



N.T. Wright speaks at Eastern Mennonite University's Augsburg Lecture Series on November 14. Wright spoke at a number of events over two days, including a Virginia Mennonite Conference Pastors' Breakfast. Photo: Jon Styer/EMU

N.T. Wright presents series on *Discerning the Dawn* Missional Partnership brings world-renowned New Testament scholar to Harrisonburg, Va.

By KEVIN GASSER

What do you do when you meet a world-renowned scholar of the New Testament? You take a selfie, or at least that's what I did. He assured me, it wasn't his first.

New Testament scholar and theologian, N.T. Wright, provided a series of presentations in Harrisonburg, VA, on November 13 and 14. A collaboration of multiple organizations, stretching across denominational lines, this event attracted crowds of people ranging in age, background, and theological affinity.

Each of Wright's presentations focused on the theme, "Discerning the Dawn," a phrase he frequently used to refer to the

vocation of Christians living on this side of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet each individual presentation could stand on its own, allowing participants to catch any number of Wright's talks without feeling as if they had missed a foundational part of the discussion.

Wright has spent much of his academic career looking at the life and teaching of the Apostle Paul and is often associated with what has been called a "fresh perspective" on Paul. A part of this movement has been a re-reading of Paul through the lens of empire criticism, that Paul and his contemporaries were calling for the early church to live as a community of disciples who saw

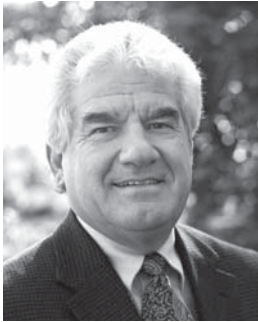
Jesus as their Lord and King. With Jesus as King, no higher allegiance can be offered to any person or organization.

With this background, it was not surprising to hear Wright begin his presentation on Tuesday morning with a call for the church to address the power-wielding officials in our world today. This is, according to Wright, one of the prophetic responsibilities of the Christian. Perhaps this was to be taken as a critique of Mennonite sectarian practices where the church has been content to go along following the teachings of Jesus without offering a challenging word

N.T. Wright continued on page 5

Updating VMC's bylaws to enhance our organizational mission

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



As the New Testament church in Acts 15 grappled with a needed reorganization, VMC is working on that too.

Conference Council, at its November 2018 meeting, approved a draft called *An Overall Design for VMC*, written by the Restructuring for Mission Committee (RFM). The committee will review the latest draft in early January, make necessary edits, and send the document to the delegates for discernment and feedback in our February 2 Winter Delegate Session.

After the delegates meet, RFM will incorporate delegate feedback, send the updated document to the districts for discernment and feedback in the spring, and ask the Constitution & Bylaws Committee to begin drafting bylaws changes for delegate ratification later in 2019.

This project began after Conference Council commissioned the VMC Polity Task Force (PTF) to review VMC polity in 2016. The Task Force's report, submitted to the delegates in February 2018, recommended that Conference: 1) simplify the structure, 2) strengthen the accountability process, 3) strengthen unity in mission, and 4) enhance spiritual practice. The report also recommended that "VMC clearly define itself as a 'conference of congregations.'"

The RFM will submit its report to delegates with a rationale for VMC defining itself as a conference of congregations. VMC consists of congregations that are "a sent people... empowered by the Holy Spirit... that embody discipleship, peace building, service, and mission for the redemption of the world," (*An Overall Design for VMC*, p. 1). The report will also include seven distinct recommendations that reflect the Polity Task Force's report, and VMC's revised mission and vision statements.

I am noting five of the seven recommendations here:

1. To reaffirm and strengthen the Delegate Assembly as the governing board of VMC: providing time for worship and fellowship at its biannual meetings, telling stories and giving witness to district mission endeavors, engaging in group discernment for the good of the faith community, and ratifying Conference Council polity and policy proposals and decision-making (p 2).
2. To strengthen Conference Council as the governing board of VMC: making decisions on behalf of conference delegates, embracing the diversity of conference constituency, having legal and fiduciary responsibility for VMC, and supervising the Executive Conference Pastor (p 3).
3. To clarify Faith Life Commission's duties and responsibilities: promote and strengthen Anabaptist Christian faith and spirituality, guide congregational faith and life, establish the criteria for pastoral credentials, give oversight to congregational and pastoral support and pastoral supervision, and enhance a district culture of missional outreach (p 4).
4. To develop a Ministerial Leadership Credentials Commission (a new entity): with responsibility to determine pastoral credentials; including reviewing and approving candidates for pastoral assignments, and reviewing and determining outcomes of leadership complaints (p 5).
5. To provide greater flexibility for districts to organize themselves to address district needs, mission and goals (p 7).

In summary, Conference Council is committed to evolving a more compassionate organizational polity that embodies the Church of Jesus Christ in our communities for "... the redemption of this world," (p 1.) May we discern our way forward through prayer and gracious engagement.

In this issue:

- 3 Steps toward a vital church
- 4 Pastoral transitions
Our journey through Journey Forward
- 5 N.T. Wright (continued)
Vital church (continued)
- 6 Virginia Relief Sale nets \$370,000

Conference Related Ministries

- 7 NewBridges grateful for earlier vision of Conference churches
Pleasant View, Inc. Dream Endowment Project grant extended
- 8 Women encouraging women... through prayer

Features

- 9 Walking with USA Ministries: "Digging In Together" will be April 5-6 at Shady Oak
- 10 Footprints from the Past: Staying with the denomination: a VMC heritage
- 11 Editorial: A life of gratitude, acknowledging God's providential care

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Steps toward a vital church

Michael Danner, Associate Executive Director of Church Vitality and Engagement for Mennonite Church USA, on vision and initiatives for addressing church vitality

By MICHAEL DANNER

In the Fall 2018 issue of *Pathways*, I introduced myself and told the short version of my faith journey. I also shared some of the commitments I bring to my work with Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) as Associate Executive Director of Church Vitality and Engagement. My title is new and signals the direction MC USA is going.

“Church vitality” signals that the measure of health for MC USA is how our congregations are doing on the ground. Are local churches thriving? Struggling? Do area conferences have the resources they need to support their churches? How are our congregations doing?

“Engagement” signals the way we will do our work. One critique of church leadership at the national/denominational level is that they (we) are disconnected from the realities in the pew.

It’s our goal to do our work by engaging conferences and congregations through listening, then acting in ways that help conferences and congregations accomplish their God-given mission.

My work is taking shape around five broad areas: church planting, wellbeing in ministry, revitalization, faith formation resources, and conference accompaniment/administration. I work with a team broadly referred to as the Church Leadership office. The team consists of Duncan Smith (The Corinthian Plan/wellbeing in ministry), Sue Park-Hur (Denominational Minister for Leadership Development and Transformative Peacemaking), Shana Peachey Boshart (Denominational Minister for Faith Formation), Sandra Shenk Lapp (Administrative Assistant), and Jenny Castro (Women in Leadership).

Church Planting

We are currently working with Mennonite Mission Network to develop resources for church planting built upon the work of the SENT conference. This spring, Mission Network will launch SENT training, a modular

approach to training and equipping church planters. This training will equip both congregations and individuals sensing a call to plant a church. Our ultimate goal is to plant peace churches—especially in places where there is not currently a strong peace church presence. If your congregation has considered planting a church, or you know persons who might be great church planters, please let your conference know. This is one area where you can connect with our work.

It’s [Mennonite Church USA’s] goal to do our work by engaging conferences and congregations through listening, then acting in ways that help conferences and congregations accomplish their God-given mission.

Church Revitalization

For a variety of reasons, a strong number of MC USA congregations find themselves in need of revitalization. This could mean anything from a fresh vision to a complete overhaul of church systems. I am working directly with this initiative, developing resources for pastors and congregations considering their future. There are two components to our approach. 1) transforming congregational systems. The goal is to help congregations shift from a maintenance mode of decision-making to joining what God is doing in the neighborhood. 2) The second component is a framework for a practice-based anabaptist faith. I will visit local conferences, introduce the frameworks, and help folks apply them to their context. This resource will be fully available at MennoCon19 in Kansas City, but also in other formats/locations beforehand.

Wellbeing in Ministry

We believe that pastors must thrive if the church will thrive. Unfortunately,

research of MC USA pastors reveals that pastoring local congregations can be difficult work, often ending in discouragement, burnout, and ministry exits. Our Wellbeing in Ministry initiative identifies five key aspects to creating congregations where pastors can thrive. We’ve done that by noting entry points for most pastoral discouragement and difficulty: pastoral evaluations, health insurance, pastoral salary guidelines, workplace culture, and pastor/congregation relations. Intentionality in these processes can dramatically increase the quality and nature of pastoral work. In 2019, we will launch the Wellbeing in Ministry resources for engaging in these five areas. Representatives will be available to lead workshops during local assemblies, in pastor peer groups, at convention, through webinars/online training, etc. Duncan Smith is an important part of this work through his role as director of The Corinthian Plan, a key aspect of pastoral wellbeing.

Faith Formation Resources

Shana Peachey Boshart is hard at work bringing together all the faith formation resources across our system into one place. She recently launched the Faith Formation landing page on the MC USA website; the page connects with the Anabaptist Faith Formation network and other resources. In early 2019, Shana will also relaunch The Gathering Place. The Faith Formation electronic newsletter is available for all working in faith formation. To receive it, please contact ShanaPB@mennoniteusa.org

Conference Accompaniment/Administration

This area has the least exciting title but makes up much of our work as an office, especially that of Sue Park-Hur and Sandra Shenk Lapp. The primary work in this area is processing Ministerial Leadership Information forms, the primary information-

Vital church continued on page 5

Pastoral transitions (October to December 2018)

Effective January 1, 2019, **Richard K. Early** is transitioning to a half-time associate pastor role at Grace Mennonite Fellowship. **Bradley Kolb** will succeed Rich as lead pastor at Grace, also effective January 1, 2019.

Ross J. Erb, advocacy coordinator at The Collins Center, has moved to inactive status (December 18, 2018).

David J. Gullman is completing his three-quarter time role as pastor of Crossroads Mennonite Church; he will continue ministering as chaplain of Pleasant View, Inc.

Leslie S. Horning completed his role at EMU and is now serving as MCC East Coast Donor Relations Specialist.

Luis Gerardo Martinez completed his role with VMissions, and is now employed in Honduras.

Lana R. Miller transferred from a teaching role at EMU on April 30, 2018, and is now serving as stewardship consultant at Everence, effective May 1, 2018.

Wellington Landis Moyer, retired pastor from TCK District, died October 10, 2018.

Christopher L. Riddle is leading workshops on the use of modern media and faith.

Paula H. Stolfus is the Care and Formation Pastor at Park View Mennonite, succeeding interim pastor Shirlee Kohler Yoder. (Correction from Fall *Pathways*; Paula was not the interim, Shirlee was.)

Credentialed leaders that have moved to “retired” category:

J. Harold Bergey, former oversight leader of Eastern District, on December 18, 2018.

Russell W. Eanes retired from MennoMedia in January 2018.

Mark H. Keller retired from Harrisonburg Mennonite Church on October 31.

Nathan E. Yoder retired effective December 18, 2018.



Our journey through Journey Forward

Reflections from Lindale Mennonite Church’s participation in denominational process of engaging, listening and sharing

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. Learn more at mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/

By OWEN BURKHOLDER

Because the Lindale congregation has had some leadership challenges to work through the past few years, it has connected only minimally with the issues of the broader church.

Jason Kuniholm and I, both interim pastors, spent most of a year working our way through the book of Acts, trying to envision “starting over again.” We finished that study in August 2018, just as Mennonite Church USA launched “Journey Forward” as a way to explore some basic principles that can be foundational for our life together.

Pastor Deb Horst and I thought this would be a great way to move toward next steps in preparation for the coming of a new pastor. We tested this with the elders and the Sunday school class leaders where there was basic affirmation along with some concern.

We then took the four sections of the *Journey Forward* document and gave three Sundays to each section – *Identity and Context*; *Follow Jesus*; *Witness to God’s Peace*; and *Experience Transformation*. We put these sections alongside Lindale’s vision statement: ... RELEASED by Christ,

...EMPOWERED by the Holy Spirit, ...SENT to share God’s love. There were 12 sermons in this series (available at lindale.org/sermons/—beginning Sept. 2, 2018) and the topics were considered in the adult and youth Sunday school classes.

We arranged for five joint sessions where the Sunday school classes met together at the beginning and after each of the three sections. Because our worship service follows the Sunday school hour, the preachers prepared a half-page insert with sermon notes and questions to be considered the following week in Sunday school.

It is fair to say that we used this material essentially for our congregational purposes. It was intriguing to hear one of our preachers say they knew that a congregation in Indiana was considering the same material, so we had some inkling we were not doing this alone. We believe that our delegates to various conference and church wide gatherings will, at the very least, be familiar with the material.

How do we evaluate this? Let’s start with a warning—the sermons were essentially topical and most of them lasted at least 30 minutes!

A key focus of our joint gatherings was storytelling around tables. For example, the buzz was good when we asked persons to share their first memories of being

influenced by the Scriptures. Then, we asked, “What are your affirmations about how we at Lindale use Scripture to inform our life together? (What are we doing well?)” That was followed with, “What could we do better?”

In the *Witness to God’s Peace* section, we invited persons to share around their tables several stories of how individuals have lived out the call to be “people of God’s peace.” People are glad to talk about Voluntary Service and 1-W experiences. And, we asked persons to share about their own journeys of coming to peace with God. It’s easier to give testimony around the tables than in front of a whole group.

In the *Experience Transformation* session, we invited persons to share stories of being transformed by the Holy Spirit—when they were “nudged” by the Spirit to confess, share, confront, pray, etc.

Another learning was appreciation for the sermon note insert in the bulletin—extra work for the office staff and the preachers that also may have encouraged focus. The series also seemed long enough, and we finished in time for Advent.



Owen Burkholder is interim lead pastor of Lindale Mennonite Church, Linville, Va.

N.T. Wright continued from cover

to governing authorities. But it felt more like a call for all Christians, regardless of denominational affiliation, to participate in civil discourse, including in relationships between the church and state.

Frequently citing Psalm 72, Wright reminded his audience that we are to hold leaders accountable, thanking them when they lead appropriately, and critiquing them when they act unjustly. When in such a challenging situation, it is the Spirit of God who will empower the Christian to hold those in positions of authority accountable for their actions. Wright spoke of the sending of the Holy Spirit, not as a “one-off event,” but as a lasting gift that allows the Christian to participate in God’s plan to re-form this world as God would intend for it to be.

Wright encouraged the church to model accountability and dialogue for the world. He noted that civil discourse seems to be on the decline, both in his native Great Britain, and in the United States. Wright blames this decline, in part, for the ever-increasing polarization we see in the world today. As a model for the watching world, we cannot simply use the power of the church to coerce the rest of the world to act with love and justice. Rather, alluding to the Sermon on the Mount, Wright reminds us that power has been redefined. It is the meek, the humble, and the peacemakers who join in God’s kingdom-building initiatives in a way consistent with the ethics of Jesus.

Throughout his presentations, Wright made reference to what he called the “seven signposts from a suffering world.” Draw-



N.T. Wright, New Testament scholar and theologian, with Staunton Mennonite Church pastor Kevin Gasser. Among other venues during his two days in the area, Wright led an Area Pastors’ Breakfast at Park View Mennonite Church entitled “Twelve Steps to Transformative Christian Citizenship: Some Biblical Challenges.”
Courtesy of author

ing from a vast array of academic concentrations, Wright attempted to show how God has been made known through the things that God has created, an area of theology commonly referred to as “Natural Theology.” While Natural Theology has its critics, Wright encouraged us to find God through the things that we can observe with our senses, while also warning us to see these things as pointing to the Creator, and not to fall into the practice of worshipping that which has been created. These signposts,

which include things like beauty, freedom, truth, and relationships, have been broken and require mending. According to Wright, the present reality is worthy of repair, and not to be discarded, as the created world was always intended to point to God and is a part of God’s plan for a redeemed future.

Wright’s presentations were not intended for everyone. His articulation of certain materials plowed to such depths that few, if any, could comprehend everything that he intended to communicate.

Furthermore, some of what Wright has said elsewhere does not necessarily coincide with historical Anabaptist teaching on issues like nonviolence. Yet, as is often the case, I find it helpful to hear from individuals such as Wright who can deepen our understanding of our own faith tradition and cause us to consider how others might be dealing with the same questions we face.

Whether we agree with everything he says or not, N.T. Wright provides a conversation partner who makes us think on a different plane and see a fresh perspective we perhaps have previously never considered.



Kevin Gasser is pastor of Staunton Mennonite Church, Staunton, Va.

Vital church continued from page 3

gathering resource for vetting credentialed leaders within Mennonite Church USA. Everyone entering our system as leaders, and all who are credentialed by an area conference start with the MLI process.

Sue and Sandra also manage MennoData, our database of all credentialed leaders within MC USA (past and present). Our team also spends significant time consulting with area conference leaders about questions relating to MC USA polity and processes, including pastoral misconduct investigations, and other issues.

We do our best to walk with conference ministers/leaders as they attempt to lead

well within the ever-changing and diverse challenges of our work. Our team motto is “Never a dull moment!”

Those are broad sketches of the work that I do and our team does within Mennonite Church USA. There is another whole category called “other;” we are often providing input into other questions/needs that arise within the Executive Board Staff.

My passion is church revitalization. I believe that our culture needs a robust, healthy Anabaptist witness through our churches. I’ll do all that I can to help conferences and congregations meet the challenges faced by our ever-changing contexts.

Editor’s note: *Engage in a day of training and input from Michael Danner in VMC. “Revitalizing Congregations” will be a resource day on Saturday, February 16, from 8:00am to 4:45pm at Shady Oak (Weavers Mennonite Church, 2501 Rawley Pike, Harrisonburg, Va.)*

We encourage pastors and other congregational leaders to participate.



Michael Danner is the Associate Executive Director of Church Vitality and Engagement for Mennonite Church USA.

Virginia Relief Sale nets \$370,000

By JIM BISHOP

The rains came down and the floods came up all summer long in the Shenandoah Valley. But the sun came out as the auction bids went up at the 52nd annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale during the weekend of Oct. 5-6 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds.

Preliminary figures indicate this year's sale raised about \$370,000 for the worldwide relief, service and peacebuilding program of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Last year's effort raised \$360,000 (preliminary), with actual final proceeds of \$393,467.

"Once all expense reports are finalized, we may reach the \$400,000 mark," said Dave Rush of Harrisonburg, relief sale chair. "Each year we generally see an additional \$30,000 coming in after the sale to raise the final total."

from 30 Valley area churches. Area congregations and other groups collected coins and currency in large water jugs for weeks, then brought their containers to the sale for sorting and tabulating by employees of Park View Federal Credit Union.

Lindale Mennonite Church (Harrisonburg, Va.) topped all donors with \$3,753, followed by Ridgeway Mennonite Church of Harrisonburg with \$2,426, and Lynside Mennonite Church in Lyndhurst with \$1,283. The funds will support Latino church planters through Virginia Mennonite Missions, and girls' access to education in Bangladesh through MCC.

This year's "special projects" offering raised \$5,300 to support the Roberta Webb Child Care Center (Harrisonburg, Va.) and emergency financial assistance through the Staunton-Augusta Church Relief Association (SACRA).

For a second year, the Relief Sale board promoted an opportunity to add to the total relief sale giving through a "S.O.S. (Sharing Our Surplus)" campaign spearheaded by local pastor, counselor, and community advocate Harvey Yoder. A special table was staffed by Everence volunteers during the sale for persons to donate money to MCC's war and famine refugee relief. Yoder reported that approximately \$35,000 came in for this initiative.

"While we hoped to exceed the nearly \$41,000 the campaign brought in last year, we deeply appreciate the generosity of over 70 people who contributed," Yoder said.

During the auction, a 79" x 84" 1930's-40's-era feed bag multi-colored quilt that Pat Weaver pieced and quilted took the top bid of \$2,600.

A slant top walnut desk with many drawers handcrafted by Norman Lambert of North Carolina was auctioned for \$6,000.

"Christmas Dreams," a framed and double-matted print by P. Buckley Moss and donated by Darrel Weaver, took the top art bid of \$300.

A gift of 12 monthly flower arrangements by "Flowers by Joy" (Joy Coakley) went for \$1,000.



Ronnie Grove of Sherando, Va., stirs Brunswick stew as his daughter watches. Photo: Jim Bishop

John and Jennifer Murch and their four children of Linville headed up the carefully-orchestrated donut-making operation for the third year, with 16,740 of the confectionary delights sold.

New this year: Demetrio (Chiro) Flores and Lerynitza (Lery) Cruz and their son Demeric Flores of Ponce, Puerto Rico, grilled pinchos, marinated and spiced chicken on a stick served with bread. The family prepared 560 of this Puerto Rican version of the shish-kabob.

Other popular food items included 720 quarts of Brunswick stew made on the premises by members of Springdale Mennonite church in Augusta County, 550 homemade pies, 2,000 barbecued chicken halves, kettle-cooked potato chips, chili, tamales, Mississippi catfish dinners and Indian dishes.

"Every year I'm impressed with the way so many people come together in a spirit of unity, both the volunteer effort and the generous giving to the work of MCC," Rush said. "Through this event, we work together to help others around the world whom Jesus calls us to serve."



Jim Bishop is a freelance writer. He resides in Harrisonburg, Va.



Community Mennonite Church youth worked the hamburger/French fries booth again this year (l. to r.): Helena Nafziger, Emma Swartz, Nina Alabanza, Lucas Swartz, and Cormack Rhodes Lehman. Photo: Jim Bishop

Activities began Friday evening with a barbecued beef dinner, music by Good Company and Cantore - local acapella music groups - and the start of the live and silent auction that resumed Saturday morning and ran through early afternoon.

The annual auction of handmade quilts, wall hangings, knotted comforters and afghans, artwork and wooden handcrafted items accounted for \$115,489 of the total funds raised.

Total funds raised included \$23,541 from the annual "My Coins Count" project

NewBridges grateful for earlier vision of Conference churches

By ALICIA HORST

When churches in the Harrisonburg District of Virginia Mennonite Conference launched NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center in 2000, the local community was growing through new agricultural industries, refugee resettlement, and university programs.

We continue to see community growth with over 50 languages spoken by children in the Harrisonburg school system and almost 20 percent of the Harrisonburg community identifying as Hispanic/Latino. We are deeply grateful for the vision to serve and minister in our community all those years ago.

Our current programs include health-care navigation, immigration legal counsel, Passport applications, and a connection to community resources. We support around 500 people a year, most of whom speak Spanish. Our office is located in downtown



NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center Executive Director Alicia Horst consults with a client. Courtesy of Alicia Horst

Harrisonburg, within walking distance of the courts and other government buildings.

This past year brought changes to migration processes for many members in our community. Our team supports families experiencing these changes, discerning

how best to move forward to keep families together. We are encouraged by the interest and energy of several local church volunteers who provide transportation for those traveling regularly to Northern Virginia for immigration appointments.

We welcome your ideas, questions, and prayer. And we are glad to meet with immigrant families worshipping in your churches and living in your neighborhoods.

May we be blessed with deep wisdom for the journey ahead.



Alicia Horst is Executive Director of NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center, Harrisonburg, Va.

Pleasant View, Inc. Dream Endowment Project grant extended

By PAM MILLER

Pleasant View, Inc.'s newly revised mission is to support "individuals who have disabilities in living out their goals for meaningful work, relationships, and spiritual development." When we received Richard and Helen DeButts' estate, our board of directors designated the Dream Endowment to encourage employee-initiated "dream" projects that support our mission. Each year, grants are awarded for projects, such as the "Jars of Clay" project submitted by Pleasant View's Pastor Dave Gullman.

"Jars of Clay" encourages spiritual development for people with developmental disabilities as well as increased community involvement in our local Faith and Light

services. As part of the project, Pastor Gullman and those on the planning committee reached out to area churches, colleges, and organizations to invite participation in a monthly meal before attending the Harrisonburg Faith and Light prayer meetings. Through the meals and fellowship, long standing relationships were strengthened and new relationships forged.

The last weekend in June 2018 the Shenandoah Faith and Light Communities of Harrisonburg and Broadway came together for a weekend retreat at Camp Brethren Woods. The retreat was the culmination of the six-month project Pastor Gullman proposed.

Funding came from the Pleasant View, Inc. Dream Endowment.

Each Faith and Light Community welcomes individuals with disabilities and their families and friends; it is a place where each person is accepted and valued. The services generally last an hour, and include time for prayer, sharing, and celebrating each person's gifts. Faith and Light is not intended to take the place of one's local church, but rather add to the faith community.

With the "Jars of Clay" grant from the Dream Endowment extended, we will hold another Faith and Light retreat at Camp Brethren Woods June 21-23, 2019. We invite you to expand your faith community and attend a Faith and Light service. For more information, contact Dave Gullman at 540-433-8960. Keep informed about meeting places and times through Pleasant View Inc.'s Facebook or website event pages.



Pleasant View residents, caregivers, and others enjoy a retreat at Camp Brethren Woods in June 2018, as part of the "Jars of Clay" project to encourage spiritual development with funds from the Pleasant View, Inc., Dream Endowment.

Courtesy of Pam Miller



Pam Miller is Development Director of Pleasant View, Inc.

Women encouraging women...through prayer

A new Mennonite Women of Virginia event introduces new format, date and invitation to Hispanic sisters

By GLORIA L. LEHMAN

Mennonite Women of Virginia touches lives throughout Virginia and North Carolina every year by gathering for prayer and raising funds to bless women around the world—a tradition for 68 years!

Known formerly as “Annual Missions Day,” the current Mennonite Women of Virginia (MWV) executive committee envisions a new format for the meeting and a new date. Traditionally, the annual missions day was the first week of May, around the date of the National Day of Prayer, but busy spring schedules for women reduced attendance in recent years.

All women of Virginia Mennonite Conference are invited to attend “Women Encouraging Women...through Prayer,” Thursday, Feb. 21, 2019, 6:00 p.m. (inclement weather date: Feb. 28), hosted by the women of Ridgeway Mennonite Church, 546 Franklin St., Harrisonburg.

The MWV executive committee also desires to make this gathering a welcome place for our Hispanic sisters, so all parts of the gathering will be spoken in both Spanish and English.



Grazia Hernández
Courtesy of Gloria Lehman

As we gather for encouraging women in word, song and prayer, Grazia Hernández will lead songs in English and Spanish. Grazia teaches Spanish at Eastern Mennonite School.

Veronica Sanchez will share her story. She and her husband, Armando, are pastors of Enciende una Luz Church in Harrisonburg and planting a Hispanic church in Waynesboro.

Angelina Pardini will share her story. She served in Jordan in 2018 with

First we will enjoy a cross-cultural buffet as each congregation brings a bountiful dish to share with our sisters.

As we gather for encouraging



Veronica Sanchez
Courtesy of VMissions

the VMissions program, E3. Angelina attends Eastside church.

A time of guided prayer for sisters around the world lifts up the ministries of VMissions workers as they serve God and touch lives around them. Then the ‘fun’ of raising funds

begins—individuals and women’s groups ‘take’ an item to cover with funds, and those gifts are sent to the workers as our expression of love and care for them.



Angelina Pardini
Courtesy Facebook

Join us for this event of prayer, blessing and encouragement as Hispanic and Anglo sisters. If you come from a distance to this gathering in Harrisonburg and need overnight lodging, please contact Gloria Lehman, 540-421-2122.

Gloria L. Lehman is president of Mennonite Women of VA. She resides in Singers Glen, Va.

Want to make sure the women in your congregation don’t miss out on Mennonite Women of VA events? Please send the name and email address of a contact woman to glorialehman67@gmail.com

SAVE THE DATE! RESERVEN LA FECHA!

Mennonite Women of Virginia Event
Evento de Mujeres Menonitas de Virginia

**Women Encouraging Women
...through prayer
Mujeres Apoyando Mujeres
...A travez de la Oración**

(formerly known as Annual Missions Day)
(antes conocido por Día Anual de Misiones)

Thursday, February 21, 2019
Ridgeway Mennonite Church
6:00 pm

Jueves 21 de febrero 2019
Ridgeway Mennonite Church
6:00 pm

The MWV is already planning this annual event – but some changes are in the works! Note the change in date! As always, our focus remains on supporting mission workers of VMC, but we also want to look at various ways to provide support. We will hear from several women who have been involved with mission work directly, and will wrap up the evening with the mission auction, where you have the opportunity to financially support a mission need of your choosing. Come one, come all! This event is not just for sewing or quilting groups – it’s for all women who attend VMC churches. It will also be presented both in English and Spanish. More details to follow – but keep this date open so you can be part of this inspiring event.

Call Gloria Lehman for more information:
540-421-2122

El MMV (Mujeres Menonitas De Virginia) ya está planeando este evento anual - ¡pero hay unos cambios por venir! Noten el cambio en la fecha. Como siempre, nuestro enfoque es en apoyar trabajadores misioneros de VMC, pero también queremos ver diferentes maneras de proveer apoyo. Estaremos oyendo de varias mujeres que han estado directamente involucradas con el trabajo misionero. Terminaremos nuestro tiempo juntas con una subasta, donde tendrán la oportunidad de apoyar económicamente una necesidad misionera de su escoger. ¡Venga una, vengan todas! Este evento no es solo para grupos de coser, es para todas las mujeres que atienden las iglesias de VMC. Todo sera presentado en ingles y español. Hay más detalles por venir, pero mantenga ésta fecha abierta para que pueda ser parte de este evento inspirador. Llame a Gloria Lehman para mas información: 540-421-2122

“Digging In Together” will be April 5-6 at Shady Oak

Mennonite Mission Network staff member Joe Sawatzky will facilitate a group Bible study on *What is the Gospel?: An Exploration of Luke and Acts* for congregational and youth leaders

By JOE SAWATZKY

I am very excited to be “Digging In Together,” by studying the Bible with congregational and youth leaders of VMC on the theme: *What is the Gospel?: An Exploration of Luke and Acts*. This resourcing event will be April 5 and 6, 2019.

As Church Relations Representative for Mennonite Mission Network, my hope and objective is for leaders to gain insight into the meaning of the gospel and inspiration to witness to the gospel. There will be two thematically identical events, one on Friday and one on Saturday. The Friday event is geared for credentialed leaders and congregational lay leaders. The Saturday event is for those who work with youth, such as youth pastors, youth workers, and MYF leaders.

After some introductory comments on the structure/shape of Luke and Acts, we will study key texts which include, in or around the texts, occurrences of the word “gospel” or “good news” (Greek: *euangelion*), in order to identify distinct accents and common themes. We will study in small groups (4-5 persons), reading each text through the lens of the question, What is the gospel? A time of brief reporting from each group to the larger group will follow, in which we gather the main themes from our conversations.

I will facilitate this process, making connections between themes and with the larger biblical story, toward a concluding statement on the meaning of the gospel from the passages at hand, a kind of summing up. We will repeat this process throughout the day. Visit <https://bit.ly/2QgCjlf> to register.

My background

The conviction that God speaks to us through the Scriptures, and that all people can hear and respond to the good news of Jesus Christ has formed my life and mission.

As a child, I absorbed the world of the Bible and the wonder of God in the settings of home and church, through parents,



ABOUT JOE

Married to Anna
 Sons Isaac (16); Moses (13); Levi (11); Jesse (9)
 Resides in Goshen, Indiana
 Education: MTh., University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (in process, awaiting official feedback); MDiv., Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (2005); BA History, Bethel College, North Newton, KS (2001)
 Served through Mennonite Mission Network in South Africa, 2006-2014

grandparents, and other faithful witnesses who told the story in word, song and symbol. As parents, Anna and I seek to transmit that devotion to our children: in praying the Psalms at bedtime; in the memorization of scripture; in hanging ornaments on our “Jesse tree” each Advent as we anticipate, in story, the coming of the promised Messiah.

Similarly, as a child, I knew that a generations-old legacy of pastoral and missionary service lived in my family tree—a calling first pondered, then embraced in my college years.

While working on staff at a church camp, I met Anna, the child of Mennonite missionaries in Ireland with a desire to serve in Africa. After marriage, we prepared for ministry at Anabaptist Mennonite

Biblical Seminary, where I pursued my pastoral degree with a concentration in mission and evangelism, with an eye to teaching the Bible in Africa.

Following seminary, we worked with Bethany Bible School, a longstanding leadership development partnership between North American Mennonites and African Initiated Churches in South Africa. There I encountered a world of spirit—of power, dreams, sacrifice, and celebration—in which the word was indeed “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12).

I cannot escape that world, nor forget the presence of its God, even as I search for meaning in the loss of its unique intensity and joy in these years of my return to North America. Perhaps this explains my interest, as I put it in my dissertation, to develop an “Anabaptist-Pentecostal vision” which sees as one indissoluble whole ethics and experience, Spirit and Word.

As it was my delight to engage the biblical story with African church leaders, so it will be my privilege to explore the meaning of the good news with the pastors of Virginia Mennonite Conference. Together, through a combination of input and small and large group study, we will aim to hear what “the Spirit is saying to the churches” through key texts in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles (Rev 2:29).

Joe Sawatzky is Church Relations Representative for Mennonite Mission Network

Schedule for “Digging In Together” April 5 and 6, 2019 • 9:00a - 3p

Welcome and Introductions
 Overview of Structure of Luke
 Small Group Study: Luke 4:14-30
 Small Group Reporting, Summing Up
 Small Group Study: Luke 14:15-24
 Small Group Reporting, Summing Up
 Small Group Study: Luke 20:9-19
 Small Group Reporting, Summing Up
 Lunch
 Brief Overview of Structure of Acts
 Small Group Study: Acts 8:26-40
 Small Group Reporting, Summing Up
 Small Group Study: Acts 14:8-18
 Small Group Reporting, Summing Up

Staying with the denomination: a VMC heritage

By ELWOOD YODER

What does a letter buried in an Indiana archive have to do with questions about staying in Mennonite Church USA today?

Quite a bit, I'd argue. The letter, which I found in our denominational archives eight years ago, reveals that some of the earliest Virginia Mennonite leaders believed in the value of a church-wide association of congregations. (Upon finding the letter, I had a little party of one by the copy machine in the lobby!)

Since then, I've discovered more stories confirming that in each era, Virginia leaders have spoken for, written about, and defended the value of staying with the denomination. Please consider these brief vignettes that may speak to the present day:

1853: That thin and yellowed letter in the Indiana archive came from the pen of Virginia Mennonite Bishop Martin Burkholder. At age 36, he wrote a letter to a Pennsylvania bishop friend, and asked that he and other ministers in Lancaster Conference consider helping him create a general conference of Mennonites.

Burkholder and Bishop Samuel Shank Sr. made several circuit trips to Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, and Canada, asking for a general conference to be formed, but to no avail. After Bishop Martin Burkholder passed away a few months before the Civil War began, decades passed before his vision for a Mennonite association of area conferences came into being.

The great irony of my search in libraries and archives along the East Coast and then finding the letter in Indiana, 157 years after it was written in the Shenandoah Valley, is that having a national archive is one outstanding rationale for staying with a denomination long-term.

1897: A year before the Mennonite

Church got organized in 1898, Virginia Bishop Lewis J. Heatwole traveled to Elida, Ohio, for preliminary meetings. He and other ministers like Christian Good and Samuel M. Burkholder went to see what was happening, and to report back to leaders in Virginia.

L. J. Heatwole faithfully traveled to the early meetings of the Mennonite Church and kept Virginia Conference informed about wider church developments. With L. J. Heatwole's clear leadership supporting participation, Virginia Conference joined the Mennonite General Conference in 1911.

1919: When Virginia Mennonite Conference met a year after World War I ended, it adopted eighteen fundamentals of faith. Conservative in nature, the articles were adopted—almost word for word—two years later by the Mennonite Church. Virginia Conference's action, adopted at my home congregation in Broadway, Virginia, on October 18, 1919, held significant influence and sway on the Mennonite Church for nearly two generations.

1942: When critical ministers urged Virginia Conference to leave the Mennonite Church during World War II, Bishop John L. Stauffer reacted strongly. Though some thought the broader church had become too liberal, Stauffer stated that Virginia needed to stay and not leave. Bishop Stauffer, then President of Eastern Mennonite College, had significant churchwide experience, and he urged the Conference to stay in the denomination. Stauffer's voice, along with others, won the day.

1981: Ruth Brunk Stoltzfus waited patiently to speak at the Mennonite Church Convention in Bowling Green, Ohio. The hot topic was whether women could be involved in ministry. Her speech at an open microphone stirred many, and helped to create action in the direction of accepting

women in leadership.

Virginia Bishop Glendon Blosser ably and gladly served as Moderator at the 1981 Bowling Green Conference, the seventh of eleven Virginia Mennonite leaders to serve as moderator of the denomination.

1997: My wife and I took our family to Orlando, Florida, for the Mennonite Church General Assembly in the summer of 1997. While our three young children enjoyed the fun times for kids and we soaked up the Florida warmth, I served as a delegate from Virginia Conference. We took our kids to Disney World after the Mennonite Church made proactive plans to integrate with the General Conference. Owen Burkholder served in 1997 as both denominational moderator and as Virginia Conference Minister, the lead executive staff position.

2019: In some ways, today's issues are different than in the past, but in other ways quite similar. I teach history and Bible to descendants of Bishop Martin Burkholder, whose letter I found in Indiana.

I try to help them understand the high value their ancestor held in organizing a general conference. I will also take a bit of Bishop Burkholder's spirited vision with me when I serve as a delegate at the 2019 Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City.

My reading of Virginia Mennonite Conference history is that at each turn in the road of divisive issues, key leaders in Virginia Conference have spoken in favor of participation in the wider denomination. Such is the direction I would urge today.



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



Mennonite Church USA Convention — July 2-6, 2019 — Kansas City, Missouri

#MennoCon19 will be an engaging experience for everyone! Adults and youth will gather at the Kansas City Convention Center to worship together and be equipped with valuable knowledge and resources to take home.

Learn more at convention.mennoniteusa.org/

A life of gratitude, acknowledging God's providential care

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



I am a country music fan. So recently, when I had the privilege of being in Nashville, I attended the Ryman Theatre and heard the Del McCrary Bluegrass Band.

The following night, I went to the Grand Ole Opry, where I heard John Conlee sing one of his classic songs: *Rose Colored Glasses*. The chorus of the song is:

*But these rose colored glasses
That I'm looking through
Show only the beauty
'Cause they hide all the truth*

A study of depression and human behavior found that modeling gratitude helps overcome depression. The opposite of gratitude is ingratitude. It takes seed in bitterness, is demonstrated with resentment, and arrives in misery.

In 2015, Martin Copenhaver, wrote in *The Christian Century*:

"No one is born thankful. Thankfulness doesn't come naturally to us, and sometimes it doesn't come at all. Rather, thankfulness is a quality that must be fostered and nurtured. Otherwise, we may find ourselves and our children being like the TV character Bart Simpson, who when asked to give thanks at the family meal says 'Dear God, we bought all of this stuff with our own money, so thanks for nothing.'"

In a religious community, there are, of course, occasions for thanksgiving in our life together. Much of this comes from Scripture itself. In the Psalms we find many songs of gratitude and thanksgiving. We discover that God is the object of affection and the reason for gratitude. It is expressed back to God. The Psalms tell of God's providential care in adversity, in victory, and in prosperity. They recognize that God is a major provider in all that is good and right.

When we survey the New Testament, we also discover that first-person witnesses in the Gospels give thanks for Jesus' ministry. It reshaped their way of knowing God and living in the world.

The apostle Paul thanked God continually for what was happening by the power of God (Romans 1:8; 7:25). Gratitude lies at the heart of biblical faith. It forms the only proper response to what had happened in history—namely, God's salvation of his people.

In an article on gratitude, Paul J. Achtemeier, New Testament scholar and professor at Union Presbyterian Seminary, noted:

"When early settlers arrived on the shores of this new land in Massachusetts and Virginia, historians discover practices of these early settlers to set the stage for folklore about thanksgiving. People experiencing hardship took time to offer gratitude to God.

Ironically, both George Washington, during the American Revolutionary War, and Abraham Lincoln, during the Civil War, called for a day of thanksgiving. It was Lincoln who instituted the national thanksgiving holiday that we continue to celebrate today. But I want to note that it was in hardship that our national leaders proclaimed a day of thanksgiving."

Diane Butler Bass, a noted theologian, was fired from her job. She was distraught and unable to regroup. She talked with a friend who encouraged her to develop a "gratitude journal" and each day write one statement of gratitude. She found it extremely difficult at first. But as she disciplined herself to think and write about the good that was around her, she discovered after a month of writing that she was unable to stop at just one good thing each time she wrote. All of a sudden, she was writing two or three things that gave her a sense of gratitude.

As a faith community, in the tradition of the people of God, we give thanks to God in all circumstances. Listen to the apostle Paul's letter to Colossians 3:12-17:

"As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion,

kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in

all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

C.S. Lewis observed that grateful people are emotionally healthy people. Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible.

John Updike believed that cultivating and practicing habits of gratitude deepens the experience of gratitude over the years: "Aging calls us outdoors...into the lowly simplicities that we thought we had outgrown as children. We come again to love the plain world, stones and wood, air and water...The act of seeing itself is glorious, and of hearing, and feeling and tasting."

I challenge each of us begin this new year by demonstrating gratitude and thanksgiving. It is our call to faithfulness in all seasons of life.

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

Gratitude lies at the heart of biblical faith. It forms the only proper response to what had happened in history—namely, God's salvation of his people.

Thank you!

I want to express my gratitude to God for the ways that many have supported Virginia Mennonite Conference through prayer, finances, and service throughout the past year. —CGK

Glen Guyton

“My Journey; My Ideal”



Glen Guyton serves as the Executive Director for Mennonite Church USA. He has over a quarter of a century of experience serving in the denomination at various levels. After the completion of four years as an officer in the United States Air Force, Glen felt the call to ministry, which was in large part due to the peace ministry of Mennonites in Virginia Mennonite Conference. After leaving the military, Glen worked for Mennonite Mutual Aid (now Everence), and on the ministry staff of Calvary Community Church (C3) in Hampton, Va. Glen and his wife, Cyndi, live in San Antonio, Texas. The agenda for this event is a 35-40 minute lecture from Glen and a time for questions from the audience. Lindale Mennonite Church is the host church for this lecture.



In addition to the Lecture, Glen will speak to EMS students January 24-25, 2019, and all are invited to his two chapels, 9:30-9:49 AM each morning, in the school auditorium.

Thursday, January 24, 2019

Free public lecture at Lindale Mennonite Church

6255 Jesse Bennett Way, Linville, Va.

7:00 P.M.

All are welcome

*17th Annual EMS Kennel-Charles
Anabaptist Lecture*

Virginia Mennonite Conference & Eastern Mennonite School

