

Journey Forward brings new beginnings

By GLEN GUYTON

Virginia Mennonite Conference is where it all began for me in 1993. At least it is where my journey began in the Mennonite church.

I am appreciative to the men and women of this great conference who welcomed me and introduced me to the Anabaptist faith. Now it is my turn to give back to this church and its many parts.

By design, our conference and congregational leaders have great authority in our system. I would have to think that there was some institutional wisdom in ensuring that we had strong conferences and congregations who would work in collaborative harmony rather than needing a Mennonite pope. That strength can also be a source of weakness when the harmony is not there.

Part of the rationale for the *Journey Forward* process is to recapture who we are so we can once again focus on our mission, our calling as a denomination. *Journey Forward* is a churchwide renewal process of engaging in scripture, storytelling, and sharing how God is at work in the lives of people and congregations across MC USA.

Somewhere along the line between July 2001 and today, the Mennonite Church became synonymous with the Executive Board and to a lesser degree the Executive Director. One might say our church has become so upside down that we have forgotten our place in this body that was created to allow its members to participate fully in God's work of setting things right in a broken world, redeeming and restoring all things in Christ to God's intended design. A design, I surmise, that involves three forever things: "faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).



Glen Guyton speaks at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly at C3 Hampton (Calvary Community Church) on July 20, 2018. His message, *We Have Seen the Lord*, during evening worship emphasized the transformative faith we carry as individuals and as the church. "First and foremost, we are a people of faith," he said. Photo: Jon Trotter

While the Executive Board has a leadership role regarding vision and advocacy for smaller conferences, one of the primary functions of the Executive Board is to coordinate the activities of our agencies, partners, and programs. The strength of the Executive Board lies in its power to convene the body, not in its power to punish. Those that want the Executive Board and Executive Director to wield the hammer of wrath are asking us to use a tool not granted to us. But we do have work to do regarding strengthening our mutual accountability as a denominational body.

Slowly, maybe too slowly for some, I do see positive energy building with many of our conference leaders, energy in helping to articulate more clearly how power and

authority work in our system. Our system is complex. Probably too complex for our size and our mission. That is why I like the simplicity of our renewed commitments that we developed after the 2017 MC USA convention in Orlando. On this journey together we commit to:

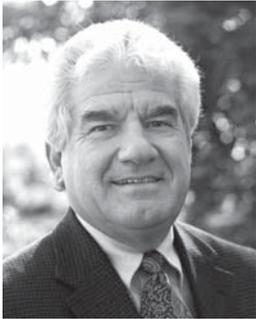
1. Follow Jesus: As an Anabaptist community of the Living Word, we listen for God's call as we read Scripture together, guided by the Spirit. Through baptism, we commit ourselves to live faithfully as Jesus' disciples, no matter the cost.

2. Witness to God's peace: We are called to extend God's holistic peace, proclaiming Christ's redemption for the world with our

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Renewing our commitment to follow Jesus

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



The work of Virginia Mennonite Conference's Restructuring For Mission (RFM) committee is underway. The goal is to enhance VMC's capac-

ity to equip leaders in our Conference and churches "for worship and service and to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to our neighbors" (VMC's mission statement).

The RFM committee met six times this spring. After clarification of our committee's mission, we set guidelines for working together on the Polity Task Force's (PTF) four recommendations:

1. simplify the structure
2. clarify roles, authority and decision-making
3. strengthen the accountability process
4. strengthen unity in mission and spiritual practice (see virginiaconference.org/resources/)

Early on we focused our attention on the role of districts in the Conference. From the PTF's research with leaders and laypersons, it is clear that what districts do and how they work is deeply appreciated. But it's also clear that "one size does not fit all." We have considerable diversity in how districts work and function. In some cases, this is different than what is suggested in VMC bylaws.

How districts work together is different because of different perceived needs, the number of churches and their membership, and the distance between congregations. In some cases, lay volunteers and pastors have to travel a hundred or more miles and/or drive in dense urban traffic. Some districts have a pastoral peer support group, some have considerable lay leadership, and some are led by their oversight leader and pastors.

Correction: On page 4 of the Spring 2018 issue, we printed an incorrect mission statement of Virginia Mennonite Missions. The correct statement is "VMMissions equips the church to share new life in Jesus Christ with neighbors near and far." We apologize for the mistake.

In response to this diversity, and to our commitment to maintain a Conference structure of congregations within districts, the RFM brought two options for conversation and discernment to the delegates this summer. One model details a "ministerial council" approach, a profession-oriented leadership by the oversight leader and pastors.

The second model details a "district council / ministerial-fellowship model," which is similar to the current structure. The intent of both models is to foster:

1. greater pastoral peer support and accountability within Conference
2. more purposeful delegate participation in district meetings to prepare for Delegate Assembly
3. greater flexibility for districts to create structures in keeping with what meets their needs.

Both models require fewer lay volunteers to do the work of Conference administration. Both reflect VMC's intent to have more lay volunteers empowered for involvement in district and congregational missional activities.

The RFM committee believes that we are best served by first reflecting on what districts need from Conference in order for us—together—to live into VMC's missional commitment to follow Jesus, share the Good News, and witness to God's peace in diverse communities.

The committee asks for your continued prayers and participation as we discern how to grow in our ability to be Holy Spirit-led communities of faith. May God's will be done as we seek to follow God.

Conference Council is committed to keeping our new mission statement front and center as we make adjustments to VMC leadership and ministries into the future.

Please participate in this conversation and keep this discernment effort in your prayers.

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DONATE

As we close our fiscal year on August 31 and begin a new year of growing leaders and supporting congregations, we welcome your gift to the Conference. Thank you for the ways you support VMC!

Donate online to VMC:
virginiaconference.org/donate

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Journey Forward and MC USA Sexual Abuse Panel results reported to Constituency Leadership Council

By MARIAN BUCKWALTER

The Constituency Leadership Council, together with Executive Board of MC USA, met at Dock Mennonite Academy in Lansdale, Pa., April 12-14. A highlight for me was worship time each morning, and in particular, worship with Dock Mennonite Academy students during their chapel service.

These students, leaders of the future for many denominations, shared ways God is working in their lives now, and dreams for the future. Inspiring!

Ervin Stutzman, retiring from his position as Mennonite Church USA Executive Director, gave his report centered on what makes him love his job: the people of the denomination. He shared pictures and stories of people throughout the church. On Friday evening, there was a special ceremony in honor of his faithful service. Glen Guyton is the new Executive Director, and was welcomed at the meeting.

Journey Forward, “a churchwide renewal process of engaging in scripture, storytelling and sharing how God is at work in the lives of people and congregations across MC USA”¹ was presented as a process, a living movement, and a discernment tool for the church, not a new document. The writing team and staff created a website providing information and resources, distributed “Renewed Commitments” to



Iris de León-Hartshorn, Associate Executive Director for Operations; Glen Guyton, Executive Director; Leslie Francisco III, Executive Board, Zenobia Sowell-Bianchi, Executive Board; and Ervin Stutzman, former Executive Director, converse in between sessions at the Constituency Leadership Council
Photo: MC USA staff

conferences, and created a study guide available from their website.

Hope was expressed that at Kansas City 2019, inspiring stories of how this Journey is taking root in our conferences and congregations will be shared.

The Mennonite Church USA Sexual Abuse Panel, formed in October 2015, finished their work and shared their report: “Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse

and Non-Credentialed Individuals.” While they began with a particular case, they came to the realization that sexual abuse is prevalent throughout the church and prevention is the number one goal.

Congregations and conferences cannot assume that if sexual abuse happens, they can just make their way as they go. in order

CLC continued on page 4

Pastoral transitions (April to July 2018)

Donald Leedy Brenneman, former pastor at Greensboro, died March 11, 2017.

***Ron Copeland**, former pastor at Early Church, Harrisonburg Va.: ministerial credentials were relinquished when he acknowledged a violation of VMC guidelines for ethical conduct of a credentialed leader.

***Steven Dintaman**, former mission worker, credentials were terminated (disciplinary) after he acknowledged a violation of VMC guidelines for ethical conduct of a credentialed leader, which occurred over six years ago.

Ray Gingerich, formerly associated with Harrisonburg District and member of Community Mennonite Church, died June 17, 2018.

Del Glick ended his role as lead pastor of Washington Community Fellowship; status changed to “active without charge.”

Willis Hunsberger, status changed to retired; former lead pastor at Concord Mennonite Church, Knoxville, Tenn.

C. Norman Kraus, author and professor emeritus of religion, died April 6, 2018.

K. Dawn Monger completed her role at Lindale Mennonite Church, March 18, 2018.

Hubert Pellman, retired pastor at Mt. Vernon and former EMU professor, died March 16, 2017.

Richard Bert Reed, Jr., former pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, license allowed to lapse.

Randolph “Randy” Smith was ordained; he is lead pastor at Mountain View, Hickory, N.C.

Carl Smeltzer, status changed to retired; former oversight leader of the chaplains cluster.

Glenn M. Steiner retired as lead pastor at Brown Memorial.

Isaac Villegas, pastor of Chapel Hill, credentials relinquished to Central District Conference with full knowledge that his credentials were under suspension.

Larry Wilson withdrew his credentials from VMC; he is credentialed with Central District Conference.

Amos P. Witmer retired from his role as ordained deacon at Zion Hill Mennonite, Singers Glen, Va.

Shirlee Kohler Yoder, interim care and visitation pastor at Park View Mennonite, Harrisonburg, Va.

***Note:** the Investigation Team which examines complaints against a person holding ministerial credentials concluded these two investigations.

VMC provides a way for persons affected by the misconduct of any credentialed leader to tell their story in confidence to an ordained female minister by contacting: vmc.ministry.care@gmail.com

lives. Through Christ, God frees the world from sin and offers reconciliation. We bear witness to this gift of peace by rejecting violence and resisting injustice in all forms and in all places.

3. Experience transformation: The Holy Spirit dwells in and among us, transforming us to reflect God's love. Through worship, the Spirit gathers the body of Christ, where our diversity reveals God's beauty. The Spirit empowers our communities to embody the grace, joy, and peace of the gospel.

With the power and authority granted to me in this role as the primary administrative officer, I want to make sure that our policies, procedures, and programs line up with who we say we are and where we say God is calling us.

That is going to take some work, but it is not my work alone. We must accept the power and authority granted to us in the system. Whether we are a conference, committee, congregation, delegate, agency or individual, we are Mennonite Church USA, and there are very specific things that we can and do control within our system.

Part of the problem occurs when we think we can control the actions of others or we think that our actions don't affect the whole. In a community, we must find ways to walk together. That means some of us will need to speed up our pace, others will have to slow down, and all us should be a little uncomfortable. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do great things together as Mennonite Church USA.



Glen Guyton is Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA.

Journey Forward "Pathways" Study Guide available

The "Pathways" Journey Forward study guide invites congregations and groups across MC USA to engage in studying Scripture, singing, praying, storytelling, exploring Anabaptist history and values, and discussing how they see God working in their lives. "Pathways" is designed for use in varying group sizes and for flexible time periods between 4-13 weeks.

Content courtesy of Mennonite Church USA. Download study guide at mennoniteusa.org/resource/pathways-study-guide/

In order to be proactive, policies and procedures must be in place beforehand, and conversations must begin before there is a crisis. This includes addressing such issues from the pulpit.

The Panel calls on us to believe the victim when we are told about a situation. Their challenge for us is this: when we first hear about a situation of sexual abuse, is our first concern about the fallout for the perpetrator—their family, their job, their influence? Or is it concern for the victim?

The Council desires to make our churches places of safety by teaching and walking in the truth that we are all created in the image of God.

The Executive Board asked CLC for guidance on their policy on board and staff appointments. With regard to the board's own appointment to governance structure roles, the board makes these commitments as a matter of policy:

1. The Executive Board will exercise its leadership limited by the boundaries described by the bylaws, church statements, and policies adopted by the delegate body.
2. Because the church is a moral organization involved in discerning matters of faith and life, lifestyle factors that are inconsistent with church statements will be taken into consideration when nominees are presented to the board.
3. The board will appoint, and direct the LDC to appoint, credentialed leaders to governance roles who are in good standing with the conference that holds their credential, and non-credentialed leaders who are members in good standing in their congregations.
4. In their appointments to committee or other volunteer roles in the church, we will expect the national staff to follow the same commitments as the Executive Board.

This was discussed by CLC and voted on at tables. Affirmative results, with some revisions, led to Executive Board unanimously approving the policy.

1 mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/

Marian Buckwalter serves as a representative from Virginia Mennonite Conference Council to the Constituency Leaders Council.

Kratz updates Conference Council on MC USA issues and conversations

By JON TROTTER

Executive Conference Minister Clyde G. Kratz updated Conference Council members on his recent activities at their May 26 meeting. He attended a meeting with other Conference Ministers from across Mennonite Church USA to talk about "how we are going to function in the future and what are some of our basic assumptions."

"In this context, we were clear as executive conference ministers, that Mennonite Church USA should function as a 'federation of conferences.' Each conference will apply the core documents of the denomination in their own settings. Virginia Conference can choose to apply them differently than, say, Central District Conference," Kratz noted.

He said that part of the challenge stems from an assumption that the foundation of Mennonite Church USA was on a federalist model, where everyone would be doing the same thing. Now we are articulating a federation model, which gives us the freedom to ask how we want to apply our core documents within our own constituency.

Kratz provided Conference Council with bios of new MC USA Executive Board members. The new executive director, Glen Guyton, was invited to bring the message on Friday evening at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly in July, and to give a presentation from Mennonite Church USA with a Q&A on Saturday. Michael Danner is a new member of the Executive Board and will relate to Clyde Kratz and other conference leaders as Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality and Engagement.

Kratz shared that a Mennonite congregation currently in Allegheny Conference is conversing with him about possibly joining Virginia Mennonite Conference. These conversations are continuing into the summer and fall.

Kratz gave an overview of some of the events during Conference Assembly in

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Conference Council continued on page 5 July. A new idea this year, as a way to build relationships among the delegates, was a team-building exercise. It is hoped that it will help delegates get to know one another before they sit down and talk together.

Kratz identified three themes that guide his work as a framework for most of his ministry activity: making disciples, addressing difficult issues, and organizational revitalization. Decisions tend to be prioritized on a year-to-year framework, with

very limited strategic thinking about three-year or five-year plans.

“Leadership often responds to the urgent and necessary. As Conference Council transitions to more of a governing body, thinking strategically will become an essential part of our work on behalf of the Conference,” Kratz noted.

Part of Kratz’ role is securing the financial health of VMC. In fiscal year 2018-2019, he will be working with Everence to develop a financial plan for some aspects

of Virginia Mennonite Conference. This Lily-funded project begins with a weeklong seminar at Princeton Theological Seminary, with an emphasis on generating revenue.

Kratz’ goals for VMC include: increasing annual congregational giving to Conference, developing a donor strategy for giving to Conference, and increasing endowment funds.

Jon Trotter is Communications Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Four obstacles to raising \$1M at the Relief Sale

By HARVEY YODER

As a part of an initiative last year to increase funds for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) at the Virginia Relief Sale, some of us came up with a plan to solicit cash donations in addition to the money raised from food and auction sales.

In a moment of madness a year ago, I even suggested we could raise \$1 million, more than double our usual Sale total, by having 5,000 wage-earning attendees (from the over 10,000 total persons who come each year) plan ahead to spend an average of \$200 each at the sale and to add an average of another \$200 as an outright gift. That would, for many, be a doable \$400 offering, less than 1% of their income for most.

Realistically I was quite sure that would never happen, since most would feel they could never afford this much, and thus require others to make much larger investments to achieve a \$400 average. But I remain convinced that we have way more than enough wealth in our community to be able to do that and far more. Compared to the needs of most of the recipients of MCC assistance, we are rich beyond imagination.

As it turned out, the Sharing Our Surplus (SOS) giving table brought in over \$40,000 at the Sale, which many felt was a good start and, in fact, amounted to over 10% of the total Sale money raised last year.

But our community can easily raise multiple millions without it causing any actual hardship on our part. So why is that kind of beyond-the-tithe outpouring of generosity not likely to happen? Here are four possible reasons:

1) **Our sense of personal entitlement:** It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to

persuade people like us to voluntarily give up our power and privilege. We can be motivated to give more generously, but only as long as it doesn’t diminish our assets or reduce what we have saved for a rainy day or for our retirement. But this level of giving will never make more than a dent in world problems like hunger, disease and homelessness. In the Mark 8 account of Jesus feeding the masses, he asks his followers to make available whatever they had, creating a miracle of generosity that not only allowed everyone to have enough but to enjoy seven baskets full of good bread left over.

2) **Our competing spending on wants and “needs”:** At some level most of us are exceedingly generous givers, but we do the bulk of our giving at Walmart, at the local mall, on Amazon, at gourmet restaurants, at local car dealerships and at travel locations near and far. And most of us have dreams of other future investments we want to make as soon as we have the means, a lakeside cabin, new living room furniture, etc., adding to our ever expanding wish lists.

3) **Competing appeals from other good causes:** It’s hard to generate relief funds from congregations when they are raising millions for building programs or trying to pay down debts on past capital projects. Likewise, church-related institutions, like schools and retirement communities, are forever adding to or renovating their facilities at levels that require millions upon millions of dollars.

Compared to the needs of refugees living in tents in the heat of summer and in the cold of winter, appeals for air conditioning and other renovation and expansion

needs that our church-related institutions promote seems to deserve the greater priority. These “needs” are close at hand and involve people and causes we have a greater sense of connection with and loyalty to. Besides, refugee communities don’t have development departments.

4) **Lack of firsthand awareness of needs:** I have no doubt that if homeless refugee families were desperately fleeing into our area from surrounding states and setting up makeshift shelters in nearby fields, we would be mobilizing all possible resources to help them. Seeing real people by the thousands having to live in tents and relying on food and water brought in by outside aid groups would move us to a far different level of response. Or one night spent in such circumstances ourselves due to displacement and the loss of all of our possessions by flood, fire, war or some other disaster would completely change our perspective. But do we have to have something terrible to happen to us in order for God to get our attention?

In light of the four obstacles mentioned, it may take something like the Pentecostal power of a violent rushing wind and of heads on fire with the Holy Spirit to break us out of the grip of our culture of wealth and ease. As someone has noted, the good news is that God has all of the treasure needed to feed and house everyone. The bad news is that God doesn’t normally pry it out of our wallets and our bank accounts.

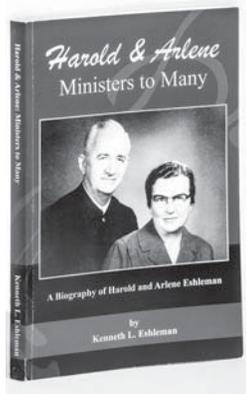


Harvey Yoder is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist at Family Life Resource Center.

Ministers to Many: new biography on Harold and Arlene Eshleman

By ELWOOD YODER

A new and inspiring biography tells the story of a pastoral couple with a deep love for God and the Mennonite Church.



With lives spanning most of the 20th century, Harold and Arlene Eshleman navigated a time of cultural change and adjusted their ministry approaches in each successive era.

Harold Eshleman (1911-1998) supported his family as a public schoolteacher for 43 years, served as a Mennonite pastor and overseer for close to four decades, and had a heart for missions. His wife, Arlene, (1911-2008) was a skilled typist, supportive church worker, and godly homemaker.

Using interviews and well-documented records, Kenneth L. Eshleman's biography of his parents reveals that Harold was an

innovator, perceived to be on the progressive side of issues. In the early 1970s, while pastoring at Park View Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va., he gave up the plain coat and became an overseer in Harrisonburg District. He helped start Mount Vernon Mennonite Church, Grottoes, Va., and dealt gently with Mennonites who changed dress patterns and lifestyles, such as wearing wedding rings, women cutting their hair, and new business involvements during the 1960s and 1970s.

Arlene Heatwole met Harold Eshleman while they were high school students at Eastern Mennonite School during the 1920s. She learned bookkeeping and typing, which enabled her to work in the business world. She supported Harold's church work with the production of bulletins and newsletters and keeping church records.

When Harold was ordained by the lot in 1945, he began as pastor at Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg. Early on he had tension with his bishop, who wanted to put Harold on a calendar system and have him rotate to a different church each Sunday. Harold insisted on settling down in one church, Chicago Avenue.

Harold won out, and that began a process in Virginia Conference of ministers being located in one congregation.

This biography also reveals the tension Harold experienced between teaching in the public school system and serving full time in Christian ministry. When asked to be the pastor at Chicago Avenue, he decided it was best to keep teaching, which he did for more than 40 years. He earned his living by teaching school.

The Eshlemans were committed to missions. Harold served for 27 years on Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions. In retirement, they began to teach, support and help a growing cluster of Laotians in Harrisonburg. The group grew, and the Eshlemans became a favorite and trusted couple among the Laotians.

Libraries and churches should include this inspiring and well-researched 230-page biography in their collections. For a copy, contact the author by email at keshlem@comcast.net.

Elwood Yoder is a writer and teacher from Harrisonburg, Va. See his full review from May 21, 2018, at mennoworld.org

Choir shares the peace of God at thresholds

By MAUREEN PEARSON

VMRC recently welcomed the Blue Ridge Threshold Choir to its campus to minister to residents and families. The choir expresses compassion and comfort through singing to persons who are at the "threshold" of living and dying or on the "threshold" of a challenging illness. The choir consists of 16 local women.

"The group does not want to be considered a 'performing' group, but instead a group that sings at the bedside of people in 'transition' whether that means declining health or actually actively dying," said Mary Glick, choir member. "We sing by invitation only and never send the whole group - usually three to six members."

The choir visits residents who are receiving hospice or end-of-life care or residents experiencing a challenging condition or illness in their rooms or apartments for 15-20 minutes of quiet singing. "My expe-



The Threshold Choir rehearsing in VMRC Detwiler Auditorium with Les Helmuth as a 'resident.'

rience with families of residents who the Blue Ridge Threshold Choir has sung for has been very positive," said Eric Martin, pastoral care chaplain for Supportive Living at VMRC. "They truly do have a ministry of bringing comfort and the peace of God."

The repertoire of songs are simple and generally short, with three-part harmony. The choir is recognized as volunteers by VMRC. "I love singing with this group,"

said Mary. "I've experienced music being of 'therapeutic' value in many ways, and I've always felt that the dying or any threshold experience is a holy moment. Being a part of that is very meaningful to me. We often say as a group that we receive more than we give. It is a blessing for all of us."

"I always come away when I am present at the time they come, feeling moved and blessed to have such a special group in our community who minister to our residents in this way- music touches the soul in a way that only spoken words cannot," added Eric.



Maureen Pearson is the Director of Public Relations & Outreach at VMRC, Harrisonburg, Va.

EMU celebrates centennial year with many events

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

Eastern Mennonite University's Centennial year (2017-18) happened to coincide with a rare celestial milestone—an eclipse visible from coast to coast. While Harrisonburg was not in the terrifyingly-named “Path of Totality” for the eclipse, it certainly was for the Centennial. The vision and excitement provided by the Centennial's commemoration lifted EMU into a kind of new orbit (to carry the metaphor onwards): several innovations graced the Centennial calendar from fall to spring, each of them providing opportunities to reflect on faith, community, hope and the future.

Homecoming and Family Weekend kicked off the year with more than 80 singular events that drew those with ties three and four generations back to join the celebration. A weekend favorite was the packed-house performances of “What we bring. What we take. What we leave.” The play by Ingrid DeSanctis and Ted Swartz, commissioned by the Centennial Committee, featured a cast of alumni actors and musicians, including current students.



The cast of “What We Bring, What We Take, What we Leave” on stage in Lehman Auditorium. Photo by Macson McGuigan

Other new events included a 100K bike ride, the 10 x 10 x 100 art show featuring six artists and their 100 words, each measuring 10 x 10, and The Presidents' Forum, hosted by historian Don Kraybill, with presidents emeriti Myron S. Augsburg, 1965-80; Joseph L. Lapp, 1987-2003; and Loren E. Swartzendruber, 2003-2016, as well as current president Susan Schultz Huxman.

Don Kraybill's *Centennial History of Eastern Mennonite University: A Century of Countercultural Education*, a labor of several years, hit the presses in time for several seminars and talks. (If you love history, you'll enjoy his book, as well as emustories.com, a repository of ten focused historical timelines, as well as alumni and campus stories.)

Fall semester continued with a special Centennial Augsburg Lecture Series featuring an alumni panel speaking about missions experiences, performances of Professor Ryan Keebaugh's commissioned symphony, and a 20th anniversary “DoveTale” benefit show.

Spring semester was enriched by events hosted by the Center for Interfaith Engagement and a weekend of theatrical performances focused on the Israel/Palestine conflict by the Mosaic Theater of DC, which raised several thousand dollars for a scholarship for a female Middle Eastern student to study at the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding.

The April Centennial histories symposium brought together all of the authors of the five Mennonite college and university histories for reflection on the past, present and future of Mennonite education.

The 100th Commencement was a singularly special grand finale. Among the 386 undergraduate degrees and 154 graduate degrees was one unique degree: the university's first honorary doctorate was awarded to alumna and Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee MA '07.

“In one hundred years of EMU's existence, who would have told anyone that a girl from West Africa, a tiny village, a tiny country, who came here to validate and to justify her inclusion in peacebuilding work at the community level would come back several years later as the first honorary degree-awardee?” Gbowee asked.

Her question echoes one that was asked this year as well: Who would have thought a tiny school in the Shenandoah Valley would grow to global influence, prepare thousands for lives of service, and exponentially help to transform the lives



Centennial Commencement speaker Leymah Gbowee MA '07 was honored with EMU's first honorary doctorate. Photo by Andrew J. Strack

of many others around the world? In 2017, ready to launch into a second century of transformative learning, EMU's Centennial year has affirmed the power and worth of its singular Anabaptist-inspired education.

Centennial activities didn't just focus on the past, but included innovative preparations for the future. More than \$3.2 million in funding helped grow and sustain new programs benefiting EMU and surrounding communities, as well as countries around the world. Five new majors and minors have been added to undergraduate offerings, including an aviation program based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A new Doctor of Nursing Practice degree is EMU's first doctoral-level program. And new endowments and scholarships, some grant-funded and others donor-funded, have provided new opportunities for prospective students. The future is bright.

Two recent graduates of the 100th Commencement ceremonies frame that future. First, the parting words of graduate Keyri Lopez-Godoy, who came to the United States from El Salvador when she was eight, and will become a teacher in a local school district in the fall: “Our light has the power to liberate others.”

And also peacebuilder Leymah Gbowee: “Whatever your calling may be, defend peace and justice with your actions, your interactions and your attitude.”



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



Staff from Park View Federal Credit Union and Grant Lehman count coins and bills for My Coins Count at last year's Relief Sale. My Coins Count is an annual program that benefits projects of Mennonite Central Committee and Virginia Mennonite Missions. Photo: Jim Bishop

MDS: Partnering in service ministry

By RICH RHODES

One reality of Christian discipleship is the benefit of partnering with others to accomplish necessary tasks. Mennonite Disaster of Va. has worked together with several churches in responding, rebuilding and restoring hope to individuals affected by disaster, during the past year.

Most localities in the U.S. have churches that have been the center of community life. This has been very helpful in the aftermath of extreme weather events. Churches serve as a collection and distribution point for families and individuals that need essential living items. When rebuilding begins, MDS has often used a part of the local church campus to lodge volunteers and be the base of the reconstruction phase.

After flooding affected the town of Princeville, N.C., Tarboro Baptist Church reached an understanding with MDS that allowed our organization to house workers in its youth facility. Bunk beds were set up in the bedrooms to accommodate more persons. The sewer facilities were modified to allow for a portable shower trailer that was parked near the house.

Another benefit from this partnership was the church's invitation to participate in their Wednesday evening potluck fellowship and the Bible study that followed. This provided meaningful spiritual and physical nourishment, and was helpful in creating Christ-centered unity.

In Lewisburg, W.Va., arrangements were made with Rhema Christian Center to use part of their campus after flooding in Greenbriar County in June 2016. Under the agreement with this church, MDS finished the interior of a large unused area, installed a kitchen, and partitioned off numerous rooms for staff, and sleeping areas for the weekly workers.

We give thanks to the Lord for these partnerships (Philippians 1:3-5). God's kingdom is enhanced and Christ's love is ministered to those in need, while working together.

Rich Rhodes is President of Mennonite Disaster Service of Virginia.

Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale to benefit MCC, other agencies

By LISA LEHMAN

Mark your calendars now for the 52nd Annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale on October 5-6 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. Your favorite foods and activities will be back again. Look forward to the delicious food (including some new options this year), 5K Race for Relief, sporting clay shoot, auction, farmer's market, children's activities, silent auction, craft items, and of course catching up with friends and family.

This year, the sale will benefit the following organizations and projects (in addition to MCC): Roberta Webb Child Care Center—providing childcare for infants through age five, where parents pay based on their income, while allowing them to be employed and productive in the workplace. SACRA (Staunton Augusta Church Relief Association) – provides emergency financial assistance to residents of Staunton and Augusta County in need of help with utilities, evictions, medications, and food. My Coins Count funds will help fund various MCC and VMissions programs.

Donations will be collected for SOS (Sharing Our Surplus) to benefit MCC's

refugee relief around the world. You are encouraged to give above and beyond your regular tithes, offerings, and Relief Sale donations.

Now is the time for you to get involved. Start collecting coins for My Coins Count, finish those projects to donate to the live or silent auctions, form plans to make some baked goods with friends, volunteer with the apple butter boiling, or help with set-up and tear down. There are numerous volunteer opportunities for all. If you have questions about how to get involved, please contact your church Relief Sale representative or email info@vareliefsale.com.

Pictures of auction items, schedule, 5k registration, and more will be on the website, so check for updates frequently. For more information, follow us on Facebook. Sign up to receive a monthly e-newsletter update at vareliefsale.com



Lisa Lehman is Chair of the Relief Sale Publicity Committee and resides in Harrisonburg, Va.

How to recover from an aversion to evangelism

By SKIP AND CAROL TOBIN

“**M**y name is Skip. I am here because I want to recover from an aversion to evangelism.”

This wasn't just a catchy line to begin a workshop entitled “Evangelism Aversion Recovery.” It was an admission that during this last season of life as VMMissions staff persons, both of us have had to work hard at regaining the passion and confidence we have had for sharing the gospel, a passion we have enjoyed at other times and places in our lives. It was an invitation to workshop participants to realize that something is desperately wrong when we encounter resistance within ourselves to sharing the news that has been transforming the lives of individuals and communities in beautiful ways for 2,000 years.

The topic seemed timely for us as members of Virginia Mennonite Conference. After all, how do we “restructure for mission” unless we reconnect with an enthusiasm for the good news that is at the heart of God's mission? And how do we live the assembly theme—God's Kingdom: The 3D Experience—unless we live into the three dimensions of Jesus' life and priorities: his worshipful relationship with his Father (UP), his close relationship with his disciples (IN) and his active compassionate engagement with the lost (OUT).

The fact is, the number of people in our communities who are totally biblically illiterate is increasing rapidly. We are failing to pass on our faith.

Several months earlier, leaders from New York Mennonite Conference had asked us to spend a weekend helping to equip them for “mission across the street.” In our final session, as we reviewed what God had done, several leaders noted remorsefully that they recognized an inner discrepancy: on the one hand a growing desire to share what is clearly life-giving, and on the other hand a deep rooted, long-ignored resistance.

It took the whole weekend to begin to admit that deeply entrenched negative attitudes and excuses are not consistent with the life of a disciple of Jesus.



Skip and Carol Tobin (left) lead their workshop at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly. Beside them are Darrell Wenger, of Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va., and Ben Risser, of Ridgeway Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va. Photo: Jon Trotter

We asked the folks who attended our assembly workshop in Hampton why they had come. Several were quick to own that the very word “evangelism” left a bad taste in their mouths, that they found clichés and overly simplistic gospel formulas distinctly distasteful. Others noted that it was something that they just never did, being fully occupied with “church activities” and having little time or energy left for authentic connections with non-believers. We all admitted that it is challenging to know what to say and that we recoil from examples of insensitivity and overbearing arrogance that are out of character for God as revealed in Jesus.

Participants expressed specific appreciation for the things that we commended to them, all aimed at helping us to reimagine the beauty of partnership with the Holy Spirit in gospel witness.

Carol challenged participants to apply themselves to the significant work of articulating a biblically-faithful gospel to the people in our lives who would be blessed

to hear it, to work at ridding ourselves of clichés and to speak what rings true in our own hearts and experience, and to treasure what is still an unfolding mystery.

Darrell Wenger, from Zion Mennonite Church, told us at the conclusion of the workshop that he felt encouraged to take up that challenge.

We enjoyed sharing what we call **LASI**: It is only after we **Listen** well that we can **Affirm** what we hold in common with one another, which then leads to being able to **Share** what is true in our own experience. Finally, we **Invite** God into the conversation - asking him to do what we can't do, in making himself known.

Given the many opportunities that Maren Hange, in her pastoral ministry at Charlottesville Mennonite Church, is having to listen to the members of her broader community in the wake of the violence earlier this year, she was grateful for our emphasis on listening as the first and fundamental task of engaging with others.

Jennifer Davis Sensenig, pastor of Community Mennonite Church, was grateful for a simple format to use in sharing with others what God has done in our lives. We recommended, and practiced, this format:

1. Identify a legitimate human need that was or is predominant in our life and which serves to motivate us. (examples: love and belonging, approval, meaning, beauty, etc.)
2. Share about the despair, the sin, and shame that occurred/occurs when we try to pursue that need apart from God
3. Describe how God rescued or continues to rescue us, offering us what we need in the context of a relationship with him.

Was there more to cover? Yes, a lot more! Would we like to offer more such opportunities? Certainly. Please be in touch if, like us, you could benefit by some recovery.



Skip Tobin is USA Ministries Director, and Carol Tobin is Asia Regional Director & Mission Advocate for VMMissions.

Virginia Mennonite men in World War I

By ELWOOD YODER

Most of the approximately 25 Virginia Mennonite Conference men who were drafted a hundred years ago in World War One went in as conscientious objectors and ended up at Camp Lee, near Petersburg, Va.



Conscientious objector cooks at Camp Lee, 1918. EMU Archives

Aldine Brenneman, for instance, grew up near Newport News, got drafted in September 1917, and went to Camp Lee where he spent over a year as a conscientious objector. For his refusal to cooperate, Brenneman spent 26 days in the guardhouse. He was harassed, threatened, and finally, near the end of the war, he was furloughed to a farm in Rockingham County, Va.



The Brenneman family, about 1945. From left, Merna, Aldine, Rosalyn, and Sallie Brenneman. Merna Brenneman Shank photo

There he met his future wife, Sallie Hartman, whom he jokingly called his “spoils of war.” Ordained by lot in Virginia Conference in 1932, Brenneman was in a strategic pastoral position to counsel young

men about conscientious objection during the Second World War.

Both my grandfather John J. Yoder and my wife’s grandfather, Jonas Hege, were drafted by Uncle Sam. Though neither were from Virginia, John and Jonas were “absolutists” who refused to put on a uniform, march, or work in the camps, for which they received very harsh punishments. Approximately 2,300 American Anabaptist men took “absolutist” positions in WWI.

In pursuit of alternative WWI stories to the “absolutist” pattern, I took a detour into the Zion Mennonite Church cemetery on a lazy Sunday morning in early June. I knew that Frank Caplinger, from Zion Mennonite Church, had taken care of horses for the U.S. Cavalry during WWI, but I was uncertain whether Frank had served as an enlisted man or worked as a non-combatant. I wondered how and where Frank had fit in.

As I walked through the wet grass to find Frank’s tombstone, I remembered a remarkable statement from 1916 that was written by Virginia Conference ministers before the U.S. entered the war. The ministers had passed a statement at Zion, which opposed entering the war in Europe, and pleaded for exemption for their young men should they be drafted. This forward-looking ministerial statement is in the Minutes book of Conference, but virtually forgotten today.



Camp Lee conscientious objectors in 1918. EMU Archives photo



Frank (1895-1978) and Wilda (1902-1996) Caplinger. James Rush photo

Frank Caplinger had been unique. Raised in the mountains of West Virginia, he attended Valley View Mennonite Church in Criders for a time, but then moved his family to Broadway and was a long term member at Zion. It was when I looked down at the ground in front of Frank’s tombstone that I was startled with an answer to my question. The U.S. military had come to the Zion cemetery after he passed in 1978 and placed a Veteran’s marker in front of his

tombstone, indicating that Frank had enlisted at age 21 and served as a Private First Class in the U.S. Army. After bowing my head in respect and praying for the morning services, I turned and went in the front door of the church, grassy, wet shoes and all.

If you want to learn more about conscientious objectors during WWI, visit the Voices of Conscience traveling exhibit, to be hosted at Eastern Mennonite University, October 1 – November 17, 2018.



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

Hope in a time of change

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Virginia Mennonite Conference is a network of congregations and organizations seeking to live out God's mission in the world.

Our congregations are located in rural and urban settings. Our membership holds diverse views on a range of theological issues and concerns about society. While we are historically a peace church, we have not always known how to achieve unity in relationship with each other over the issues that tend to divide us. At times our focus is on what divides us rather than what unites us. This is the Church in which we are participants, sometimes actively and sometimes passively.

John Roth wrote an essay "The Church Without Spot or Wrinkle" in *Anabaptist Experience*.¹ His essay was presented at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in February 2000, in the midst of the discussions on the integration of the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church. He highlighted two central themes:

1. The principle and practice of church discipline has been foundational to a distinctive Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the church;
2. For virtually all of our 475 year history, the teaching and practices regarding church discipline have been a source of profound disagreements, intense conflicts, and numerous schisms within the Anabaptist/Mennonite Church. He resolved that we needed to embrace both discipline and conflict.

Virginia Mennonite Conference has been navigating a period of time where Conference leadership has exercised discipline. Leaders have not rushed into disciplinary processes, but engaged the disciplinary processes with hope to achieve clarity about conviction and expected behaviors of credentialed leaders.

As the Faith and Life Commission engaged disciplinary processes, new patterns

of conducting investigations of credentialed leaders and lay leaders began to emerge from Mennonite Church USA. There has been uneasiness within our Conference concerning best practices for conducting an investigation into ministerial misconduct.

Each district of our conference has been invited to review and respond to "Navigating Ministerial Complaints." This process provides an opportunity for leadership discernment and transparency concerning protocols and policies for disciplinary matters of credentialed leaders.

While policies and protocols are necessary for our life together, preventive education is also essential for credentialed leaders. Virginia Mennonite Conference partnered with FaithTrust Institute to equip Lonnie and Teresa Yoder to be trainers within our Conference on *Healthy Boundaries*, a form of ethical training for credentialed leaders. The Faith and Life Commission is requiring this training for all active credentialed leaders with a time frame for completion. In addition all newly credentialed leaders will be given a year to conclude the training. In the future Faith and Life Commission will be looking at additional ethical training frameworks for active credentialed ministers.

Conflict is not new to our life together. As we navigate conflictual circumstances, it remains my hope to challenge us and to be challenged about leadership processes that may help us find a resting place with the issues that contribute to the conflict.

I have intentionally utilized the language of "resting place" because some of the conflicts that I am aware of will not be solved as a win-lose scenario or the final solution. At best, the leadership direction is to find a space that we can talk with each other without forcing each other to embrace our view, but be able to live and learn from each other in the future.

I have appreciated reading *Re-imagining The Church: Implications of Being a People In the World* by Robert J. Suderman. A takeaway from my reading is that merely redirecting our focus upon mission will not solve our problems.

A missional vision is deeply concerned with expanding the breadth of influence of

Our goal is to generate an effect leadership model that can serve congregations and credentialed leaders in a way that supports and strengthens their mission.

the people of God in the world, but it is also interested in the scope of challenge that exists within the framework of the people of God. Being a disciple with a missional vision responds to the subject matter that our worshippers and the community in which we reside are grappling over. Their concerns and issues demand our attention from a faith perspective.

A major leadership initiative that is underway is Restructuring for Mission. This task force is looking at how the people of God conduct their communal life as a network of congregations.

I am excited by the way in which the group is seeking to simplify our structure and limit administrative work for districts and conference. Our goal is to generate an effect leadership model that can serve congregations and credentialed leaders in a way that supports and strengthens their missions.

This is not an easy task as old patterns of organization are reconfigured. Our leadership culture, both credential leaders and lay leaders, value the way in which much of our structure has provided stability and predictability. As new patterns emerge, there will need to be acknowledgement that these changes will not be without angst, emotional frustration, and resistance.

The changes that are coming are seen as helping us sustain our Conference into the next decade.

As we look forward, it remains my hope to continue providing leadership to Virginia Mennonite Conference, as we make disciples, discern difficult issues, and revitalize our life together by reshaping the structures that hold us together. It is a missional vision of being the body of Christ.

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

¹ The essay by John Roth is the first chapter in the book *Without Spot or Wrinkle: Reflecting Theologically on the Nature of the Church*, published by WIPF and Stock, Oregon, 2015.



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FALL 2018 MISSIONAL PARTNERSHIP EVENT



N.T. WRIGHT

A SERIES OF PRESENTATIONS ON
"Discerning the Dawn"

NOVEMBER 13-14, 2018 • HARRISONBURG, VA

Tuesday, November 13

7:30-9:00 a.m. • Area Pastors' Breakfast* at
Park View Mennonite Church Fellowship Hall

*Twelve Steps to Transformative Christian Citizenship:
Some Biblical Challenges* (plus Q&A)

11:00-11:45 a.m.

Eastern Mennonite Seminary Chapel at Martin Chapel
The Spirit and the Church's Task (based on John 16:4b-15)

7:00-8:30 p.m. • Keynote at JMU's Memorial Hall

*Signposts from a Suffering World: How God Reveals Himself
Despite Everything*

Wednesday, November 14

10:10-11:00 a.m. • Eastern Mennonite University Chapel at Lehman Auditorium
The Day the Revolution Began: Atonement the Right Way Round

11:00-11:30 a.m. • Post chapel Q&A with N.T. Wright at Lehman Auditorium

7:00-8:30 p.m. • Augsburg Lecture Series Colloquium Address at Lehman Auditorium
Promised Glory: Thinking Straight about God and the World (plus Q&A)

* Register for Pastor's Breakfast at virginiaconference.org/news/nt-wright-fall-event/

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