



## BEGINNING IN SUBMISSION

BY MELISSA YODER

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In the fall of 2020, my husband Nikolas and I applied for a ministry position that seemed to be a calling from the Lord and also came at a time when we were both looking for new job opportunities. We waited eagerly for the responses to our applications and as we waited, I realized that this felt like such a perfect opportunity to put the CMC mission of maturing and multiplying churches into action in my own life. When we were told that we were not even going to be interviewed for the position, I found myself disappointed that we would not have the opportunity to join CMC in their mission of maturing and multiplying. Obviously, one specific job is not the only way to engage in this mission, but I had been relying on this opportunity, hoping to automatically become a “multiplier.” After facing the disappointment of not getting a job offer, I realized that it was time to re-evaluate how I saw my part in CMC’s mission. If I cannot rely on a “ministry position” to help me mature and multiply, where do I start?

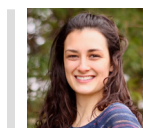
In reading Charles Swindoll’s *Jesus: The Greatest Life of All*, I have been reminded again that anything we wish to do for Christ begins with abiding in him. Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus spoke again and again on themes of submission such as abiding in him, taking his easy yoke, bearing his light burden, etc. Swindoll brings a fresh perspective to the familiar parable of the vine and the branches as he explains the meaning behind the metaphors. As the parable goes, we are the branches that are abiding in Christ, the vine. If we are truly abiding in him, it will be apparent to everyone, as we will bear the same type of fruit that he does. However, if we are not fully abiding in him, we will not bear any fruit and will be an odd-branch-out on the vine. It is here in the parable where Jesus states, “Any branch that does not bear fruit, he will take away” (John 15:2). At first glance, it may appear this means the unfruitful branch is cast off and taken away from the vine, but Swindoll says that the Greek implies something else. In accordance with the symbolism in the beginning of the parable, this line refers to the vinedresser lifting the

fallen branch to train it on a trellis. Instead of being thrown entirely away, the unfruitful branch is brought nearer to the vine and given support so that it may have another chance to bear fruit (Swindoll, 147-148).

**It is when we are submitting to and resting in Christ that we become like him and can work in his Kingdom.**

If we apply this parable to ourselves and to the CMC mission of maturing and multiplying churches, we can begin to see that submission is the very first step to being a part of it all. I may eagerly set off to mature and multiply, but unless I am attached to Christ, the vine, my branches will not bear the fruit of his Kingdom. It may appear that I am bearing fruit; it may appear that in my eagerness to become a “multiplier” I have done all the right things. But unless I am abiding in Christ, all my maturing and multiplying will only be chasing after the wind. It is when we are submitting to and resting in Christ that we become like him and can work in his Kingdom. It is in our abiding in him that we find our branches bursting with his fruit, not our own.

As we begin this new year with grand hopes of multiplying and maturing Christ’s church, let us remember that this begins in submission. May we abide in the Vine so that he may multiply and mature the church through us.



*Melissa currently lives in Columbus, Ohio and works as a surgical coordinator while supporting her husband Nikolas through nursing school. They currently serve at Shiloh Mennonite Church.*

JOIN US THIS SUNDAY FOR OUR

LIVE STREAM



## Looking Back on 2020

BY BRIAN HERSHBERGER

Some things are memorable for the sheer joy they induce – a baptism, a wedding, the birth of a child. Some things are memorable for the abject pain they unleash – a broken bone, a broken promise, the loss of a loved one. Some things are memorable for the grand interruption to normalcy they bestow – a huge storm, an unexpected crisis, **a global pandemic**. Just as a winter cannot pass here in Ohio without someone referring to the blizzard of '78, it is hard to imagine a time when people will no longer be talking about the pandemic of 2020.

The past year unleashed a plethora of challenges upon the churches of CMC. Should we stop meeting in-person? Should we start meeting in-person again? Should we require masks? Who would have thought at the outset of 2020 that these questions and others like them would even be pertinent to the church, much less create so much consternation and division. Add to that the racial and political tensions that seeped into the church from our broader culture, and as one pastor put it, "This has been the most challenging season in all my years of ministry."

In true fashion, God has used the challenges of 2020 for his good in numerous observable ways in CMC:

- Churches which had previously not had an online presence found creative ways to have meetings, hold services, and share the gospel online.
- Avenues for many CMC churches to be the hands and feet of Jesus by meeting practical needs in their communities opened up in new and significant ways.
- Discipleship deficiencies and opportunities in our churches became glaringly obvious as the pressures of 2020 revealed spiritual immaturity that was previously hidden.
- Interruptions to the normal way of doing things taught our congregations that church has to be about more than just the Sunday morning "show." Consumer Christianity took a hit.

As was the case for each of our churches, CMC as a whole experienced its own set of disappointing cancellations. For the first time since World War II, CMC's annual summer conference was cancelled. In December, the difficult decisions to cancel the 2021 Pastors Conference and BOOST Retreat were made.

In spite of these cancellations, some really good things happened! In February, a Mature & Multiply Summit was held at the Rosedale International Center. The summit brought

together leadership teams from nine CMC congregations for a time of vision casting, story sharing, and goal setting around three areas of focus: church recalibration, church planting, and ministry to the Amish. What a gift for CMC, RI, and RBC to have the privilege of partnering with these congregations to push out the vision of maturing and multiplying in their communities.

In October, leadership teams from five congregations and a church planter in upstate New York came together for another Mature & Multiply Summit. The gathering resulted in a unified desire to see each other's churches thrive and the kingdom of God expand. "A need in any of our churches is a need in all of our churches," was a statement made by one of the pastors and heartily embraced by the others. A 5-year vision emerged from the summit to see "Eight thriving, unified churches in New York's North Country that are transforming their communities."

Another highlight of the year was the launch of RBC's Training in Ministry program. It has been a dream of Conference Pastor Steve Swartz to see an opportunity for men and women across CMC to be trained in leadership and ministry without having to leave their home communities, and Steve was able to be a part of the team from RBC, CMC, and LMC that helped launch this online program.

CMC's church planting initiative also gained momentum. In addition to the aforementioned summits, a team of leaders has been meeting monthly to strategize getting the church planting movement off the ground. Last summer they began meeting weekly via Zoom for one hour of prayer. The combination of four prayer gatherings and one strategy gathering each month is producing forward movement as a plan for assessing, coaching, and supporting church planters is taking shape.

As I reflect on 2020, my mind goes to the words of Jesus who said, "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18 KJV).



*Brian, executive director of CMC, is married to Sharla and lives in Marysville, Ohio. Brian and Sharla have four adult children of whom three are married.*



# A Step, A Word, A Prayer—All One at a Time

BY PHYLLIS MILLER SWARTZ



Five mornings a week, I do what I hate. But because of the treadmill, I've walked 524 miles this year—enough miles to walk from the place I live to the place I was born and back again. Since I retired, I've been writing. I'm not fast. I pull words from my brain one by one. But because I've written nearly every day since I retired, I have written over 200,000 words, including two books, some curriculum, and 200 blog posts. None of this is phenomenal. It doesn't set any records. It's not even inspiring. It's just a lot of plodding along. But these are two examples of how the sometimes underrated quality of consistency pays off.

But consistency also works the other way. I wish I were natured more like my husband Steve—more attuned to what is good and honorable and pure. Instead, I consistently have an antenna up for what's wrong. If there is a chance of danger, I'm on to it. Consistently. If someone is in trouble or mad or drifting away, I don't miss this, either. If people are disloyal to me or to my family or to the church, I notice and remember.

## If I couldn't forgive instantly and generously...I could make a habit of the Lord's Prayer.

If you want to find my first line of thinking, take the opposite of Philippians 4:8. And through the years, these steadily negative thoughts have created neural pathways in my brain as physical as the treadmill.

Here's the thing about brain pathways—the more you use them, the smoother they get. It's like they change from a mud path at first, then with more use, to a graveled road, and finally to a paved superhighway. This is why Steve, who's seen the positive since he was a child in arms, can quickly find what's honorable. And why I, with a long-time prairie dog eye for a hawk in the sky, have no trouble seeing problems . . . everywhere.

So what can I do?

A few years ago, I discovered one simple and powerful strategy.

I was reading *Amish Grace*, a book about the killing of five girls at the West Nickle Mines School. This is a thoughtful book. The authors don't gloss over grief. They acknowledge

the long emotional process of forgiveness. But this example of Amish grace is also a call to a high road, one so steep I have often stumbled as I've tried to climb.

As I read, I was looking for help. I had been valiantly trying to forgive someone—and spectacularly failing. And out of all the passages in the book, I grasped onto one small idea. This, I thought, I could do.

The Lord's Prayer, an Amish bishop said after the killings, was their motivation to forgive. Many of them said this prayer eight times a day—in the morning, before and after meals, and in the evening.

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*—these words, repeated day after day, year after year, had created holy paths in their brains, paths that by constant use were made easier to follow when tragedy slammed into them.

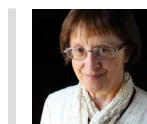
Interspersed with washing dishes and milking cows and soothing babies, their praying often must have felt dutiful. But the habitual practice had prepared them.

This, I thought, was something I could handle. If I couldn't forgive instantly and generously like Steve, I could make a habit of the Lord's Prayer.

To stay consistent, I linked this with the treadmill. And, maybe five years later, it's still the first thing I do on my two-mile walk. Secondly, I say the Beatitudes.

It's almost as if I can feel these two new pathways in my brain, paths that lead to Philippians 4:8 thinking. And they're getting easier to follow. I don't slog in the mud so much anymore and less gravel is crunching under my feet. Sometimes the road even seems almost as easy as Steve's superhighway.

Nothing spectacular, just consistent.



*Phyllis is retired from teaching and serves as an adjunct instructor for RBC, a docent at the Columbus Museum of Art, and visits churches with her husband Steve. She blogs at Apple to Apple and is writing her second book.*



# Passing Prayer to a New Generation

BY MADALYN

Rosedale International (RI) recently underwent a transition as Mim, who served as the organization's Prayer Coordinator, retired after nearly twenty years in the role.



Mim began developing the position in 2003, when RI answered a call from CMC for more in-depth teaching and guidance on prayer within the conference. "It was a piece that was added to my job description, and one that I have probably learned and grown from more than anyone else." During her time in the role, Mim led the conference and its agencies to view prayer as an integral part of life. Under her steady guidance, communities across the conference formed prayer chapters, deepened their understanding of prayer through conferences and retreats, and traveled across the world to serve RI's workers through prayer. In the office, staff members began meeting regularly to pray together. "A big highlight for me was all the interaction and times of prayer with so many different people who came in and out of the office," Mim shared. "Praying with staff, with and for workers, REACHers, board members... It was just being part of a family that cared about prayer."

Looking back over the past two decades, she is encouraged by the growth and change within the conference. "It's kind of hard to measure what all is going on, but I'm very thankful for glimpses of how the Spirit is working and leading."

Amidst the uncertainties of the past year, Mim has felt God calling her to a change. Although she anticipates that this transition may be difficult, Mim feels peace as she steps into a new stage of life, and she is "just deliriously happy" to pass on the torch to Joel. "When he was a prayer intern, we had really good times together and I saw his heart for prayer. I'm excited for his fresh vision!"

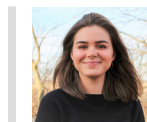
Although originally from Salisbury, Pennsylvania, Joel now lives in Columbus, Ohio, with his wife Amy. His extensive history with RI made him a natural fit for the role. He first became involved with the organization in 2014, when he joined the REACH program as part of the Spain team. "I had an incredible experience in Discipleship Training School where my eyes were really opened to who God is and the life I am called to. I loved being in a community where everyone was focused on God," After returning to the United States, Joel joined RI's staff as Prayer Coordinator Intern, serving REACHers and City Challengers and encouraging their own excitement for God. Two years later, he returned to REACH once again, this time with Amy, to lead the 2019 team to Thailand.



**I want to see the body of Christ whole and together.**

When asked about the vision he has for his coming years as Prayer Coordinator, Joel responded that he plans to focus on CMC's young people. "People from my generation are so passionate," he said, referencing his time with REACH. "I know there is potential for a movement of prayer and a movement of the Holy Spirit in my generation, and I want to see that happen." Additionally, Joel hopes to cultivate intergenerational prayer within the conference. "I think that the older generation needs the perspectives of my generation, and my generation needs the wisdom and experience of the older generation. I want to see the body of Christ be whole and together."

Rosedale International is deeply grateful to Mim for her tireless service and dedication over the last two decades. Please pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on both Mim and Joel as they transition into new stages of life and continue to grow in prayer.



*Madalyn lives in Rosedale, Ohio. She recently graduated from Grace College & Seminary and serves as Media Coordinator at Rosedale International.*