

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

March 2002
Vol. 12, No. 5

Virginia votes to join Mennonite Church USA

To join or not to join. That is no longer the question. Delegates representing most of the 73 congregations in Virginia Mennonite Conference met at Springdale Mennonite Church on Saturday, January 26, to decide if VMC would join the new Mennonite Church USA. It was a day for which many prayers had been offered, and a day which had been given time and attention like few others.

After leading a meditation surrounding the theme that “our God is a sending God,” Conference Minister Owen Burkholder commissioned the delegates, “Now I send you to the work today, inviting God to give us love and compassion.”

Before addressing the primary issue of the day, the delegates were presented with a request from Faith Mennonite Church, South Boston, VA, to withdraw from Virginia Conference. A letter from the congregation noted the increasing differences in the congregation’s understanding of the authority, interpretation, and application of scripture. The delegates approved the withdrawal with regret.

The delegate assembly was then presented with the motion “that Virginia Mennonite Conference affirm its commitment to full membership in Mennonite Church USA.” At the previous delegate session in July 2001, there had been much affirmation for joining MC USA. However, in the interest of giving some congregations more time to process the issue, the delegates had agreed to wait until January to vote on full membership. If the motion did not receive 75 percent support, VMC would become a provisional member for not longer than five years.

The plan of action determined by the July meeting provided no option on the ballot for delegates who were not in favor of membership in MC USA. Because those delegates were concerned that their voices were not being heard, the original motion was tabled while the body voted on a motion not to join MCUSA as either a full or provisional member. The motion failed with only 18% support. That vote was followed

by a vote on the issue of full or provisional membership. With 84 percent of the 195 delegates in favor of full membership, Virginia Conference became the newest charter member of Mennonite Church USA.

While it brought joy and hope for many, the vote to join MC USA was also accompanied by sadness and grief. The congregations in the Mtn. Valley District - Bethel, Dayton, Morning View, and Salem Mennonite churches - requested to be released from membership in Virginia Mennonite Conference effective May 1, 2002. Although the release of those four congregations was accepted with regret, the Conference invites continued association as mutually desired and beneficial.

A vote was also taken on a possible new category of membership, which would allow congregations to be members of VMC but not MC USA. The vote failed with 72 percent support. After hearing from several congregations that might have found it helpful, it was suggested that Conference Council listen closely to counsel from the districts as the congregations who had hoped for some provisional option consider their situations.

The day ended with singing, blessings, and the lingering hope that Virginia Conference can move ahead and focus on the key issues of what it means to be a missional church.

• Rachel Smith



Rachel Smith

Lloyd Weaver (center) leads the delegate body in a prayer of blessing for the five congregations who are withdrawing from Virginia Conference.

Help Me Write This Song

*Our God is an awesome God
He reigns from heav'n above
With wisdom, pow'r and love
Our God is an awesome God*
(Rich Mullins)

I don't even know if there are other verses that go with this song. But I have the beginnings of another verse that I need your help with. "Our God is a sending God..."

The Mennonite Church USA has now been established. Built into its purpose is the intention to participate with what God is doing in the world.

When I was younger (and occasionally still), the big question was that of purpose. "What's it all about?" The focus, of course, was (and is) on me. "What am I here for?" My Missional Church friends are slowly getting through to me. This is God's world. So the question now becomes, "What is God doing in the world?" If I can get God's purpose figured out, then my purpose becomes quite clear. My prayer becomes, "Lord, let me see and share in what you are doing in your/my world today.



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

So what is God doing? How do we see what an unseen God is doing? Well, if God wants to be known, God will have to make the transition. So, assuming God does want to be known, God has to be a sending God. From There to here, God has to have sent some things, some One.

Assuming, then, that Jesus was the Sent One, we now know a great deal about what God is doing. When we listen closely to the parting words of the physical Jesus to his disciples, we must come to terms with the reality that Jesus is also a sending One. The disciples are sent the Holy Spirit who sends them.

Are you with me? Finally, those who claim to know and love God are sent by God. What God is doing in the world (for the most part) is being done by those filled with the Spirit of Jesus.

Is there reason to sing? Here's my beginning effort, you take it from here...

*Our God is a Sending God
Jesus our Lord has come
The Spirit brings such love
Our God is a Sending God*

Owen Burkholder



Linda Overholt

Children at Mt. Pleasant give comfort and joy

As a Christmas project, Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church in Chesapeake collected 102 blankets to be sent to refugees in Afghanistan. Families with children in the Sunday School department were offered \$10 from monies the children had brought in during the year as an offering. This gave the children the opportunity to purchase the blanket themselves and bring it in. Everyone was encouraged to pray for each family that will receive the blankets. We trust we have provided some comfort and joy for this suffering people group.

• Linda Overholt

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Urban Ministry Director in NC

An appointment jointly sponsored by Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions and Mennonite Mission Network has recently named Paul Godshall the Urban Ministry Director for the Eastern Carolina District of Virginia Conference. This position is new for the area and is the result of study and consultation conducted by Mennonite Board of Missions, Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions, and the Eastern Carolina District to explore the possibility of extending the Anabaptist influence to major cities in the area. The areas affected by this new position include a “triangle” comprised of Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill as well as a “triad” comprised of Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem.

“I plan to stay in touch with the existing churches of the area,” said Godshall, “to help develop and strengthen their vision of mission and outreach.”

Godshall’s first task as the Urban Ministry Director is to gather together his Project Advisor Group and begin to build relationships with one another. “I want to meet with the key players in the different areas and get to know them,” said Godshall. “I want to learn what Anabaptist means to them and where they think we should be going.”

Godshall will continue his half-time position as the pastor of Durham Mennonite Church and serve as the Urban Ministry Director for one-quarter time.

• Lynley Culbertson



John Bender

Paul Godshall has recently been named Urban Ministry Director for the Eastern Carolina District of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Eternal instants

The sun spilled over Mt. Tyrbe onto a silent Lezhe, Albania, on January 1, 2002, making all things new. The torrents of yesterday had washed the world clean. And now the sky was clear and the sun bright. The firecrackers, rockets, and sparkling lights that exploded from every apartment building left only empty cases scattered on the ground. Every frustration, disappointment, and anger from the old year was released and dissipated into smoke.

God had orchestrated the weather for this day, and for a few brief hours that morning as everyone slept the world was made new. It was an “eternal instant,” as Max Lucado writes in his book *God Came Near*; a moment to “remind us that everything is okay” and that we are standing on holy ground.

This new year I want to be aware of and cherish the “eternal instants.” The visitor who comes and chats for a while, but then for a few brief minutes as he stands in the hallway with his coat on ready to leave he shares what is really on his heart—an “eternal instant.” Or as today, several hours of impromptu plans were made with the arrival of a friend from out of state that culminated with three of us standing by the Adriatic Sea with a setting sun and silent crashing of the waves—an “eternal instant.” We need the “eternal instants” to stay connected with eternity and with the One seated on the throne who is making all things new, and to remind us that we are standing on holy ground.

I trust that this new year you and I will discover the “eternal instants” waiting for us.

• Allen Umble

Ministry in a post-modern matrix

Postmodern. The word sounds rather intimidating, threatening, inexplicable—especially in church circles.

Yet the social and cultural changes that postmodernity represents actually offer new opportunities for the church, a series of speakers said at the 2002 School for Leadership Training, held Jan. 21-24 at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

Nearly 300 pastors, students, and lay leaders grappled with the theme, “Ministry in a Postmodern Matrix.”

“Many postmodern people are interested in spirituality but not usually in Christianity as it is traditionally practiced,” said Stanley Green, executive director of Mennonite Mission Network, in his keynote address. “They are skeptical of leaders who are all style and no substance. They are looking for leaders who are real, who are honest about their weaknesses.”

“I found the speakers this week articulating what I’ve been feeling for some time,” said Rose Huyard of Mt. Vernon Mennonite Church, Port Republic, VA. “I liked the idea presented of church leaders also being seekers, asking questions along with the people we serve,” she added.

• Jim Bishop



Jim Bishop

Sheryl Shank of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church and Blaine Detwiler, pastor of Lakeview Mennonite Church, Susquehanna, PA, compare notes during a break at the School for Leadership Training at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

Programs vs. relationships

We often think about ministry for young adults as programs. We say, “We need a dynamic program for young adults to stay involved in the church,” or “What programs will make us more young adult friendly?” In reality, ministry to young adults is not about good programming, though it can be helpful.

The ministry should not only be about how to make congregations young adult friendly, but how to assist in their spiritual formation.

Congregations with this formation goal will naturally become young adult friendly.

A key aspect of formation for young adults is relationships. Young adults are seeking relationships with people who truly care. Any program that does not take this seriously will be unsuccessful over time, no matter how many attend.

The world is full of programs; the church needs to offer something more. The church needs to assist young adult spiritual formation by offering opportunities:

- for commitment
- to grow deeper
- to discern gifts
- to develop relationships
- to be mentored
- to be in a Christian community.

Programs may be a part of making this happen, but developing relationships between various members of the congregation and young adults is essential to carrying out this ministry.

• Dave Maurer

“Young adults are seeking relationships with people who truly care.”



Youth sponsors from across Virginia Conference met in Williamsburg, VA, to be challenged and encouraged in their work with youth.

Family-based youth ministry

“What model of youth ministry can we create to hold youth for the long haul?” Mark DeVries asked.

Author and speaker Mark DeVries serves as Associate Pastor of youth and their families at First Presbyterian in Nashville, TN. On January 18-20, he held the 85 youth workers of Virginia Conference captive with humor, candidness, challenges, and encouragement for their work with youth.

He noted that, historically, the paradigm for youth ministry has changed about every 50 years. In the 1990s, two models of youth ministry have emerged. His book *Family-Based Youth Ministry* discusses one of these emerging models, which was the focus of his input.

He identified one of the roots of the crisis in youth ministry as the isolation of youth. “If we want our young folks to grow up as adults, they need to hang out with adults.” He suggested that 20% of time in youth ministry be focused on empowering, equipping, and encouraging parents who have tremendous influence on their youth, and 80% be focused on helping youth develop significant relationships with many other adults in the congregation. Our job is to stack the stand with COWs—a Cloud Of Witnesses (Hebrews 12:1,2). Our goal is to develop HOGs—Habits of Greatness or Godliness.

The challenge for the congregation is to help integrate youth into the entire life of the church. “If we can just get adults to show up and interrupt kids’ lives. . . Our job is to call out the gifts in youth before you ever see them.”

He challenged us to try something new like linking an adult prayer partner with each youth. Expect failures and then try again.

• Kathy Hochstedler

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Prayer: resource for mission

What does it take to do God's work? Prayer sometimes fails to get the attention it deserves, but it underlies all mission activity. Prayer is essential because mission is fundamentally spiritual activity—where the Kingdom of God encounters the “powers.”

It is fairly easy to track gifts of money and volunteer time, but how can we acknowledge those who invest in ministry through prayer? Jesus recognized those who “enter the closet” for prayer and said God will reward them (Matt. 6:6). There are other forms of prayer. One is corporate prayer, modeled by the first century church. And Paul suggests that our lifestyle is a form of prayer, “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom. 12:1), referring to Old Testament worship rituals. A balanced faith experience will include all of these prayer styles.

VMC and VMBM staff offer several ways to facilitate the prayer efforts of churches and individuals. Each issue of *Connections* includes a prayer calendar with daily items. Weekly bulletin announcements are

sent to churches. The World Mission Prayer Fellowship meets monthly and is an opportunity to hear first-hand reports and to gather for focused prayer. Additional information on any of these is available from our offices.

• Joe Bontrager

Opportunity: Prayer Coordinator

VMBM is seeking a volunteer Prayer Coordinator to:

- Encourage and resource congregational prayer efforts
- Communicate prayer needs to congregations
- Develop creative prayer initiatives

If interested, contact Joe Bontrager

bontragerje@vmbm.org

540-434-9727



Aging better

In spite of the jests we often hear about “senior moments” or “I must be getting Alzheimer’s,” it is quite likely that some of us, or a member of our family, will experience dementia, depression, or Alzheimer’s disease in our later years. This is not a pleasing prospect.

During the second program of Conversations, a group of “Third Agers,” pastors, educators, and others concerned about aging from an Anabaptist perspective discussed ways to understand the concerns involved in caring for individuals who are evidencing symptoms of dementia and Alzheimer’s, and how to deal with these challenges while helping both the patient and the caregiver.

The discussion highlighted the need for education for congregations and communities to recognize the symptoms. It was suggested that, if possible, the congregation should identify a person who has had some experience dealing with individuals with dementia or Alzheimer’s. This person could be a significant help and support to concerned family members as they begin to see signs of behavioral patterns of confusion, forgetfulness, and other significant deficits in a loved one. A neurologist should be consulted for a diagnosis

and appropriate medical treatment. Early diagnosis and treatment may delay the disease.

An affected person should be kept in touch with reality as much as possible, recognizing at the same time that they are mostly living in the past. This can be done by visits from familiar friends and trusted family members who can discuss “old times.” Or young persons can visit and ask to talk about things which happened in the past. Encouraging the person to attend church as long as possible, and then providing tapes of church services, can provide a connection with the present. Providing counseling for the newly diagnosed patient can help deal with the loss of abilities and the guilt of becoming more dependent on the family for additional care.

The church can also play an important role in supporting the caregivers. Volunteers to periodically relieve the primary caregivers are important so that the caregivers take care of themselves and

don’t “burn out.” They should also have the opportunity to discuss their problems and frustrations with a supportive person.

It is time to change the way we age and think about aging and dying—which also makes our lives better now.

• Dick Good

“It is time to change the way we age and think about aging and dying...”



A choir from Vietnamese Christian Fellowship, Falls Church, VA, sang at the “kick-off” event for City on a Hill 2002. The church is one of several participating Virginia Conference congregations.

City on a Hill 2002 “kick-off”

Representatives from the Washington D.C. area Mennonite churches gathered Saturday evening, February 2, for the City on a Hill “kick off” celebration that included brief reports and music by participating churches. At the close of the meeting, boxes of salt were distributed as an on-going reminder that we are the “salt of the earth.”

Taking its name from Matthew 5:13-14, City on a Hill is a designation by Mennonite Mission Network that provides funding and consultation to Mennonite churches in a different metropolitan area each year to encourage church planting, peace, and other outreach ministries. The 2002 City on a Hill was awarded to Mennonite churches in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, representing four Mennonite conferences and five ethnic groups. VMBM is participating as a co-sponsor in the Washington area.

• Joe Bontrager

Correction Trace & Kristin Oberholtzer’s current missionary term in Italy ends in 2004, not 2003 as printed in the Missions Directory.

Leadership Updates

Del Glick was installed as interim pastor for Washington Community Fellowship, December 2, 2001.

Dennis Stutzman was installed as Pastor of Evangelism by Waynesboro Mennonite Church, January 13, 2002.

Paul T. Yoder was installed as interim pastor for Greenmonte Mennonite Church, January 13, 2002.

Vance Brydge, minister at Lyside Mennonite Church, passed away October 2, 2001.

Eldon Hamilton, retired minister from Lindale Mennonite Church, passed away October 23, 2001.

Highland Retreat Summer Camp Schedule

Resident Camps for Kids

Camp Crawfish	June 16-21	ages 9-11
Camp Cardinal	June 23-28	12-13
Camp Woodchuck	June 30-July 5	10-11
Camp Cottontail	July 21-26	8-9
Camp Coyote	July 28-Aug 2	12-13
Camp Bear Paw (Mini)	July 15-16	6-8

Backpacking Camps

West VA Mountain Adventure	June 16-21	13-15
Appalachian Trail Masters	Aug. 4-10	15-18

Soccer Camp

Aug. 4-9	Grade 7-12
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Day Camps for Kids

Camp Acorn	July 15-19	6-13
Camp Beechnut	July 22-26	6-13
Camp Chestnut	July 29-Aug 2	6-13
Camp Hazelnut	Aug. 5-9	6-13

Teen Adventure Camp

July 7-12	14 & over
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Wilderness Camps

Explorers	June 30-July 5	11-12
Mountaineers	July 14-19	12-13
Pioneers	July 21-26	13-15

Parent-Child Canoe Trip

June 28-29	10 & over
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For a complete brochure:

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Audit for VMBM, August 31, 2001

This year’s audit for the Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions was performed by the PBGH Accounting Firm.

The auditor’s report states: “We have audited... the financial position of Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions as of August 31, 2001, and the related statements of activities and cash flows for the year then ended. In our opinion (except for the following omission)* the 2001 financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions as of August 31, 2001, and changes in its net assets and its cash flows for the year then ended in conformity with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America.”

Total assets were \$2,002,688 and total liabilities were \$156,351 as of August 31, 2001. Change in net assets from August 31, 2000, to August 31, 2001, was (\$52,919).

—*Evelyn W. Kratz, Director of Financial Services
Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions*

* As in prior years, the auditor’s report includes this disclaimer: “The Mission Board does not record an obligation to pay for health insurance claims resulting from the Organization’s participation in a self-insured risk pool.” This means that VMBM has a sizable pool of money set aside for claims, but does not have funds equivalent to the largest possible claim of all employees simultaneously.

March 2002 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

31 Hallelujah — Christ arose! May we experience the power of Christ's resurrection in our daily lives, and let it flow to others.

3 Jamaican Mennonite Christians are raising their voices in praise this morning at the Conference worship service. Mark Wenger will bring the sermon in the afternoon session. Pray for God's outpouring on this assembly.

10 Pray for the missionaries in Bari as they intentionally seek to expand their Christian witness by reaching into their neighborhoods through friendship evangelism.

17 The Marriage Retreat in Trinidad is ending today. Thank God that the Trinidad Church makes building strong marriages a priority. Lonnie & Teresa Yoder traveled from Jamaica to serve as resource persons.

24 Aaron Onelangsy is the Laoitian pastor at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Pray for his efforts to train leaders for the Laoitian fellowship.

Tuesday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by the Richard & Edith Martin School of Leadership Development in memory of Richard Martin, whose life of ministry encouraged Italian Mennonite leaders.

If you would like to sponsor one or more months of the prayer calendar, contact David D. Yoder at 540-434-9727 or 1-800-707-5535.

4 Pray for Allen Umble as he continues to provide leadership for the church in Lezhe while the Kropfs are in the States on sabbatical. Pray for a seminar which is being taught at Lezhe today by David Shenk, professor at Lithuania Christian College.

11 Potomac District of VMC is participating in the Baltimore-Washington area City on a Hill project. Pray for unity for the Washington area churches of several conferences as they plan together.

18 The VMBM staff meet tomorrow for prayer, consultation, and planning, which will take effect 2002-2003. Your prayers will undergird the work, and will send God's spirit to assist in this process.

25 Pray for Trace and Kristin Oberholtzer as they bring to closure their formal language training and explore housing arrangements for ministry at Termini Imerese in a support role to Toni and Marilena Ceraulo.

Wednesday

He is not here; he has risen, just as he said.

Matthew 28:6 (NIV)

6 A Partners in Mission team is being formed to go to Johannesburg, South Africa. This is the first time a PIM team has gone to this location. Pray about joining the group, which will be led by Lori Green of Calvary Community Church.

13 Omar & Dolores Beiler have a full day of seeing patients on Wednesdays at the Joyland clinic in Jamaica. Teresa Yoder assists them. Pray for God's strength, wisdom, and grace to be evident as they serve.

20 Earl Moyer is guiding the vocational students at the Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica who are building a volleyball court and other recreational equipment. Thank God for Earl's energy and skill in this work.

27 Join William Broughton, pastor of Temple Hall Menn. Church in Jamaica, in praying for the youth fellowship that is a large part of the membership. Pray also for the friendship evangelism thrust that they are concentrating on.

Thursday

7 Mission Advisory Council of Harrisonburg District is working to discern needs in the community where local churches can engage in ministry. Pray that the ministry of the leadership and congregations will be relevant and effective.

14 Mission Advisory Council of Harrisonburg District is working to discern needs in the community where local churches can engage in ministry. Pray that the ministry of the leadership and congregations will be relevant and effective.

21 Many families are considering service opportunities. They desire to serve together. If you have been praying and considering going this summer, now is the time to contact the PIM office.

28 Pray for a PIM team of young adults, composed primarily of missionary kids who have grown up in Italy, as they prepare to provide a program for the missionary kids at the Annual Mediterranean Missionary Retreat in June.

Friday

1 The busier we are, the less we can afford to *not* spend time in prayer. Praying throughout the day keeps us in contact with Heaven. Join with brothers and sisters around the world who are praying for peace, love, and reconciliation.

8 Pray for Kenny & Stephanie Stoner in Jamaica as they meet people in daily life. May they have God-anointed appointments that happen spontaneously!

15 Women from Virginia Conference are meeting at Windhaven Church tomorrow to hear Matilda Kipfer speak. Pray that the women will be refreshed and their souls revived through Matilda's words and fellowship with others.

22 Pray for Margaret Keeler as she starts new Bible studies in her own community (Balmain Village) and in Dow Village.

29 Jesus died so that we may live. Thank him today for His ultimate sacrifice for us. May our lives show our gratitude for the priceless gift of salvation.

Saturday

2 The Jamaica Mennonite Conference delegates are meeting today to do the church's business. Pray for clear direction from the Holy Spirit to guide them in the deliberations they undertake.

9 Thank God for the very good response in the new Sunday School started in Esperanza, Trinidad. Pray that the teachers would show love and clearly share the wonderful news of Jesus with these children.

16 A seminar on worship is being hosted today at Weavers Menn. Church. Pray that those who attend will be challenged and encouraged by what they learn. Pray also for Lee Ebersole and Heidi Miller Yoder as they teach.

23 The Partners in Mission team to Nicaragua will have orientation today. Pray for Jim Hershberger as team leader and each member of the team.

30 Pray for the baptismal service of new believers which will take place at Toritto tomorrow. What a wonderful way to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Pray that family members and visitors will also receive new life in Christ.

