

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

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Walking where Jesus walked, as Jesus walked

I joined a delegation from Eastern Mennonite Seminary to Palestine because what I was reading—both in newspapers and in e-mails from friends in the region—had become too difficult to grasp without experiencing it myself. I expected the geography of both scripture and headlines to impact me with new insights into both.

Words like “occupation,” “curfew,” and “checkpoint” may sound relatively innocuous on the printed page. It took the sound—the steel-on-pavement jackhammer sound—of Israeli tanks rolling through the city streets during our first night in Bethlehem to even begin to understand the daily intimidation of occupation.

The arrival of the tanks signaled the beginning of four days of curfew. Curfew does not mean home before dark—it means that soldiers are authorized to shoot anyone they see in the street, day or night. As Americans, we were able to negotiate with the soldiers to allow us to carry out our work at Christmas Lutheran Church. They reminded us, however, that they were making an exception for us, and that the Palestinians would never normally be allowed such liberties.

American privilege also blunted our education regarding checkpoints. A system of fences, Israeli-only roads, and checkpoints serve to carve up Palestine into cantons resembling the Bantustans of apartheid South Africa. Palestinians must apply for permits to travel from one zone to another. Then, they must wait in long lines to pass through checkpoints where they must often submit to humiliating searches. As Americans, we were able to make special arrangements and pass through with little trouble. But for our Palestinian tour guide who lives in Jerusalem, the six-mile trip to Bethlehem to visit his parents could take hours.



Ryan Beiler

Yet in the face of such daily struggle, Palestinian Christians find hope. Christmas Lutheran Church, led by Rev. Mitri Raheb, is building a center for education in art, music, and media with support by foreign donors. As the second-largest employer in Bethlehem, Rev. Raheb believes the church has a vital role in the community.

Though not from a historically pacifist tradition, he has come to see nonviolence as the only truly Christ-like response to the situation faced by occupied Palestine. This is his vision: “Imagine the future artists, musicians, and journalists of Palestine being challenged by ideas of nonviolence and articulating them creatively to their community.”

Charlie Haddad, headmaster of the church’s school, promotes similar ideals in the classroom. His school is teaching Palestinian children—Muslims and Christians—how to resolve conflicts nonviolently. A sign in one hallway reads, “Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent.”

His suggested response for the indignities of curfew: “What if we just all decided to go outside all at once—they can’t shoot all of us.”

Delegation members David Kreider (Harrisonburg, Va., Community Mennonite Church) and Susan Balzar (Hesston, Kan., Hesston Mennonite Church) negotiate with an Israeli soldier to allow the group to unload a truckload of donated furniture during curfew.

continued on back page

Winding roads have destinations, too

It all began with a proposal. “Would you like to be married to a preacher?” I asked.

She answered with another question. “Would you like to be married to a missionary?”

The answers were “yes” and Earlene and I soon began our married life together.

That was 31 years ago.

Actually, we could find the roots of our lives’ directions much further back than that. Both our families loved the Lord and the church encouraged involvement from a young age. We both had grandfathers who were bishops. We both had missionaries and ministers in our extended families. We both felt drawn to the mission of the church while children. Maybe our lives’ directions were set from our mother’s wombs.

Perhaps. But it didn’t always seem so along the way. I was shy. Earlene was uncertain about the demands placed on families in ministry situations. I was intimidated by preaching. We thought about graduate school in social work and ended up in seminary. We thought we would go to Associated Mennonite Bible Seminary and ended up at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. We moved to North Carolina and then ended up beginning our pastoral work in Northern Virginia. When we first heard a specific invitation to the mission field Earlene said “yes” and I said “no.”

I’ve been to Kansas. When you want to go some place, you go straight there. In my corner of Virginia, on the other hand, you may go down a street that seems to arbitrarily change its name, wind over a hill, go around a barn, and change compass directions several times. To go one direction, you may have to begin by going another.

Such has been our experience of God’s leading. It has often been a circuitous path, more like Virginia than Kansas. We haven’t always seen most clearly at a specific moment. We’ve never doubted that God has



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

a will and way for his people. We’ve seldom doubted that God’s will and intentions included us. We’ve just not always known clearly what he is up to.

But through these years we’ve observed some other things too. God is not just out there somewhere at journey’s end. We meet him in the twists and turns of life. God’s will is not just the goal of life, we walk with him in life. We may find God as much in our search as in our success, in our struggles as in our triumphs.

So, we’re learning some lessons. Walk through open doors. Don’t burn bridges behind you, they may be needed again. Backing up isn’t always bad, especially when that is where you need to go. Winding roads have destinations too.

Along the way, we have enjoyed the journey-and God’s company. We expect no less in this next venture as well.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Loren Horst". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Pleasant View honored by Taste of the South

Pleasant View, Inc., a non-profit organization which serves adults with developmental disabilities, has been chosen by Taste of the South as the charity recipient of 2002. Taste of the South is an organization made up of current and former southern Congressional staffers and hosted by a committee of southern members of Congress. This organization raises thousands of dollars each year for charities in the southern United States. Pleasant View, Inc. is the first Virginia organization in 20 years to be selected as the beneficiary of the Taste of the South's fundraising.

On June 5, Nancy Hopkins-Garriss (Executive Director), Rosa Bare (Public Relations and Fundraising Coordinator), and Dr. Ken Showalter (Board of Directors Vice President), met with Congressman Bob Goodlatte, Senator John Warner, and Senator George Allen on Capitol Hill and attended a Congressional Reception in honor of Pleasant View, Inc. On June 8, an invitation-only gala of 2,300 guests was held in Washington, D.C. to honor Pleasant View, from which a large portion of the proceeds will be given to Pleasant View.

The money raised by Taste of the South will help Pleasant View's expansion plans for its Day



Courtesy of Rosa C. Bare

(L-R) Nancy Hopkins-Garriss, Executive Director of Pleasant View; Rosa C. Bare, Public Relations & Fundraising Coordinator, Pleasant View; Julie Hooks and Jeff Miller, chairpersons of the Virginia Committee for Taste of the South.

Support Programming Services, in which clients learn social, academic, job-training and pre-vocational skills. A check presentation was anticipated for late June, when Congressman Goodlatte would present Pleasant View, Inc. with the money raised by Taste of the South and its representatives.

"I wanted to pick a charity that would be most affected by a large donation—a charity that could really make an impact... I wanted to give to my hometown," said Jeff Miller, chairman of the Virginia Committee and a graduate of Broadway High School and Bridgewater College.

• Rosa C. Bare
Pleasant View, Inc.

Youth workers meet for lunchtime conversation

A year ago, Conference Youth Minister Kimberlee Greenawalt began meeting with youth workers over lunch simply to provide opportunity to talk about their ministry. These monthly gatherings were attended by youth workers who were paid by their congregations and conversation often focused on such topics as salary, administration, fundraising efforts, and other joys and struggles.

Greenawalt has now opened these luncheons for broader participation. All junior and senior high youth workers in the Harrisonburg area—paid or volunteer—are invited to attend and participate in the conversations.

"It's low-key," said Greenawalt. "There's no pressure, no agenda." Greenawalt doesn't even know in advance who will attend. The youth workers simply gather together to discuss issues related to youth ministry. The participants talk about what is happening within their group and their individual youths' lives. They share ideas, discuss planning for



Rachel Smith

Dana Blauch (Harrisonburg Mennonite), Kimberlee Greenawalt (Conference Youth Minister), and Amy Rush (Zion Mennonite) enjoy fellowship and conversation over lunch at Spanky's in Harrisonburg on June 11.

the Atlanta 2003 Mennonite Youth Convention, and compare policies to increase consistency among the churches. The conversation frequently results in increased collaboration between congregations as they plan projects and activities.

For more information about the August luncheon for youth workers, contact Kimberlee Greenawalt at 540-434-9727 or e-mail gkimberlee@aol.com.

• Rachel Smith

A little church with a big heart

The congregation is small, but their love is big. These are the words I would use if asked to explain why I have traveled 45 minutes to church nearly every Sunday since I arrived in the Shenandoah Valley to attend Eastern Mennonite University. I became acquainted with Big Spring Mennonite Church in Rileyville, Va., through the work of God and friends. Looking back, I cannot imagine my college experience—I cannot imagine my life—without the love of Big Spring Mennonite.

Sara Ulrich

Now that I have been out of school for a year, I wonder if it is time for me to continue on this journey we call the Christian Walk and leave my home at Big Spring Mennonite. The thought is nearly unbearable because these are the people who have taught me what it means to be “family in Christ.” These are the people who have opened their hearts and homes to me. These are the individuals whom I have grown to love and who so openly encourage and challenge me to be a woman of faith every day.

Living far from my family in Nebraska, the people at Big Spring Mennonite have seen me through the struggles of faith and life that one encounters every day. They blessed me as I moved to Washington, D.C. for a year; they rejoiced when I returned from summer vacations; they cried tears of joy, fear and anticipation with me as I prepared to travel to the Middle East. They have faith in my abilities and encourage me with praise. They know me, and I know them.

Omar is always good for a debate. Kevin shares my passion for Palestine and Israel. Sue gives me health advice (and leftover angel food cake). I have at least four “fathers” with whom I consult regarding my car. Thelma has taught me what intercessory prayer really means. Ray always makes me laugh. George demonstrates that wisdom is not always outspoken. Catherine is the epitome of “do not become weary of doing good.” And Tommie Lou is, simply, an amazing woman.

The words of a favorite childhood song have truly come alive for me: *all grown-ups, all children, all mothers, all fathers are sisters and brothers in the family of God.*



Catherine Stoltzfus demonstrates the love of God and the family of faith to Kristen Bowman as she teaches a Sunday School class at Big Spring Mennonite Church in Rileyville, Va.

The missional church: seeing the world through God's eyes

A few years ago, Christian Conquest Fellowship moved to the corner of 12th Street and Florida Avenue in northeast Washington D.C., an area some considered a “difficult neighborhood.” But Pastor Paul Gaskins saw a great opportunity to share God’s love. Similarly in Jesus’ day, the religious leaders looked down on the common people who were unfaithful in following the Law; Jesus saw them as “sheep without a shepherd.”

Jesus sometimes got in trouble because he saw things differently from those around him, because he viewed the world through God’s eyes. God’s purpose is to bring healing and hope, redemption and reconciliation. The challenge for the church is to make healing and hope our underlying goal, one that shapes who we are and what we do. To do that, we must begin to see our neighbors and ourselves through God’s eyes.

• Joe Bontrager

VMBM USA Regional Director

• Sara Ulrich

Big Spring Mennonite Church

Bringing hope to Esperanza

In a village of approximately 3,000 people heavily influenced by the Hindu religion, there are very few Christians. Esperanza village is nestled among the cane fields of central Trinidad, and most of the residents are employed with the sugar industry. An invitation came to a member of the Charlieville Mennonite Church to provide a Christian witness in this place.

Beginning with a young woman, who is a believer, meetings were held on Sunday afternoons with Bible study, singing, and prayer. Within a few months, Sunday school sessions were started and presently 17-25 children attend with high interest.

A real answer to prayer came when permission was granted for the use of the Esperanza Community Center. Prior to this, the group had been told that it would be impossible to get it, because the man who has the keys to the center and the people in the area do not like Christians; “they make too much noise,” was one complaint. But the Lord worked out the details and services are held there each week.

People started asking for a communion service so one was planned for June 2. Fifteen people took communion, following a sermon that explained communion and the Gospel message. After communion the preacher asked everyone to pray for and encourage each other. Many people stood and testified how meaningful communion was for them.



Omar Beiler

Two young friends who attend Sunday School at Esperanza, Trinidad, share the fun of playing with a kitten.

Presently there is an interim leadership team composed of Lalmon and Rafina John, Sister Farida, Richard and Margaret Keeler, and Rawl and Linda Gunpath. “Esperanza,” a Spanish word, means “hope.” Hope Mennonite Church sounds like a good name for this emerging congregation, but better than that, the Gospel of hope has come to the people of the village of Esperanza.

• Linda Gunpath
Diego Martin Mennonite Church, Trinidad

Crest Hill adds to its numbers

Two young women were baptized at Crest Hill Community Church, Wardensville, W. Va., during a service on May 5. Crest Hill is pastored by Milford and Carolyn Lyndaker, and is supported by a grant from VMBM through the Northern District of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Milford Lyndaker



An unexpected return from Italy

The ministry of VMBM workers Trace and Kristin Oberholtzer was brought to premature closure in April as Italian officials expelled them from the country, citing infractions of Italy's residence laws. The Oberholtzers, in Italy since September 2001, were to have assisted in ministry at Termini Imerese, Sicily.

Recent Italian and European laws have made it extremely difficult to obtain religious visas necessary for foreigners to serve there. Trace and Kristin were therefore advised, in keeping with the cultural milieu and customs of Italy, to avoid the complexities of registering with the local police as was technically required. This counsel came from experienced VMBM personnel, American Consulate personnel and staff from the center where Oberholtzers did language study. These sources were obviously unaware of the more stringent law enforcement plans of Italy to heighten security due to terrorism and accords governing members in the European Union.

For over 35 years, VMBM has worked successfully with the Italian authorities in securing the offi-



Dale Gehman / EMM

Trace & Kristin Oberholtzer

cial documentation needed to serve and reside there. VMBM workers are urged to respect the laws and civil authorities and comply with legal requirements as is appropriate for persons in ministry.

"VMBM is profoundly sorry for this erroneous counsel and for the grief it brought into the lives of Trace and Kristin," said VMBM President David D. Yoder. "Their unavailability [due to the expulsion] is a great loss for the Italian believers."

The Oberholtzers' expulsion is valid through April 2007. Service possibilities in other locations are currently under discussion.

• VMBM Staff

Congregational Resource Center

It's time to plan for another educational year in the congregation. Here are some worship resources for an emphasis on Christian Education:

- **"Dedication of Leaders"** in *Seasons of Prayer* by Lisa Withrow
- **"Thank God for Doors: A Commissioning Service for Church Leaders"** in *Through Laughter and Tears* by Bertha Landers
- **"Grow in Grace"** insert with reading in *Innovative Worship* by Vital Ministry
- **"Dedication of Teachers"** in *Litanies for All Occasions* by Garth House
- **"A Blessing"** from Brazil in *Gifts of Many Cultures* by Maren Tirabassi and Kathy Wonson Eddy

As you are discerning the gifts of members of your congregation, you might want to read these books:

- **"Calling Forth of Gifts"** in *Come, Let Us Celebrate: A Resource Book of Contemporary Worship Services* by Blair Richards and Janice Sigmund
- **An Odd Body: Church, Witness, and Culture in 1 and 2 Corinthians** in the *Good Ground* series
- **Gifts & Calling: Discovering God's Will: 7 Keys to Finding Your Purpose** by Serendipity
- **Body Building: Creating a Ministry Team Through Spiritual Gifts** by Brian Kelley Bauknight
- **Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth** by Corinne Ware

The Resource Center is open 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, with a key available at the EMU Information Office in the Campus Center for use after 5:00 p.m.

Visit the Resource Center website at www.emu.edu/mcrc to browse our catalog. Contact the Center at 540-432-4219 or wengerkw@emu.edu with requests or questions.

August 2002 Prayer Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>4 Today the three Mennonite churches in Trinidad meet for a joint service of praise and worship. Thank God for His leading during the past year and ask for His strength to face the challenges in the year ahead.</p> <p>11 Pray for the smooth transfer of leadership from Allen Umble to Paul Kropf as he resumes the leadership of the congregation in Lezhe, Albania, after a year-long sabbatical.</p> <p>18 At least nine congregations in Virginia Conference are searching for pastoral leadership. Pray that God's call to spread His word will be heard and answered by men and women.</p> <p>25 Tomorrow Francesco and Martha Picone return to Sicily after visiting churches, family, and friends in the U.S. Praise God for their faithful leadership over the years in the Italian Mennonite Church.</p>	<p>5 Pray for Pino and Rosanna Arena as they travel back to their home and work after representing the Italian Menn. Church at the Virginia Conference Assembly. Pray for refreshment in ministry as they return to their congregation.</p> <p>12 All of the Stoner families are learning sign language in preparation for the new school year. Ask God to give them patience and enthusiasm for learning this method of communication.</p> <p>19 The Mennonite Churches of Jamaica are holding two weeks of camp this month. Pray for the leaders of the camps and for the participants, that they will be refueled with God's love and power as they return to their homes.</p> <p>26 Whether they are in kindergarten, middle school, or high school, students often experience "back to school" anxieties and pressures. Pray that Jesus will be the friend that goes with them every day.</p>	<p>This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by Layman, Diener, & Borntrager Insurance, Inc.</p> <p><i>If you would like to sponsor one or more months of the prayer calendar, contact Gloria Lehman at 540-434-9727 or 1-800-707-5535.</i></p> <p>6 Pray for E. Carolina District's church expansion planning group as they meet to review progress and hear reports from their Urban Ministry Director. It is encouraging to hear about growth at Greensboro Mennonite Fellowship.</p> <p>13 Potomac District and VMCB are participating in the 2002 City on a Hill program of Menn. Mission Network. Pray that this joint effort would strengthen the unity among congregations and strengthen their witness in the Washington, DC area.</p> <p>20 The Northern and Central Districts of Virginia Menn. Conference are looking for individuals to replace their current overseers, who are past retirement age. Pray that God's servants will step forward to fill these important roles.</p> <p>27 Pray for new personnel who are going to their places of service at the end of this month. May God's presence sustain them in the adjustments they need to make in their particular place of work.</p>	<p>Pray for clarity of direction for VMBM staff, missionary personnel, and two Italian pastor couples today and tomorrow as they discuss the past, present and future partnership of VMBM and the Italian Mennonite Church.</p> <p>8 The end of the fiscal year for VMC and VMBM is August 31. Will the books balance this year? Thank you for your contributions throughout the year and pray that others will join in so that our goals can be achieved.</p> <p>15 Richard and Margaret Keeler are in England for several weeks visiting family members and taking a course in pastoral counseling. Pray that this will enrich and renew them for the tasks they do in Trinidad.</p> <p>22 Our church schools fill important needs for growing children ages 5 through 18. Pray God's abundant blessings on teachers and administrators as they begin a new school year.</p> <p>29 Families are settling into the school routine again. Pray that God will be a strengthening resource for transitions and that memories of good family times during the summer will build strong bonds for family members.</p>	<p>Tomorrow is the delegate session of the Menn. Church of Trinidad and Tobago. Remember these brothers and sisters in their reporting and deliberations. May God's spirit unify them in the directions they chart for the future.</p> <p>9 The summer heat and humidity in Jamaica can drain the energy of workers there. Pray for extra strength for Omar and Dolores Beiler as they work in the clinic and make home visits this month.</p> <p>16 Tomorrow is the District "Mission and Ministry Festival" at Raleigh Menn. Church. A variety of activities and presentations are planned for all ages. Pray that the Festival will build awareness of mission and ministry opportunities.</p> <p>23 Join Richard and Margaret Keeler and members of the Mennonite Church of Chaguana (Trinidad) in praising God for Sona's return to God and his physical healing. Pray for Sona and his family.</p> <p>30 Today pray for the international students who are studying in the United States. May they see Christ's love as we welcome them into our homes and congregations.</p>	<p>Francesco & Martha Picone will be sharing Mediterranean news from the Italian Menn. Church at Waynesboro Menn. Church tomorrow morning. Pray that God will bless their ministry as they spend time in our churches.</p> <p>10 VMBM and VMC are partners in the Theological Programs for High School Youth, hosted by Eastern Mennonite Seminary. Thank God that the Lilly Foundation has granted monies to put this program in place.</p> <p>17 Pray for the Mediterranean Missions Festival which will be held tomorrow at Weavers Mennonite Church. Pray for enthusiastic participation and support of this event and missions in general.</p> <p>24 Andrew, Leesha, and Danielle Stoner are learning to know the children in the Top Hill community. St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. Pray that they will build friendships with children their age.</p> <p>31 Our youth are a prized generation and youth leaders play a vital role in their development. Pray especially for persons who are becoming youth sponsors for the first time during the new church year.</p>	

Announcements

m e d i t e r r a n e a n f e s t i v a l

Sunday, August 18 • 4:00 p.m.
Program at 5:00 p.m.

Shady Oak, Weavers Mennonite Church
Rt. 33W, Harrisonburg, Va.



Skits from Italy and Albania

Songs and stories
from PIM teams
who served in
Albania and Italy
this summer

Soccer
game

Book signing and
CD purchases

Tastes of food from the
Mediterranean region

a fundraiser for the ministries of VMBM in the Mediterranean region

Walking where Jesus walked, continued from pg. 1

The courage and hope I encountered among Palestinian Christians taught me more about Jesus than any of the ornate Holy Land shrines we visited. Even though my limited experience of occupation helped me to understand the plight of the Palestinian people, I am inspired and challenged by the spirit of Christ I see present in Christians who not only walk where Jesus walked, but also walk as Jesus walked.

• Ryan Beiler
Washington Community Fellowship

Dorothy Jean Weaver (Harrisonburg, Va., Community Mennonite Church) and Rev. Mitri Raheb of Christmas Lutheran Church, Bethlehem, carry part of a truckload of donated furniture past an Israeli armored personnel carrier to the church.



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