they have left behind family and friends. With the move to online ministry this past year, the “attendees” at their services have included people from around the Arabic-speaking world who are hungry for fellowship and new life in Christ.

The end of 2020 also saw the beginning of a new relationship as the Spanish-speaking Iglesia Emanuel initiated a partnership with the English-speaking Abbeydale Christian Fellowship in Calgary, Alta. Uniting these two church bodies will take some adjustment, but there is mutual benefit and hope for spiritual and numerical growth ahead. We continue to support Antonio and Esther Pitta as part-time pastors throughout the transition.

– Gerald Reimer,
Director of Canadian Church Planting

MISSIONS

Are missionaries super-Christians who never grieve when a family member back home dies? Are their marriages always happy and healthy? Are they ever disappointed with God? Do they experience friction with other strong-minded workers? How do they cope when plans get altered month after month? And how do they manage when their support team and pastor live thousands of miles away?

Providing pastoral care for missionaries and living among them in Central Asia gives us a unique opportunity to support these resilient workers. They live in challenging situations and sometimes need assistance when the challenges pile up. These workers are precious in God’s eyes and they are becoming precious to us as well as we get to know and work alongside them in their joys and struggles.

– Brian and Tricia,
EMC missionaries in Central Asia

CHURCHES AND EMCERS

How could our ministry have grown in the last year? Sometimes pruning is needed to grow a bigger, stronger, more fruitful tree. Many churches have discovered that people from around the globe were signing in to their worship services. Long-forgotten members suddenly showed up in church again. Family members joined each other’s services. People from the community found the online format allowed them to join from a safe place. Another delight in some churches was the discovery that genuine sharing, fellowship and caring could happen between members on a Zoom call! A Zoom meeting can be an excellent forum for a small group Bible study. Is there a down-side to all these? Of course. But let it not be said that the Holy Spirit faced COVID-related restrictions in the past year.

Newly Accepted Missionaries



Danny Plett
– Germany,
Ukraine, Belarus
and Brazil



Antonio and
Esther Pitta
– TBD



B – Central
Asia



Brian and
Tricia –
Central Asia

Rudiments Grads



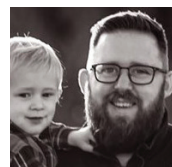
Gary Giesbrecht
– Coaldale



Dan Cormie
– Braeside



Abe Penner –
Gospel Light



Jesse Penner
– Pleasant
Valley



Scott Dick
– Rosenort

Learning New Things

CONFERENCE


The EMC Ministerial recently adopted an extended period of study, reflection and mentoring for ministers being credentialed. Each year a cohort of ministers chosen by our churches go through seven months of study together. This past year we had 14 people in this class. Some of these were missionaries who want a deeper connection to our EMC heritage and theology, and who recognize that being ordained as a minister will give them access to ministry they did not have before. Our examination of these ministers happened over two weekends in April and May 2021. We are grateful for a year of stimulating study, conversation and determination on the part of these emerging ministers.

CHURCHES AND EMCERS


The EMC Ministerial enjoys sharpening each other in theology. We have long had a dilemma about whether the Scriptures teach that women can be called to pastoral ministry. We have spent the last year looking into the Bible and are now thinking about how churches that take different perspectives can work together in missions, church planting and pastoral support. We hope to make a decision soon, though the question will not go away in the near future. In this wrestling we are part of a wider evangelical debate.


This past year we also had a wonderful theology conference called Desire: Pastoring, Same-Sex Attraction and the Church. We wanted to enter more deeply into the biblical teaching on sexuality in a way that would allow us to pastor from a foundation of truth and a posture of love. We were deeply impressed by the maturity, wisdom and honesty with which our ministers dialogued on these questions. We heard powerful stories of agony, pilgrimage and redemption that caused each of us to search our own lives, asking the Spirit to bring such transformation to us as well.


ONLINE COMMUNICATION TIPS


 **Know what's around you:** Mute before you holler at your dog and check what is in your background.

 **It is hard to talk to a camera:** How do TV people do it?

 **Keep 'em short and keep 'em moving:** Three hours online is twice as long as three in person.

 **Silence is awkward:** We don't have a great solution

 **Relationship is still important:** In one-on-one calls, take some time to chat

 **Online meetings make for short commutes:** And lets people attend from around the world.

MISSIONS


Learning has taken on an incredible breadth this year.

Our three-month training began January 2020 and ended eight months later. The Latin American interns were unable to travel home and portions of their training had to be cancelled, but we saw God working in these unprecedented circumstances. They cultivated relationships with local people when restrictions allowed, and shared the story of Scripture.


As online communication has become more normal, willingness to engage virtually has increased. From the Balkans we have been working with a new team from three different Latin American countries. We participated in a one-year celebration with our team in North Macedonia along with more than 70 churches and individuals. C has been able to teach an online English language course based on Bible studies to 50-plus missionaries, unbelievers and churchgoers from around the world.

Thank you for your prayers—we are grateful for God's faithfulness.

– C&G, EMC Associate Missionaries in the Balkans

 **Faces are important:** Keep your video on and show expression, it's so much more encouraging for the speaker.

 **In person is still better:** But online has its advantages, too.

 **Virtual mustaches are great:** They just are.

We Started New Things

GROWING TOGETHER

Communicating effectively about issues and events in real time needs to be a priority in the EMC. Growing Together is an email newsletter exploring topics that are relevant, test our faith and affect how we engage the culture around us. Sign up for the newsletter at www.emconference.ca/growingtogether.



PRAYER UPDATE EMAIL

The past year plans were constantly adjusted and adapted, and *The Messenger* production time necessarily meant that the Prayer Calendars were often very generic or inaccurate by the time they were distributed. Because of this the calendar is no longer included in *The Messenger*, but is emailed in the EMC Missions Prayer Update. This monthly email includes the Prayer Calendar, Prayer Corps requests for Bolivia, Mexico, Nicaragua and Paraguay, and information on any upcoming prayer-related events or news. Printed calendars are still available through your EMC church office. Learn more or sign up for the email at www.emconference.ca/pray.

WEBSITE

Early in 2020 we launched a new EMC website! The redesign allows the site to be more easily navigated and simplifies the process of giving online and purchasing through our online store. New content was, and continues to be, added. Check it out at www.emconference.ca.

EMC TODAY

EMC Today is an email for churches, pastors, delegates and others who are interested in the happenings of the wider EMC. This email, sent every other week or so, highlights upcoming events, new publication releases, updates to ongoing discussions and more.

Contact your church office to sign up.



YOUTH LEADERS ZOOM

Strength in numbers. In a year of reduced contact, and postponed or cancelled events, the National Youth Committee has offered online Zoom gatherings with EMC youth leaders across the country, usually based on regions or time zones. For those who have needed a greater sense of community, these gatherings have provided opportunities for sharing personal and ministry realities, fellowship, and praying for one another. Keep your eyes open for ongoing gatherings in your area.

VIDEOS PRODUCED



Board Reports

Discussions



Sermons

Missionary Interviews



And Have More to Come

CHURCH PLANTING

Did you know that Meklit, the daughter of our Ethiopian Church Planting Coach Dr. Yemiru Tilahun and his wife Zway, just graduated from McPherson College in Kansas with a pre-medicine/biology bachelor's degree with honours? The Church Planting Task Force wants to tell more stories like this of our church planters' lives and their ministry endeavours. We look forward to producing short video stories in the coming months!



PRAYER MEETINGS

The Board of Missions has recently launched Missions Prayer Meetings! The first one, held at the beginning of March 2021, included three EMC missionaries involved in Bible translation. Each one shared a story and some prayer requests, and then was prayed for by breakout groups. We plan to continue these online meetings, and are planning for the next one on June 24, focusing on church planting.

MUSLIM INITIATIVE

Since Conference Council summer 2019 the Board of Missions has been exploring the start of a new EMC missions field among Muslims. They want to conduct an on-site visit to meet with OM Spain leadership to discuss a partnership relationship to reach Moroccans coming across the Gibraltar Strait into the city of Algeciras, Spain. This visit was postponed from Spring 2020 and they hope it can take place this fall.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

The Board of Leadership and Outreach will be leading the EMC through a dedicated year of spiritual renewal beginning with Advent this coming November. For those congregations who wish to participate, this will be a year in which we place a special emphasis on prayer, fasting, a fresh resolve to follow Christ in everyday life and congregational vitality. As we come out of the pandemic this will be an opportunity to ask, "Are we still tracking with Christ? Where to? What do we need to do now?"



WEBSITE LANGUAGES

With the help of several multilingual pastors, we have begun translating some of the resources found on our English website to Spanish, Amharic, Mandarin and Arabic. We believe this will be of value to our growing number of multicultural churches in the EMC. Links on the homepage will take people to this new content, which we plan to expand in coming years.

ABUNDANT SPRINGS

PRE-LAUNCH

Our National Youth Committee excitedly prepared a bundle of ideas, swag and party food money, and sent it out to all our EMC youth groups this May! With Abundant Springs being postponed until 2022, we wanted to connect with and encourage all our groups in the meantime. We also let them in on the theme of next year's retreat, which reminds us that no matter what happens, God's got us. We are "Held."



God's Supply

God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply. He is too wise a God to frustrate His purposes for lack of funds, and He can just as easily supply them ahead of time as afterwards, and He much prefers doing so." – Hudson Taylor

FINANCIAL REPORT

As stewards of God's resources here on earth, we continually rely on him to provide and sustain us as we continue to build his kingdom, even in hard times. This is exactly what has happened in the 2020 fiscal year as overall giving has remained stable despite a global pandemic, expenses were decreased in almost all areas, and government program revenue provided an extra boost due to decreases in giving for certain months. This resulted in an excess of revenues over expenses of approximately \$315,000 for 2020 and we thank all churches and individuals who generously gave to EMC ministries to make this

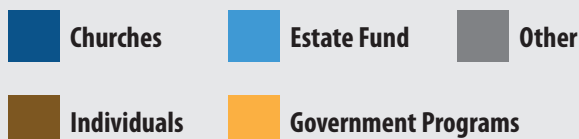
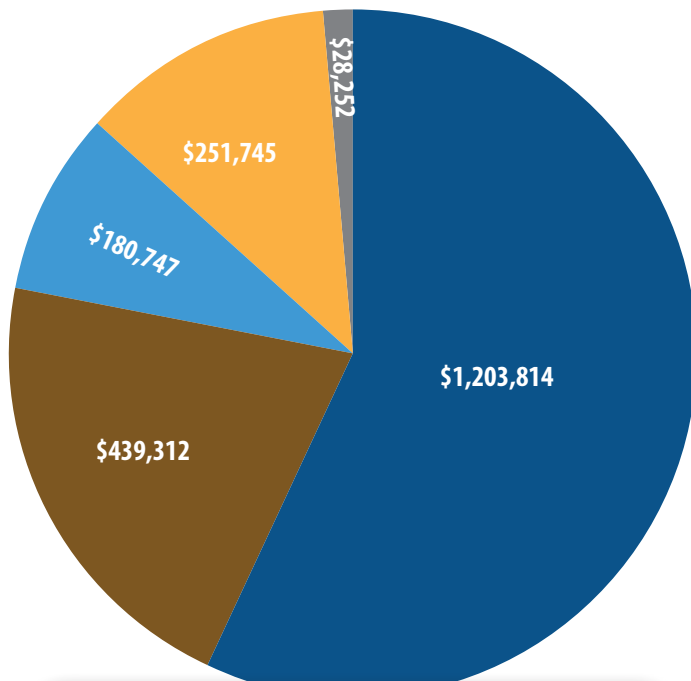
2020 Expenditures by Board*

	General Fund	Designated Funds	Total
BOM	\$869,572	\$389,075	\$1,258,647
BCM	\$250,096	\$2,948	\$253,044
BOT	\$232,771	\$4,898	\$237,669
GB	\$37,156	-\$6,548	\$30,608
BLO	\$399,477	\$57,059	\$456,536
	\$1,789,071	\$447,433	\$2,236,504

*PENDING FINAL ADJUSTMENTS

2020 General Fund Revenue

\$2,103,871



possible. The significance of this amount is not lost on the Board of Trustees as operating losses of \$150,000 have been incurred over the last two years and our operating reserves were also depleted by the end of 2019 and require replenishing.

The chart above shows all expenses. The general fund expenses are in the first column. The additional funds raised and spent by boards are in the second column.

The pie chart shows where general fund income came from to support EMC ministries including: directly from churches (57%), individuals (21%), estate funds (9%), government programs (12%) and sources such as sales and interest income (1%).

Just short of \$100,000 was dispersed in 2020 towards EMC church building or renovation projects through the EMC Church Building Grant Fund which is still accepting applications.

The revised support model continues to be phased in with missionaries raising 10% of their support in 2020, 25% in 2021, and 40% in 2022. The goals are to strengthen relationships among missionaries and churches, further develop support networks and deal with financial realities.

Our annual audit is once again being conducted by OnBusiness and the statements will be available upon request. Delegates will find a more complete financial report on the Conference Council page of the EMC website as this event draws nearer.

The Sustainable Funding Strategy Committee has finished an initial assessment and presented their results. The next phase will be translating these results into actionable items which can sustain the EMC into the future.

~Board of Trustees