

PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2021

*Serving
Other
Churches*

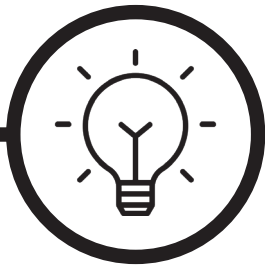
CENTRAL MENNONITE



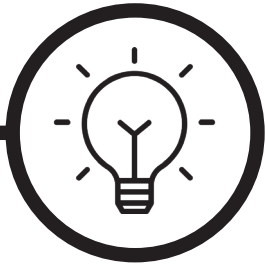
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Serving Other Churches: Central Mennonite in San Juan de la Maguana

For over a decade now, MVBC has partnered with Central Mennonite Church in San Juan de la Maguana to reach La Florida, a collection of rural villages in the surrounding mountains of San Juan. The residents are largely subsistence farmers who have been exposed to Christianity through the occasional Roman Catholic priest and, more recently, through various Christian missionaries.

Our brothers and sisters at Central Mennonite Church reach out to these farmers and their families as neighbors. They are sowing gospel seeds and praying God would grant growth. Over the past few years, many of you have been able to see the work and partner with them in this worthy endeavor.

More recently, Central Mennonite has sought to pull together other churches in their region. For two years in a row, the church has hosted a pastors conference walking through the nine marks of a healthy church. Those of us in the West are heirs of the Protestant Reformation—our theology and our lives have been affected by those great Reformation truths of Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, and the Glory of God Alone. These Reformation truths have not reached Latin America or the Caribbean to the same degree, and Central Mennonite is seeking to change that.

In short, this local church in the DR is laboring not only to see the gospel spread widely—into the hardest-to-reach villages—but deeply into congregations needing sound, biblical teaching.

We got to know Ronnie Herrera, Patria, and Abdiel from when Ronnie came to Atlanta to complete our pastoral internship program. He's now serving as a teaching elder at Central Mennonite. Below we have his update and a sweet reminder of why we, like Central Mennonite, strive to be a church that serves other churches.

MVBC: We loved having you and your family in Atlanta. How is everyone doing?

RH: We are doing very well. God has been gracious in every area of our lives. Patria is back to work at the school. Patria and I just graduated (she got her degree in clinical psychology, and I got a degree in theology). Abdiel just started classes as well. For a whole school year, we had a teenager, Claritza, living with us while she went to

school in San Juan. She is now back with her parents in La Sabana, a village in La Florida. This was probably our biggest challenge recently—raising a teenager with no previous experience. We finally decided it would be best for her to be back with her parents.

MVBC: You are an elder of Central Mennonite Church (CMC) in San Juan. What is that church like, and how would it differ from MVBC theologically? How is the church doing?

RH: Our church is mixed with adults and youth; a lot of our young adults are the only believers in their families. A majority of our members have come to faith in their adulthood. As our leadership shifted a few years ago, so has our theology and practice. One of the main differences between us and MVBC is in women's roles (we do have deaconesses).

Our church is doing great. God has been very faithful in spite of COVID. We have grown financially, and we have recently paid more attention to our church structure. God has been leading us every step of the way. Our members are growing more in discipleship and the Word of God. Right now, we are updating our policies to see what best fits our congregation and how we can be better stewards and shepherds of the congregation. Most of our policies are based upon a single-elder ruled congregation. We are trying to move away from that.

MVBC: Over the years, MVBC has partnered with CMC to bring the gospel to the villages of La Florida. How did this partnership arise?

RH: Several years ago, Tony and I led our youth group through David Platt's book, *Radical*. We ended our group discussion with a camp where we did our own version of a secret church and prayed for the unreached. We were encouraged to seek an unreached community in our town that we could adopt. Since I was already working alongside Miguel Shaul, a missionary living in San Juan, we decided to visit some communities where we could share the gospel. That is how we first heard of La Florida, the most populated and yet least reached cluster of villages. It was a difficult region to get to due to the rocky terrain and roads interrupted by rivers without bridges. We rented a four-wheel-drive truck for over seven years until this year, when we were finally able to purchase a new truck. This has helped us tremendously as we encourage our church to grow in its commitment to missions.

MVBC: Your church has a real passion for local and international missions. What do you and the elders do to encourage the congregation to be active in evangelism?

RH: I believe it starts with modeling. I have been very involved in missions, and usually, in my sermons, the unreached and unengaged come to mind as I preach. Tony, another elder at the church, has always had a heart for the poor and those in need. The same things could be said of our other elders, Roberto and Alejandro.

I would say there are three things we actively do to encourage our church to get involved in evangelism. We are constantly encouraged to pray for the unbelievers, especially since we have several unbelievers coming to our service every Sunday. We encourage our church to give towards missions. (As I write this, we are putting together an offering for our Haitian partners to take to the affected area in Haiti due to the recent earthquake). We also encourage our members to get involved in going to either La Florida or overseas on mission trips.

Most importantly, we have to teach our members that the Bible is the authoritative word of God. Christ said that he had all authority in heaven and on earth; therefore, we are to make disciples. It is there that we see the command to pray, give and go.

MVBC: What made you decide it would be wise to leave the DR for a season to do a pastoral internship at MVBC? Years out, can you pinpoint any ways that internship has been useful both to you and your congregation?

RH: I was probably not aware of what I was getting myself into. I knew it would help me do better at my job at Central Mennonite Church, and I knew it would help my family to get a small break where we could focus on our family itself. Two years later, we are still counting the blessings it was for us to spend that time with MVBC. It gave me a greater heart for the local church and pastoral work. It provided Patria and Abdiel with relationships that are still a blessing to them. Living among you guys and experiencing the practice of pastoral work at MVBC provided me with skills and tools to bless CMC.

MVBC: For two years now, CMC has hosted a pastors conference working through the 9 Marks of a Healthy Church. What is this conference like, and what are you hoping to accomplish with it?

RH: The conference is mostly targeted to pastors and leaders in the San Juan area, though we have extended the invitation to some Haitian pastors as well. This conference has been a blessing not only to the members of our church who have assisted and those who volunteer, but it has also been a blessing to other churches in the area to move into a more biblical ministry environment

and practice.

Our desire is to bless other churches with what we have. We know that Dominican churches have a lot of strengths, but we also have plenty of room to grow when it comes to ministry. Helping other churches grow in the ministry of the Word and a more biblical way to do ministry will guarantee that more and more people are using their lives to glorify God as they are part of healthy churches.

MVBC: What are CMC's plans for the future? Are there any items we can be specifically praying about for you and your church?

RH: As I mentioned before, we have seen God bless us with more people growing in their commitment to Christ. Members are intentionally praying and asking God to lead them to know how they can serve him. We see more church plants growing as part of our ministry. More and more people keep on trusting Christ as their Lord and Savior. Meanwhile, ministry opportunities and finances grow. We want to be good stewards, and that demands time and work from the four elders of CMC as we juggle our lives in order to shepherd the congregation. Pray that we do this faithfully.

Tony is seeking to become the chairman of the executive board of the Mennonite Convention in the DR. We see this as an opportunity to help and assist other churches in the convention.

Finally, we are discussing updating our policies to better suit our church government structure. We want the structure of our church to reflect the biblical pattern. Please pray that we are wise. We are looking into going on an elder retreat to discuss these things sometime in November.

MVBC: God has used you in our lives to encourage us to think strategically about reaching our neighbors. You encourage us regularly by seeking to faithfully shepherd the flock God has entrusted to your care and by seeking to plant churches in your region. How has MVBC been an encouragement to you?

RH: We feel cared for. I can speak for most people in our church that MVBC and CMC have similar DNA. We are both seeking to magnify the name of Christ both in Sandy Springs and San Juan. As we pray for one another, we know who we are praying for and what challenges we are both facing. MVBC has been an encouragement through stories and experiences, and I have seen how God is shepherding you in every way.

Chasing Contentment: Trusting God in a Discontented Age

Written by Erik Raymond

Erik Raymond's book, *Chasing Contentment*, aptly tackles a challenge all believers face. We commonly grumble, complain, and give in to discouragement when difficulties come our way instead of responding as we should. Is contentment reserved only for the most mature Christians and, maybe then, only at the end of a well-lived life? As we work, raise families, navigate relationships, and deal with suffering, contentment may seem elusive. But like Paul in Philippians 4, by God's grace, all of us can "learn the secret" of being content in every circumstance. Raymond challenges his readers to believe that contentment, which comes from the inside out, is possible because of Christ. He defines contentment as "the inward, gracious, quiet spirit that joyfully rests in God's providence" (23). The foundational doctrine of providence teaches us that nothing happens by chance, but that God lovingly orchestrates all things. He pursues his children, and "through the gospel makes himself our treasure," so that we are ultimately content in Christ (163).

Upon finishing the book, I was left with three big impressions:

1) Theology matters in our pursuit of contentment. Raymond spends a fair amount of time delving into some key doctrines that lead believers to see Christ as beautiful and sufficient. A high and proper view of God is at the heart of contentment.

2) Though contentment is learned in both ease and affliction, affliction is often God's chosen means to cultivate this virtue in his children. I was encouraged by the plentiful Scripture references I can go back to in times of trouble when I'm tempted to grumble.

3) Contentment is not a solitary pursuit. Raymond writes on the role of the church in "making God's people content in him" (145). I appreciate his clarity in calling Christians to embrace regular, solid Bible teaching as God's means to grow us in holiness and of course, contentment.

Raymond relies heavily on the writings of Puritans, Jeremiah Burroughs and Thomas Watson, so *Chasing Contentment* is theologically rich; but it is also easy to read and practical. One of my favorite things about the book are the suggestions for how to pursue contentment, which is useful for discipleship or counseling. The discussion questions at the end of each chapter are well suited for one-on-one or small group discussions. Whether you read this book alone or with others, you will be pushed to consider the sufficiency of Christ, even in this discontented age.

— RECOMMENDED BY SHIRLEY CHANDLER



Excerpts From
the Book

1

"What if God took away what currently makes you happy, like he took away Joseph's coat and seat of honor? What if providence brought you to a pit? One thing is for sure; it would reveal whether your contentment were an inward work of grace or an external consoling by created things."

— Understanding Contentment, p.30

2

"If you are having a hard time being content, make a list of everything you have that you don't deserve, and then make a list of everything you deserve that you don't have. When you and I realize how kind and gracious God has been to us, we're able to see things in a proper perspective."

— Better Than I Deserve, p.62

3

"We can become restless and even question God's wisdom when events just don't seem to add up or another path looks more favorable. This is often the biggest struggle for me. So I have to remember at such times that this God who stands behind all his works of providence is no less powerful, good, and wise. And this means that if another option were truly better, he would have ensured that it happened."

— Be Still and Know, p.117

Why Should I Be Baptized?

Written by Bobby Jamieson

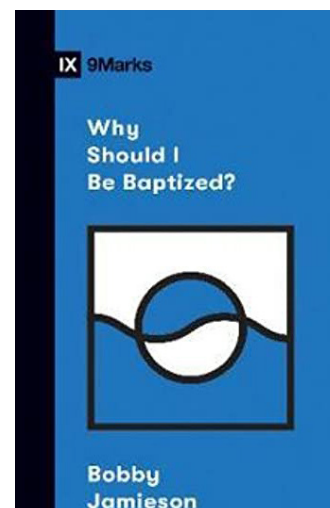
Baptism is a believer's act of publicly committing himself or herself to Christ and his people. Have you been baptized as a believer in Christ? Have you wondered why baptism is so important? In the first sentence, Bobby Jamieson states that "the goal of this booklet is to persuade you to be baptized." Then, using the teaching of Scripture, Jamieson presents the importance of baptism in the life of the believer and in the local church.

This booklet is a brief dialogue about baptism and is broken into three sections. In the first section, Jamieson addresses the question, "Why should I be baptized?" To answer that question, he unpacks three reasons you should be baptized: to obey Christ's command, to publicly profess faith in Christ, and to formally commit yourself to Christ and his people. In the second section, he covers some of the most common objections to baptism. For example, "I don't want to get baptized because I've already been baptized as an infant" and "I don't want to get baptized because my non-Christian family will reject me." These are two of the seven objections that are covered. Finally, in the last section, assuming you have been persuaded to be baptized, the author deals with the question, "What should I do now?"

A helpful topic Jamieson covers in the booklet is obeying Christ's command in Matthew 28:19 to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." After observing the command in the context of Scripture, Jamieson summarizes Jesus' teaching by saying, "baptism is the first item on Jesus' list of 'Everything I Have Commanded You.'" The author is clear that baptism is the first act of following Jesus.

If you have repented of your sins and trusted in Christ for salvation but have yet to be baptized, I recommend you read this booklet. If you have been baptized as a believer, this booklet will give you a biblical understanding of baptism and enable you to share the significance of it with others.

– RECOMMENDED BY DENNIS MOSBY



Excerpts From
the Book

1

"The Christian life is more than following commands, but it certainly isn't less."

– Why Should I Get Baptized?, p.17

2

"Declaring your faith will deepen your faith. Confessing your faith will confirm your faith. Sharing your faith will strengthen your faith."

– Why Should I Get Baptized?, p.20

3

"If baptism is for believers only, and you haven't been baptized as a believer, then you haven't been baptized at all—and you need to be."

– I Don't Want to Get Baptized Because..., p.29

SEPTEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

September 1	Titus 3:12–15	September 17	1 Thessalonians 5
September 2	1 Peter 5:1–14	September 18	2 Thessalonians 1
September 3	1 Corinthians 16:12–20	September 19	Acts 20:1–6
September 4	Colossians 2:1–5	September 20	2 Thessalonians 2
September 5	Ephesians 6:21–24	September 21	2 Thessalonians 3
September 6	Psalms 74	September 22	Philippians 1
September 7	Psalms 65	September 23	Philippians 2
September 8	Psalms 14	September 24	Philippians 3
September 9	Psalms 116	September 25	Philippians 4
September 10	Psalms 42	September 26	Acts 20:7–12
September 11	Psalms 78	September 27	Ephesians 1
September 12	Psalms 79	September 28	Ephesians 2
September 13	1 Thessalonians 1	September 29	Ephesians 3
September 14	1 Thessalonians 2	September 30	Ephesians 4
September 15	1 Thessalonians 3		
September 16	1 Thessalonians 4		

***Sermons in bold**

TAKE UP & READ



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH