

## The 3D experience and beyond

Reflections on the Conference Assembly theme and experience



By JOHNNIE GNANAMANICKAM

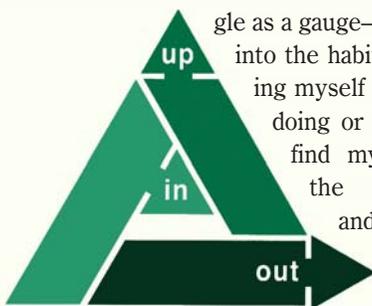
If you found yourself wondering what “the 3D experience” means, or are thinking, *I get the out part but what’s up? What’s in? And what do 3D glasses have to do with the conference, my congregation or me?*— you’re probably not alone!

This language might be new and seem strange at first to some. However, the concept isn’t new or different from what we already know to be true of the basic dimensions necessary to living as disciples of Jesus Christ.

One participant simplified the theme this way: “We are called to be in relationship with God and our brothers and sisters. From this stance we are then prepared to communicate God’s love to our neighbors.”

### The 3D gauge

I have found it useful to use this triangle as a gauge—getting into the habit of asking myself how I’m doing or where I find myself on the triangle and which



**UP:** As disciples, our value and identity are grounded in a relationship initiated by God (Romans 5:8), not based on our efforts or accomplishments. We need simply to rest in that identity as God’s beloved, redeemed through the cross.

**IN:** Disciples grow into maturity through sharing their gifts with other believers in the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). It is in the context of these relationships that the gospel is made visible and we experience transformation through the Holy Spirit.

**OUT:** Healthy disciples reflect God’s love for the world by reaching out to people and inviting them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). It is this overflowing love of God that gives disciples perseverance to serve day to day, seeking the fruit of the kingdom.

direction(s) the Lord is inviting me to move towards.

I would highly recommend this discipline of evaluation to you personally, as well as for your family, small group, congregation or any Christ centered group. At the personal level, it’s even better to have an accountability partner or mentor ask the questions and help reflect on and plan for necessary adjustments.

For example, some weeks I find myself spending more time and energy on outward activities, relating more to people in need of God’s love. Reviewing where I stand in the triangle on a week like this helps me realize that I need to prioritize upward time with the Lord and inward connection, fellowship, or partnering with my brothers and sisters. The interpretation of the reading on my 3D gauge for this week would look more like this: “As I communicate God’s love to our neighbors, I discover my need for God and my brothers and sisters.”

Could we employ the 3D gauge to review our individual and collective experience at Conference Assembly and beyond?

### Assembly highlights

Here are some of my highlights from Assembly and what each experience looks like on my 3D gauge. Our individual experiences will differ at least somewhat.

Missional stories from:

- Kendra Yoder (Garden City Church plant, Richmond, Va.)
- Seth Hankee (Greenmonte, Stuarts Draft, Va.)
- Randy Smith (Mtn. View, Hickory, N.C.)

- C3 Hampton—Beginning & Future
- Lynne Eggert (VMMissions’ E3 Collective program)
- Norma Teles (VMMissions worker serving Roma people at Joshua Center in Lezhe, Albania)



Dr. Natalie Francisco, co-pastor of C3 Hampton, brings the evening message at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly on July 19, 2018. Her message, *Transformed to Serve*, brought into focus each of the three dimensions of being a kingdom disciple. Photo: Jon Trotter

These were definitely outward expressions, inspiring us to reach similarly outward and, as well, to seek the Lord upward about how we could partner and support (inward) our brothers and sisters in mission.

Pastor Natalie Francisco (C3 Hampton) reminded us of the need to allow the Spirit of the Lord to transform us from the inside out (upward), and that we prepare and position ourselves for transformation when we gather inward with one accord, one mind, one passion in her message “Transformed to Serve.”

Glen Guyton, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, in his message

**3D experience** continued on page 7

# Updating VMC's understanding of accountability

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



During the summer delegate session at Conference Assembly, I reported on Conference Council's commitment to become more transparent and

accountable in the work of Conference. This means that we're committed to providing more opportunities for folks in our churches to share their stories about how they are joining the Holy Spirit's work on behalf of God's church in our communities.

We are simplifying and reducing the people-time it takes to do the business of Conference in order to free our people to engage mission and vision activities.

We want to involve our delegates more purposefully in the discernment of important issues and in decision-making of policy proposals. We are also in the process of clarifying VMC policy on dealing with the ethical misconduct of church leaders, including outlining the complaint process for those who have been affected by the ethical misconduct of leaders, and how to report the results of investigations of ethical misconduct.

The Faith and Life Commission (FLC) and Conference Council has had a pastoral misconduct policy in place since early 2000. Mennonite Church USA revised its *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* in November 2016. VMC is now revising its policy document called *Navigating Ministerial Complaints* (See [virginiaconference.org/resources/](http://virginiaconference.org/resources/)). Conference districts are studying the draft document and will give their feedback for edits this fall, and then delegates will discern the document in February 2019.

The FLC and Conference Council have been grappling with sticky issues in our review of policy, for example, the definition of "abuse of power." Most everyone agrees that a leader abuses his/her power when

initiating (or agreeing to) inappropriate sexual behavior with a congregant or elsewhere. And we all agree the leaders should not embezzle money from the church.

On the other hand, some are raising the question: are pastors who lead their congregations out of the Conference abusing their power? And is the circumstance different when lay congregational leaders make that request of their pastor?

Another potentially complicated issue is "dual relationships." Some refer to this as wearing different hats. Pastoral oversight leaders simultaneously are administrative supervisors, pastoral colleagues in faith and life, and consultants/counselors in crisis situations, personal or congregational. Sometimes they grow deep friendships and have family outings.

We all agree that leaders have dual roles or wear different hats, but we may not always agree on which role or hat is the most important or appropriate in a given situation.

For example, in leader misconduct situations, the oversight leader's supervisory role is the most important, even if the information of misconduct of a church leader was shared to him or her in total confidence. Oversight leaders are required to share breaches of pastoral/leader ethics with the FLC and Executive Conference Minister, and in some cases to VMC officers.

It's for this reason that we must have an organizational chart, bylaws and job descriptions that reflect who is responsible for what—and who has prescribed authority to act on behalf of the organization in a particular situation. In any event, the FLC and Conference Council are responsible for what occurs within VMC and then to respond in keeping with its policy.

In summary, while we live in challenging times and in a culture of situational ethics, it does not change church leaders' responsibility to live in keeping with God's commandments and VMC's core beliefs and values. May God help us find our way.

## In this issue:

- 3 Considering moral distress in the church
- 4 Meet Michael Danner
- 5 Mennonite Higher Education Association looks toward the future

## Conference Related Ministries

- 6 Youth are taking the lead  
WCRC: New facilities, old mission
- 7 Kingdom living and giving at Mennowood
- 8 Imagine all the lives shaped  
New EMU campus worship format 'more invitational'

## Features

- 9 Walking with USA Ministries: Partnering and investing in local mission workers
- 10 Footprints from the past: *Mennonite Hour* miracle
- 11 Editorial: Being a follower of Jesus has three dimensions

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# Considering moral distress in the church

## What it is and how we can address it

By ALDINE MUSSER

Following a recent conversation on moral distress with the Faith and Life Commission, I have been reflecting on ways in which VMC has been impacted by this phenomenon over the past several years. I am convinced that paying attention to the way in which moral distress has impacted our church life can help us build moral resilience.

Moral distress occurs when one knows the prescribed action to take, but doing so violates one's moral code.

Moral distress was first defined in the context of difficult medical decisions required at the end of life. Nurses experience moral distress when they are obligated to carry out aggressive treatment in end-of-life situations, treatment plans that prolong dying and consequently create more harm than good. In such situations, nurses may also perceive they are unable to understand the complexities of the full situation.

A nurse may also feel powerless to take the ethically correct action because of the fear of losing his or her job. For the same reason, he or she may choose to remain silent in the midst of disrespectful interactions, because her need for self-preservation may outweigh her belief in the importance of speaking up on behalf of others. The inner conflicts create moral distress.

Moral distress generally begins after a traumatic or difficult situation has played itself out. As one begins to consider the social and organizational issues at work in a particular situation, multiple questions surface about one's own accountability and responsibility.

Moral distress always involves a threat to moral integrity. The human sense of wholeness and self-worth is linked to the ability to hold clearly defined values congruent with one's actions.

Moral distress results in the inability to collaborate. It creates a lack of trust. In some situations, it results in resignation.

### **Finding strategies to alleviate moral distress and to build moral resilience is an ethical imperative if we are to stay true to our shared values—compassion, respect, excellence, and integrity.**

In the last several years, Virginia Mennonite Conference has experienced challenging situations in which we have experienced high levels of moral distress.

We walked through situations that caused many persons to feel isolated, unheard and devalued. We witnessed threats to moral integrity as we've listened to others being belittled, labeled as unimportant or unintelligent.

Three questions have surfaced for me as I've reflected on moral distress:

1. What do we need when we want to run from difficult situations?
2. What do we need from God during the tough times we face as congregations?
3. What do we need from the church community during times of great stress?

I've also reflected on possible answers to those questions. Finding strategies to alleviate moral distress and to build moral resilience is an ethical imperative if we are to stay true to our shared values—compassion, respect, excellence, and integrity.

We need to notice our emotions and identify our assumptions and biases. We must create a climate where it is safe to speak up, and we must find the courage to say what we believe is true.

Can we learn to build networks of support that focus on possible change? Can we collaborate from multiple points of view to improve our stressed systems? Can we write policies that guide how we as a church function together? Can we search for the root problems that cause moral distress?

I offer these thoughts as a beginning place for further conversations about how we might respond if and when we encounter moral distress in our midst. May we all develop the capacity to sustain our integrity in the midst of moral complexity and confusion.



Aldine Musser is a retired pastor and Oversight Leader of VMC's Northern District.

## Pastoral transitions (August to October 2018)

**Ray Gingerich**, Harrisonburg District, member of Community Mennonite Church, died June 17.

**Richard Heatwole Showalter**, retired pastor in Southern District, member of Springdale Mennonite Church, died August 15.

**Preston Nowlin Jr.**, associated with Central District, died August 17.

**Loren Horst**, associated with the Leadership/Administration Cluster and former VMissions president and mission worker, retired August 21.

**Brenda North Martin**, a member of Raleigh Mennonite Church, which transferred to Central District Conference, withdrew from Virginia Mennonite Conference, August 21.

**James "Jim" Mellinger**, Eastern Carolina District, former lead pastor of Greensboro Mennonite Fellowship, N.C., retired August 21.

**Milford Lyndaker**, Northern District, former pastor of Crest Hill Mennonite Church, retired August 31.

**Paula H. Stoltzfus** is interim care and visitation pastor at Park View Mennonite Church, succeeding interim pastor **Shirlee Kohler Yoder**, who completed her work on September 1.

**Andrew Cheung**, lead pastor at Washington Community Fellowship, since September 15.

**Howard Miller**, lead pastor at Huntington Mennonite Church, since October 1.



# Meet Michael Danner

## Mennonite Church USA Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality and Engagement

### ABOUT MICHAEL

- Married to wife Melissa for 28 years
- Has three adult children, Julia, 27, Nicholas, 23, and Isabelle, 21
- Has a BA in Speech Communications from University of Illinois, Urbana; a Masters in Religion from Trinity

Evangelical Divinity School; a DMin in Contextual Theology from Northern Seminary

- Pastored at Metamora Mennonite Church, Metamora, Ill., for 18 years; Conference Executive Minister for Illinois Mennonite Conference for three years prior to current role

By MICHAEL DANNER

Although I've spent most of my life in the North, I was born in Sumter, South Carolina in 1968 on Shaw Air Force base. Given that fact, you now know that I wasn't born and raised in a Mennonite church.

At the age of 13, I committed my life to Jesus and I was baptized. The implicit message I received at that time was "Congratulations! You are now good with God. When you die you will go to heaven. Keep coming to church and don't forget to give." That's what I thought being a Christian was about.

As I grew up, that story became less and less compelling. A conflict in my home church left me disillusioned. When my church split, I split. By the end of my sophomore year of college, I was struggling.

My brother Steve helped me connect with Campus Crusade for Christ as I started my junior year. I heard a clear call to follow Jesus (not just believe things about him). I committed my life to following Jesus and haven't looked back. I am here today because of that transformative experience.

I entered the Mennonite Church in 1997. I was a youth pastor in the United Methodist Church (1992), but didn't feel at home with the polity. I became a Christian education director in a Congregational Church, but didn't resonate with the way their radical congregational polity left them without a theological center (1993-1996). Those experiences confirmed my call to ministry, but I felt homeless. So, I went to

seminary (by then I was married with three kids) with a commitment to grow as a pastor. My wife and I were also committed to finding a denomination we could call home.

In my study of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, I resonated with the radical reformers. My professor didn't like that because Zwingli was the hero of their story, but I was rooting for his students.

I asked my professor if there were any radical reformers left today? He pointed me to the Mennonites. In a related/unrelated story, my parents began attending a Mennonite church after our home church split. Those stories converged and eventually I joined the staff of Metamora Mennonite Church as the associate pastor. I eventually became the lead pastor and was on staff at MMC for 18 years until July 2015.

I tell that whole story, because if you know that story, you will understand my approach to my current work more clearly.

### I believe:

- The local church plays a vital role in God's ongoing work in the world.
- The primary purpose of the local church is disciple-making.
- Disciple making involves invitation, teaching, and missional practice. When churches don't do this, it has consequences (personal and societal).
- Denomination does matter. Each denomination (or non-denomination) is shaped by a history of biblical interpretation and communal practice. These are not all the same.
- I choose the Anabaptist way of following Jesus, because I believe it is

what Jesus had in mind when he called people to follow him.

- I became Mennonite because I believe Mennonites are serious about the Anabaptist way of following Jesus.
- I have experienced many gifts within MC USA. I've also seen many people experience transformation through the ministries of MC USA congregations and conferences.
- Yes, I'm aware that we don't have it all together all the time (sometimes in quite serious ways), but despite that, MC USA churches are engaging in God's mission in their neighborhoods in transformative ways. God isn't hindered by our weakness.
- Churches can engage in ministry in their contexts, even if we stumble along in our discernment of big questions at the national level.

With all of that said, my job, broadly stated, is to help shape the ministry of the wider church so that congregations and conferences have the tools they need to participate fully in God's mission in their context (town, neighborhood, region, etc.).

Since June 1, I have been in learning and evaluation mode. Some essential functions have continued through our office. We are also reimagining how we do our work with an eye towards congregational thriving. The only measure of success for our department is conferences that are thriving by empowering congregations to thrive. As the local church goes, so goes the whole.



Dr. Rebecca Stoltzfus, president of Goshen College, speaks to campus on June 14, 2017. She was selected to lead the new MHEA as its chairperson for the next year. Photo: Goshen College



Participants sing hymns at Eastern Mennonite Seminary's Baccalaureate service, May 4, 2018. EMU is a member of MHEA. Photo: Eastern Mennonite University

## Mennonite Higher Education Association looks toward the future

By KAYLA BERKEY

The Mennonite Higher Education Association (MHEA) officially launched at the first in-person gathering on September 15-17 in Angola, Indiana.

The presidents of six higher education institutions participated in the gathering: Sara Wenger Shenk, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary; Jon Gering, Bethel College; Jane Wood, Bluffton University; Susan Schultz Huxman, Eastern Mennonite University; Joseph Manickam, Hesston College; and Rebecca Stoltzfus, president of Goshen College. Carlos Romero, Executive Director of Mennonite Education Association (MEA), and Dick Thomas, chair of the MHEA Beta version, also took part.

A key decision at the meeting was selecting Rebecca Stoltzfus to provide leadership for MHEA as the new chair. MHEA will operate as a federation of institutions and the chair position is a one-year term with the possibility of renewal.

“Our first meeting together as MHEA was historic in several ways,” said Stoltzfus. She noted that five of the six presidents are relatively new to their positions. “We needed to learn to know one another, and I left with a great respect and appreciation for the talent, commitment and perspectives of these leaders.”

At the meeting, significant time went into storytelling and relationship-building. Each president shared stories about how their institutions connect to their shared vision of Mennonite education and about what bridges can be built looking toward the future.

“The presidents’ stories were inspiring and powerful in understanding at a deep level how our schools are implementing the vision of the church for Mennonite higher education,” said Romero.

“We used worship and storytelling as means to understand each other and our work,” said Stoltzfus. “Our colleges, universities and seminaries are places that nurture and transmit the expressions of our faith in challenging times — not by being rigid and unyielding, but with resiliency and openness to the transformative work of the Spirit.”

The meetings included reviewing the purposes of MHEA and holding conversations based around affordability and accessibility, and faith and human formation. Romero also introduced the upcoming MEA strategic planning process.

In addition, having identified 25 collaborations that already happen between the schools, the group determined priorities for continued collaboration through academic programming and support staffing. As one example, three of the MHEA schools currently participate in offering a collaborative MBA program.

“Our priorities for our first one to two years will be to explore partnerships that can grow and sustain our excellent academic programs, or can achieve economies of scale in the administrative aspects of our work,” said Stoltzfus. “We also seek to create new structures and practices to support the relationship of our institutions to Mennonite Church USA.”

The schools, Mennonite Church USA, and MEA plan to maintain a close and intentional relationship through several avenues, including regular communication, involvement in boards and presidential search committees and a shared Anabaptist foundation.

The process of establishing MHEA began in March 2017 at an MEA meeting in Jacksonville, Fla., where representatives of the Mennonite colleges, MEA, and Mennonite Church USA discussed moving forward with a new structure to address the changing state of Mennonite higher education. This resulted in a task force that began its work in July 2017 and distributed a proposal for feedback. A revised and final proposal was created in January 2018. The MHEA Beta version began on February 1, 2018. The new MHEA organization was officially launched at the September 2018 meeting with six schools participating.

“It is exciting to be in a place where we are looking forward, dreaming together, thinking of the possibilities and finding ways to strengthen the individual institutions and the overall mission of Mennonite education,” said Romero. “Our institutions are a significant part of our missional endeavor as Mennonite Church USA.”

The next in-person meeting is planned for January 2019.



Kayla Berkey is Multimedia News Editor of Mennonite Church USA.

# Youth are taking the lead

By KENT KAUFFMAN

Last year, a group of Mennonite youth leaders teamed up to try something new: a junior high youth retreat, collaboratively planned by youth leaders and Highland staff. Following the success of that first retreat last fall, the group also planned a senior high retreat in March and a second junior high retreat this October.

The retreats themselves, which have involved young people from at least ten different Mennonite congregations, are exciting news—it is so important for our young people to have opportunities to worship and play together, building friendships and strengthening faith—and Highland Retreat is privileged to host these wonderful events.

But for some of the youth, the experience is more involved, more time-consuming, and more rewarding than just showing up to enjoy a weekend retreat.

Starting with the second retreat, a key group of senior high youth have been actively involved in everything from the initial planning stages to last-minute retreat details. Youth leaders were asked to

recommend young people from their congregations to be part of the planning council, which meets regularly in the months prior to each retreat. Seven high school youth from six different congregations – including a few who served on our Highland summer staff! – are currently participating in the planning process for the October junior high retreat.

Aided and supported by the youth pastors in the group, the youth themselves took on active leadership roles. They gathered for meetings to choose guest speakers, discuss possible themes, and outline event schedules. They took on various planning projects, including menu selection, scheduling activities, housing, and marketing.

When the retreat weekend rolls around, they will be on hand to make announcements, lead activities, and help



Youth at the Senior High Retreat proudly their handiwork. Photo courtesy of Kent Kauffman

out behind the scenes.

We are very proud of the way these young people have capably stepped into leadership, and very thankful for the wonderful youth pastors who guide them. These leaders of tomorrow are building up God's kingdom today, and we are honored to work alongside them.



Kent Kauffman is Executive Director of Highland Retreat.



Campers at WCRC enjoy an activity. Oakwood Lodge is in the background. Courtesy of Bob Briscoe

By BOB BRISCOE

In the early 1980s, our founders Lloyd Weaver and Bob Mast asked, “We gave our hearts to the Lord at revival meetings. We’re not having those anymore. Where are young people making their decisions to put their faith in Jesus?” After asking around they found that many were doing it at camp. Their response was, *If that’s the*

## Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center New facilities, old mission

*way the Holy Spirit is working, then we need to build a place for the Holy Spirit to work.*

Now, some 35 years later, our mission statement reads: “WCRC provides a place for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of kids and adults through camping and retreats.”

This place where the Holy Spirit works includes a hotel. In 1992, architect Clint Good, contractor Harman Construction, and project manager Glen Stoltzfus completed Oakwood Lodge. It has 2 floors with 24 hotel-style rooms, two meeting spaces, and a commercial laundry facility. It is our most comfortable lodging option for guest groups.

The décor was ideal when it was built, but after 26 years it needs an update. Donors have already supplied over 25% of the

\$400,000 needed to renovate the building. The board’s goal is “a brand new Oakwood Lodge,” to serve our guests for the next 26 years.

Jean Oswald and Ilse Deel are providing artistic direction. Board member Tim Mills and Maintenance Director Larry McLaughlin are coordinating the project.

Meanwhile, plans are also emerging to build a new dining facility that will accommodate 300 people. That’s three times the capacity of the current Magnolia Center dining room.

All this means more room for more guests and campers to experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their lives as God draws them to Christ, renews their faith, and sends them home to share the good news far and wide.

Bob Briscoe is Executive Director of Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center.

**3D experience** continued from cover

“We Have Seen the Lord!” exhorted us to “leave the dead things alone!” Because we have this upward experience with the Lord, we can gather inward (together) as we move outward and forward in mission.

Chakesha White’s experiential lesson with blindfolded space-seekers was a memorable illustration on the challenges we all face in our upward relationship with the Lord, being surrounded by many competing voices, and the importance of distinguishing and following the one voice that is trustworthy amidst the clamor.

We heard Moriah & Micah Horst’s call for our congregations, districts, conference to be inwardly intentional about making room for, encouraging and inviting younger people to participate.

Aldine Musser’s paper on moral distress and Ross Erb’s presentation on responding to misconduct by non-credentialed leaders are much needed practical counsel for addressing problems with our inward relationships.

Dillion & Esther Sinclair’s Bible study modeled inward teamwork as a couple and passionate upward worship.

Then of course, there were ‘business’ items on the agenda. All these included upward and outward elements, but were primarily part of our formal and informal shared inward experience.

### **Beyond Conference Assembly**

So what does your experience look like on the 3D gauge—at or even beyond Assembly—as a member of VMC and of God’s kingdom in this world? What directions are

the Lord inviting us to reach towards in this time—as individuals, as congregations and as a conference?

How is God calling us to grow upward in our relationship with the Lord and experience God’s power to transform us into Christ-likeness? How is God moving us inward in our love for and equipping of one another as individuals, families, and congregations? How is God compelling us together to move outward and make disciples of all people groups?

I welcome you to share your responses to these questions at <https://goo.gl/DYtccD>



Johnnie Gnanamanickam served on the Assembly Vision Team and is Associate Pastor at Mt. Pleasant Mennonite, Chesapeake, Va.

## **Kingdom living and giving at Mennowood**

By **THELMA SHAFFER**

**M**ennowood Retirement Community is a non-profit Christian-based community. It was created in 1985 to provide seniors a home they could live in comfortably, including meals and an emergency bracelet to alert our staff if there is an emergency. (There is a nurse always on the premises).

In 1998, the Assisted Living and Memory Care center were built. This was developed so that as community residents need more care, they can stay within the community and get the care they require. Much of this is about physical care, but they also need personal investment—people pouring time, energy, and love into their lives so that they see that they have value and purpose.

The residents at Mennowood are family. They look out for each other. They love the staff and the staff loves them. They worship together as well. Two times a week they have Bible study. On Mondays they have praise and prayer. On the weekends several church groups come in for a service or to give communion. Their faith is an important part of their daily lives.

Mennowood residents love kingdom giving—giving back to the community—

which is why they’re excited about their new project: making sleeping mats out of plastic bags for the less fortunate.

Plarn (plastic yarn) is made using plastic shopping bags. Most people are already trying to find a way to reuse the bags that overflow from plastic bag bins. Plarn can be used to make a variety of items, such as rugs, reusable grocery totes, and even hats or shoes.

The sleeping mats that our residents are making are intended for people who are homeless, for refugees in camps and people in poorer countries.

These crochet mats are remarkably comfortable and create a barrier between the ground and the body. It’s no problem if the mats get wet as they can easily be dried. The mats are also a cleaner way of sleeping. Bugs do not like them. In addition, when dirty, they can be hosed off, shaken out and be made good to go. They are portable as well. The crochet plastic makes for a very lightweight mat. With the accompanying strap, these crochet mats can easily



Mennowood residents make plarn mats for the less fortunate out of plastic grocery bags. Stock photo

be carried over a person’s shoulder.

This project is not only for a good humanitarian cause; it’s also eco-friendly because each mat keeps 500-700 plastic bags out of the landfill. And they are free to make.

The residents come together once a week to work on the different aspects of making the mats. Some residents fold, others cut the bags. Each step requires residents to use their unique skills. This time together not only helps others that are less fortunate, but also affirms a sense of purpose and value.



Thelma Shaffer is Director of Marketing and Admissions for Mennowood Retirement Community.



Lynette Mast, peace-building teacher, explains to kindergarten students how Jesus washed his disciples' feet to show care and an attitude of service. Washing each others' hands reminded students early in the year to show care and service to each other.

Photo: Andrew Gascho

## New EMU campus worship format 'more invitational'

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

During many chapel worship services of the past, Eastern Mennonite University campus pastor Brian Martin Burkholder has kept an eye on the clock, watching the 30 minutes trickle away. So, too, did some of the audience—heading out of Lehman Auditorium to class or other commitments while music was playing, a speaker was wrapping up final conclusions, or announcements were being completed.

The amount of time for chapel wasn't the only concern shared by Burkholder and the campus ministries council. They were asking questions attentive to enhancing faith and spiritual life on campus.

Would other gathering formats be more formational? Could more options be offered to meet more community and individual needs?

This fall, a new campus worship format debuted. It is both "invitational and intentional," Burkholder says, offering multiple spaces in a variety of venues facilitated by volunteer campus community leaders – students, faculty and staff. "This structure expands our time together, provides choices for how a person wants to engage, and brings people into spaces around campus where they are both comfortable and challenged. We are broadening our ministry to better meet the growing diversity of our student body in connected and collaborative ways."

Burkholder says the number of student leaders "who are finding each other and enjoying working together and enhancing each other's efforts" has brought new energy to campus ministries. The exploration of a new format for campus worship and break-out groups is, he added, "both focused inward, towards individual spiritual growth and formation, and outward, connecting communities of faith and wider dynamics of community engagement."

Lauren Jefferson is Editor-in-Chief of EMU Marketing and Communications.

## Imagine all the lives shaped

By ANDREA WENGER

After thirteen years of K-5 offsite, Eastern Mennonite School (K-12) is now one campus on Parkwood Drive.

Now in its 101st year, imagine all the lives shaped by Eastern Mennonite School through these years as children study, sing, pray, and play together. With this backdrop, our principals reflect on "God's Kingdom and the 3D Experience" at EMS.

**Maria Bender '81 Archer, K-8 principal**  
(K-5 principal 2005-present)

"Encounter"—the Mennonite Education Agency faith formation curriculum—helps us look for places where God is working at right relationships, and talk about how we interact with each other, God, ourselves and creation.

Heidi Byler's third grade class talks about "God's Shalom Work." Each new school year, the class brainstorms about how a student should treat another student, how a student should treat a teacher, how a teacher should treat a student, and how everyone should treat the school community.

**Justin King, high school principal**

Being a high school student in today's world is complicated. Our students navigate a lot of pressure as they juggle relationships, school work, technology, long-term planning and the intensity of the news of our times. In my first three months here, I have been inspired by the resiliency of our students and the commitment of our teachers who walk with our students in prayerful mentoring roles.

I'm also challenged by the hard work everyone is willing to do. We often use restorative justice circles to create safe space where everyone is heard. It means learning how to listen. It's painful at times. We don't always get it right. And it can take a lot more time than more traditional punitive practices. But our faculty and administrative team believe that now, more than ever, our young people benefit from learning to listen to people who may think differently. We worship God and honor his Son, Jesus, holding each other up in times of difficulty, and confront our conflicts.

We are grateful for generous pledges and donations to date totaling \$3.2 million to the Let the Children Come Campaign to renovate the former MennoMedia building for our elementary program. We continue to seek funding of \$1 million by January 2019 to fully fund the renovation of classrooms, and addition of offices and community and outdoor learning spaces. See [www.emhs.net/support/ltcc.cfm](http://www.emhs.net/support/ltcc.cfm) for more.

I'm deeply grateful for the partnership with the churches of Virginia Mennonite Conference, for the roles that pastors, youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, parents and family friends play in helping us to fulfill our mission. Please come for a chapel service, have lunch with a student from your church, and reach out with questions or concerns. We're all in this together!

Andrea Wenger is Director of Advancement for Eastern Mennonite School.

# Partnering and investing in local mission workers

By SKIP TOBIN

As USA Ministries Director for Virginia Mennonite Missions, I am delighted at how the number of our local mission workers serving in Virginia Mennonite Conference has grown in recent years. I work with great folks who are planting churches, serving inmates, serving college students, connecting congregations with their neighborhoods, and more. It is a joy to see how strong partnerships and relationships have developed on personal, congregational, district, and agency levels.

There are so many individuals, families, churches and groups of churches involved behind these mission workers who are deeply investing time, energy, prayers, and financial gifts. They are the ones who enable these ministries to happen.

Let me share a few snapshots of some local mission partnerships.

**Seth and Theresa Crissman** were VMissions first local long-term workers. Their partnership began in Harrisonburg District. District Minister Roy



Seth and Theresa Crissman with Eliana, Isaiah, and Maria

Hange asked VMissions to help create support structures for the Crissmans and their (already beginning) Kids Club ministries. Now connecting with Immanuel, Waynesboro, Eastside, Community, and Park View, and with new relationships made with Weavers and Mt Pleasant, hundreds of neighborhood children hear the gospel weekly. This year, a new tranSend intern, Melody Zimmerman, joined the Crissman family to be a team.

**Alfonso Alvarado**, a church planter for a year and a half, launched Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah. The church continues



Alfonso Alvarado

to grow under Alfonso's able leadership, weathering Alfonso's difficult health issues, including two detached retinas and a large stomach tumor. We celebrate a strong partnership with Northern District churches.



Jason Wagner

works as a chaplain in the Harrisonburg Rockingham Regional Jail. He meets daily with incarcerated men, bringing them into God's loving presence. Jason connects regularly with other visiting prison ministries, meets with newly-released men, and is a resource for congregations who want to reach the lives of the incarcerated. Jason's release into ministry came about through the efforts of two Harrisonburg District pastors: Ben Risser and Jason Gerlach, who worked to see an increased Christian presence in the jail where they serve.

**Armando and Veronica Sanchez** are planting a new church in Waynesboro in partnership with Southern District. Armando and Veronica live in Weyers Cave, Va., and are also founders of Enciende Una Luz, a congregation in Northern District. Along with another leadership couple from Enciende, they plan to use Waynesboro Mennonite Church as their meeting house.



Veronica and Armando Sanchez

**Tyler and Kendra Yoder** recently moved to Richmond, Va., to plant Garden City Church. Having caught a passion for church planting through Eastside Church, their home congregation, Tyler and Kendra

are presently finding jobs and learning about life and ministry in Richmond. We are thankful for this unique partnership with Eastside Church, who serves as the lead agency.



Kendra and Tyler Yoder

**Juan José Lagos** is our newest appointed mission worker. He lives in Winston Salem, N.C., with his wife, Cecilia. Juan's hope is to plant a Mennonite congregation in that city.



Juan José Lagos

VMissions and Virginia Mennonite Conference are working together on both a congregational level and a district level through these worker appointments. God is indeed at work in these unique ways on a grassroots level, and new glimmers of hope are being seen.

All photos courtesy of workers/VMissions



Skip Tobin is USA Ministries Director for VMissions.

# Mennonite Hour miracle

By ELWOOD YODER

Sparked by the desire to be a witness for Christ through their music, four college students launched a very successful Mennonite radio program in 1951.

It began on Monday evening, September 11, 1950, when the Crusader Quartet from Eastern Mennonite College (EMC) sang on the radio for *The Calvary Hour*, a paid radio program recorded at the WSVB radio station in Harrisonburg. After singing, the men climbed into their car to return to campus, but Eugene Souder remembered he had left a favorite pen in the recording studio. The others waited while he bounded back up the steps of the studio to get his pen. There Eugene, 23, ran into the program director of WSVB and boldly asked if his men's quartet could have free airtime to sing a *cappella* hymns.

When the radio station manager agreed, the college fellows began singing their harmonies in 15 minute segments. Then, without asking, the Crusaders brought a speaker along to share the gospel on their show. That's when the radio station manager abruptly ended the free time, telling them they needed to pay for airtime if they wanted to preach.

In the early 1950s, Virginia Mennonite Conference was changing. When Roy Kreider asked his college president about



The Crusader Quartet (from left) Paul Swarr, Aaron King, Roy Kreider, and Eugene Souder at 1948 tent meetings in Richmond Va., with evangelist J. Otis Yoder. Photo: Eugene Souder

singing on the radio, the men were prepared for a "no" answer. Virginia Conference Bishop and EMC President John L. Stauffer, however, did not stop the men, remarkable considering that he had enforced the Conference ruling against radios in the previous decades. In 1944, the Conference prohibition against radios was lifted, and, in a dramatic turnaround, by 1950, radio became an accepted means of gospel ministry.

Then a handful of Mennonite businessmen offered to pay for a half hour of time for the Crusader Quartet. The winds of change were happening fast. By March 4, 1951, they were on the air with a 30-minute show, including preaching. By 1952, the radio ministry that Eugene Souder, Aaron King, Paul Swarr, and Roy Kreider had launched in college blossomed into a denominationally-sponsored radio ministry.

B. Charles Hostetter, Sr., became the regular radio preacher, and *The Mennonite Hour* was broadcast on as many as 100 radio stations across the U.S. and Canada, and

in other countries and other languages. Finally, in 1978, the radio ministry that began with four committed young men ended its amazing run.

Kreider, Swarr, King, and Souder had been vitally shaped by the 1948 Upper Room prayer revivals that broke out on the EMC campus. They understood that connections with and support from their churches were essential to their ministry.

The Crusader Quartet sang at many revival meetings, did service work in Kentucky, and conducted street evangelism in New York City. After college, the Crusader Quartet disbanded, and only Souder continued on as staff with *The Mennonite Hour* for fifteen years.

It is from Eugene Souder's courting letters written to Alice Byler from 1949 to 1951, and published in *He Keeps Me Singing*, that the remarkable story of *The Mennonite Hour's* origins emerges. Eugene's letters reveal divine interventions at the outset that blessed, inspired, and touched thousands of lives through radio music and preaching.



Elwood Yoder teaches Bible and Social Studies at Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, Va.



Paul Swarr, Eugene Souder, Roy Kreider, and Myron Augsburger discuss the 1948 revival at Eastern Mennonite College in 2016.

Photo: Elwood Yoder

# Being a follower of Jesus has three dimensions

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Virginia Mennonite Conference held our Assembly at C3 Hampton (Hampton, Va.) with the theme *God's Kingdom: The 3D Experience*. This theme emerged as our Assembly Vision Team sought to bring a new lens to the multi-dimensional nature of being a disciple of Jesus in our time.

## Our encounter with God through Jesus

Each person experienced a personal encounter with God as a prerequisite for baptism. As we learned about God's call to us through reading scripture, reflections, sermons, and Sunday school experiences, we learned the way of Jesus is normative—it is how we want to live in the world.

Our first encounter with God is not the last encounter, but it launches us into a lifetime of seeking God and reflecting the character of Jesus in our daily living.

Our encounter with God gives us a way to understand our life. Utilizing Christian teaching, our character and moral framework is developed to provide a foundation for personal choices, communal discernment, and life in the world. Our relationship with God is nurtured and developed throughout our entire life.

Palmer Becker's work *Anabaptist Essentials* frames it well in his first point: "Jesus is the center of our faith." As followers of Jesus, we seek to understand our life experience in relationship to the way of Christ. It is the basis for character formation, virtue development, and even moral foundation. To miss this component of our faith experience will unfortunately lead to a lifetime of navigating "fool's hill."

## Our encounter with community

As followers of Jesus, we take seriously the importance of being part of a local assembly of believers. While the worship experience on Sunday morning is a very important part of our faith experience, our congregational life is more than the worship service. The relationships we hold in the congregation contribute to our sense of identity.

In a Pew Research Center report, twenty percent of "nones"—persons who claim no affiliation to any church—identified a "dislike of organized religion" as a reason for their disassociation. In Pew's article "Why America's 'nones' left religion behind<sup>1</sup>," Pew Research Center categorizes this percentage according to three broad reasons: a) anti-institutional religion, b) religion too focused on power/politics, c) religion causes conflict.

Each of these themes could be dissected further to uncover the human interactions rejected by this group of people. I suspect the challenge is based on the breadth of individualism that exists in our culture as opposed to the communal nature of being the body of Christ.

The important take away for me is that it matters how a fellowship of believers gathered in a local assembly navigates their relationships. In our tradition, we have moved from an individual or small group of leaders making decisions on behalf of the community to a more egalitarian model of decision making that seeks to understand the members concerns while in the midst of decision-making.

At the same time, this model of governing the community of faith has not solved all our problems. There are indeed still conflicts, and yes, at times decisions are made in such a way that leaves people uneasy. I merely highlight that this is an area of communal life that warrants our continued attention, not only in the congregation, but also as a Conference.

## Our engagement in mission

What is the purpose of being part of a community of faith? It is more than identity formation. It is more than worship. It is about a common vision to live into the reign of God, not only in congregational life, but also in the world in which we reside. A group of people that merely tends to their own needs will become extinct, or self-destruct in conflict, leading to extinction. A congrega-

tion engaged in mission is propelled to look beyond their own needs. The mission contributes to a robust sense of purpose beyond sustaining their own identity.

Mission takes on a variety of forms. It is the place where we welcome diversity of expression. For example, some congregation will focus their mission on relating to the homeless people in their town by seeking to extend compassion through hospitality, relationship building, and material aid.

Another congregation may seek to provide a vibrant faith experience for university students during their college years.

Other congregations may see value in supporting overseas mission endeavors that bring the gospel to a place where the message of Jesus may be silent.

Yet another group of congregations seeks social change in their town, city, or country based on the way of Jesus. Their ministry of social justice may lead to new expressions of God's reign in our culture. All of the ways congregations engage in mission are valued and necessary for our Conference.

Being a follower of Jesus does bring challenges to our life, but it can also invigorate us and create legacy experiences. As we envision our life on the way with Jesus, we are called to nurture our relationship with God and develop disciples with moral character. We envision assemblies of believers gathered in various formats that reflect a community ethos aligned with their vision as members of the body of Christ.

We implore you to extend your compassion in mission through evangelism, service, and peacemaking that reflects the way of Jesus.

<sup>1</sup> [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/)

Clyde G. Kratz is Executive Conference Minister of Virginia Mennonite Conference.



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"The Bible, Especially the Sermon on the Mount, Freed Me from All This." Bonhoeffer as a Practical, Biblical Theologian

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"This Is the Very Least the Bible Asks of Us in Such Times as These." Bonhoeffer and the Jews (in Nazi Germany)

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2019

"Christianity Stands or Falls with Its Revolutionary Protest against Violence." Bonhoeffer's Persistent Opposition to War

A Lecture Series by **Mark Thiessen Nation**, Professor Emeritus, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, author of the book, *Bonhoeffer the Assassin?*  
(Location: Martin Chapel, Eastern Mennonite Seminary; 6:30-8:45 p.m. Each lecture is 45-60 minutes, followed by a discussion)