

## Atlanta 2003 participants find a place at God's table

In CNN's food court next to the Omni Hotel, Mennonites of all ages filled dozens of tables as they ate ice cream and pizza and shared how God's banquet at Atlanta 2003 would last much longer than fast food.

Laughter, prayers and stories flowed freely at these tables, a symbol of Mennonite Church USA's first biennial church-wide gathering, "God's Table, Y'All Come." While eating there, Mennonites enjoyed fellowship, celebrated lifelong friendships, and made new connections July 3-8 at the Georgia World Congress Center convention site.

About 8,000 Mennonites criss-crossed this courtyard on their way to conventions planned for adults, young adults, youth and children at the Congress Center site and for junior high kids at the nearby Marriott Hotel. Donning backpacks and digital cameras, participants headed for delegate sessions, worship services, seminars, events such as the "Many Voices, One Spirit" concert that represented the multi-racial diversity in the church, and the Walk for Reconciliation to the Martin Luther King Center.

The eating space provided cool from the heat and calm from the frenzy. Convention goers could rest their tired feet and ponder how they'd heard during worship services that God feeds them at God's table. The Mennonite Church USA Executive Board Office of Convention Planning worked for two years to develop this theme in the five conventions, each with its own table to symbolize God's invitation in Luke 13.

Worship speakers such as former President Jimmy Carter reminded audiences that God invites all people to the table—with dark skin or light, in good times or bad, in poverty or wealth. Each convention used a table in its worship, calling the young and old to the banquet of God's love and invitation, beckoning them to be "little Christs" in the world.

"It's easy for us to say that 'I am a Christian' if we belong to a church or congregation or have accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior," said Carter during the opening joint worship service for youth and adults July 3. "We say it glibly and with such ease.



Laurie Oswald

"But the word 'Christian' means 'little Christ.' Suppose we erased the word 'Christian' and substituted the words 'little Christ?' If when asked who we are we said a 'little Christ,' that would be sobering and demanding and it would make life very challenging. Profound changes would occur in our personal lives."

In the days following the opening service, convention participants shared God's bounty by being "little Christs" throughout Atlanta. About 4,000 adults, youth and children volunteered at about 40 servant projects across the city; donated more than 400 pints of blood for the Red Cross; and honored the Civil Rights movement in the neighborhoods near downtown Atlanta.

They also participated in a hymn sing in Centennial Park; and built new bridges in the ongoing journey of shaping a multi-racial denomination by hearing stories about earlier Mennonite Civil Rights advocates in Atlanta such as Rosemary and Vincent Harding and others connected with Mennonite

From left, worship leaders Jonathan Larson of Atlanta, Monica Spory of Winnipeg, and Hugo Saucedo, San Antonio, Texas, lead the adult assembly in prayers and meditations about the theme of Atlanta 2003, "God's Table, Y'All Come."

# The tyranny of the urgent

Recently I was reminded about how urgent it is for us as Christians to be doing things. Philip Yancey, in his insightful book *What's So Amazing About Grace*, says, "Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more...And grace means nothing we can do to make God love us less."



**Steve Carpenter**  
Conference Coordinator

I believe it. The things we do may help us love God more but they can never earn His approval or cause Him to love us more. In Christ we are loved completely. God cannot love us any more or any less. He is not so much interested in our good works as he is interested in us.

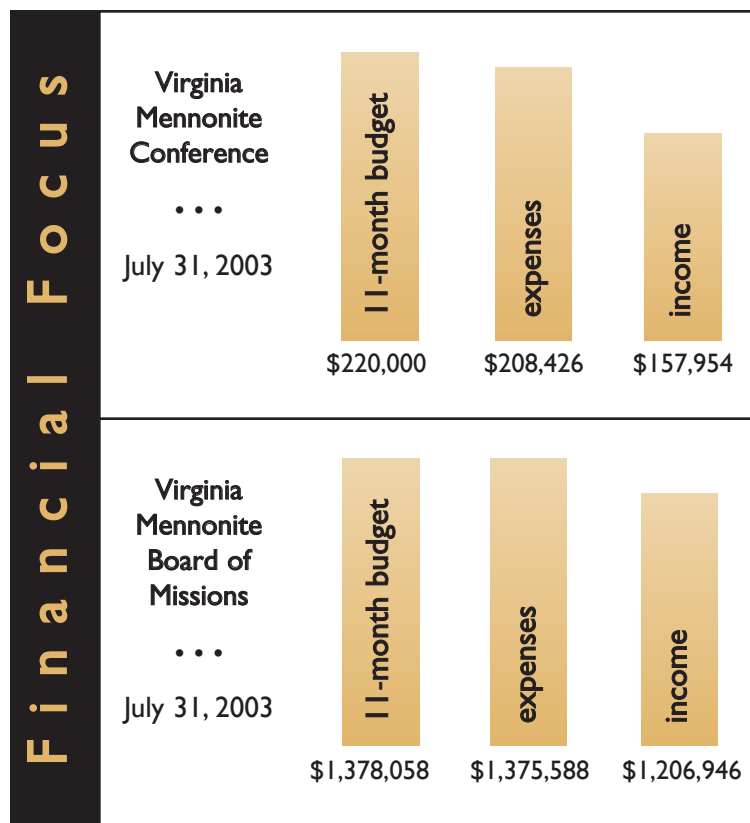
There is an important balance in the Christian life between being and doing. I, like many of you, tend to lean heavily on the doing side of the equation. I am always busy. I find it hard to just stop and rest, or think, or pray. Recently I was challenged with the idea of taking a silent retreat. I find the very idea frightening but think it would help me "be" with God and not just "do" for Him.

As a father of two young girls I often found it difficult to just be with my children and love them. I was more apt to plan something with them rather than just hanging out together. Granted, sometimes a well-

planned activity, like an all-day hike, provides opportunity to both be and do. However, more often I took my girls to see a movie or for a swim, then exercised by swimming laps while they played together in the shallow end of the pool.

It is often the urgent things that keep us from being with God and others. My daughter is unable to miss a phone call. She will stop and answer it, no matter what, just because of the urgency of its ringing. If it rings when she is in the shower she is more than willing to pay the 50 cent charge for using \*69 to find out who called.

The telephone can serve as an indicator of our comfort level with resisting the urgent in favor of the important. I have learned to ignore the phone when I am with someone. In doing so, I show respect for the people I am with. Might that call be important? Yes, it might, but if it is, they'll call back. Can you resist a ringing telephone? If you can't, ask yourself why. If you are honest, your answer might be revealing.



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**Editor**

Gloria Lehman

**Assistant Editor**

Rachel Smith

**Copy Editor**

Earlene Horst

**Circulation manager**

Beth Brunk

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**Phone** 540-434-9727

1-800-707-5535

**E-mail** info@vmbm.org

info@vmconf.org

**Web** www.vmbm.org

www.vmconf.org

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## Visiting small farms in Lushnje, Albania

Melba and I joined the Mennonite mission team in Lushnje, Albania, on May 2. Almost every day there are interesting—indeed exciting—things taking place.

Try going to the store to buy basic groceries without knowing the word for any of the items you want. You might think that would be easy. Just push the grocery cart down the aisle and pick up what you want. The problem with that idea is that there are no “serve yourself” grocery stores in town. But with the help of a dictionary or a friend, you would soon learn the basics of living in another part of God’s world.

Andon Rrapokushi is a 47-year-old husband, father, neighbor, Christian brother and co-worker who is fluent in Albanian, English, and Greek. He also understands Italian and Russian. Andon is a great help to us as a translator. He translates for the Friday evening Bible study in our house and has translated twice when I preached in the local churches at Goricaj and Kemishtaj.

Andon and I also work together with the farmers. Yesterday we took an extension agent on a tour of greenhouses where farmers were almost ready to transplant tomato seedlings. At one place the seedlings had been moved from a protected area to full sun in one day and showed signs of serious stress. The extension agent spoke rather strongly to the farmer, saying that it was a sin for the seedlings to be treated so harshly and that the plant’s first setting of fruit would be retarded. After we left the farmer I expressed my support to the agent for his speaking the truth, even when it was not a pleasant task. I commented that in the end, it is the truth that will set people free. With Andon’s help, we had more discussion on truth, with a Bible-centered testimony.

Much of our effort is in making connections and gathering important information that the small farmers need. Recently a member of the church had the unfortunate experience of losing their family cow. Just a couple days earlier we had talked with a missionary couple who had helped three poor families each buy a cow. We called the missionary, who lives about 35 miles away, and presented the need. He said he had almost enough money in his account to buy one more cow and would be happy to help out.

We arranged for the missionary couple to meet the family, see the stable and hay stack, and take some pictures. They are now trying to find a suitable cow to purchase. This needy family will soon



courtesy of Willard Heatwole

Willard Heatwole (second from left) and an Albanian extension agent (right) visit livestock farmers in Gungas, Albania.

have a cow again to meet their milk needs and provide some income for the household budget. The first calf is to be given back to the church for another family in need.

After the morning church service on August 3, Melba and I plan to leave by car for the neighboring country of Greece. Andon and his wife, Angelina, will accompany us. Angelina was born in Albania to ethnic Greek parents, so she speaks Greek as her first language. They will team up to translate for us. Angelina will translate Greek to Albanian, and Andon, Albanian to English. We will



Ransford Heatwole

Andon Rrapokushi and Willard Heatwole work with small farmers near Lushnje, Albania.

be going to a vegetable growing area and hope to learn how the farmer’s association functions, some production techniques since the climatic conditions are very much like ours in the Lushnje area, and methods of marketing and distribution.

VMBM is in need of more missionaries for Albania and other parts of our world. Are you available for a possible assignment? We can recommend being cross-cultural missionaries. If you sense God’s call for this kind of service, begin conversations with a staff person at VMBM.

- Willard Heatwole  
Lushnje, Albania



## Rustic setting nurtures spiritual growth

The sky breaks open with the first slivers of pink and lavender. The outline of the pine trees and mountains gradually becomes clearer, and soft clouds of mist hang over the mountains and form a brilliant shade of gray that contrasts sharply with the bright green of the pines. Shortly after sunrise, the summer staff members of Highland Retreat begin to gather on the basketball courts. They walk up one by one and form a circle on the warm concrete courts. Some of them wear sweaters and carry mugs of coffee or tea. They use this time in the early morning to share a brief devotion and then to pray for their day, their week, and their summer. Golden Nugget, as it is called, is a valued time each day where staff can find renewal and support.



Highland's mission in programming is "to provide personal group experiences that encourage meaningful spiritual growth, focusing on young people and youth-related constituencies, and capitalizing on the rustic setting." From the early morning prayer time to the Wednesday hikes to the evening recreation, it is apparent that the staff is dedicated to their campers and to providing a place that encourages



photos courtesy of Paul Beiler

"meaningful spiritual growth."

Many parents send positive feedback about this fulfillment of mission. One parent wrote, "Thank you so much for providing such a neat summer camp for children to attend. My son recently attended Wilderness Camp and had a great time. I believe that the camp had a significant spiritual impact on him as well, which is becoming increasingly evident by his changed behavior. Since coming home, he has consistently been more considerate, more respectful, and more obedient. He is looking forward to coming back next year."

Highland Retreat also has a great impact in the spiritual life and growth of the staff who participate in the program each summer. Many are prepared

for leadership in other areas of the church. They have opportunities to share testimonies, Bible studies, and firesides with campers and each other.

Staff, campers, parents, and churches have continually provided support to Highland through their prayers, volunteering, and other contributions. Together they have kept the mission of Highland Retreat alive and breathing.

• Lindsay Deel  
Summer Program Director



Laurie Oswald

Participants of the Junior High Convention at Atlanta 2003 enjoy a game July 5 at the Marriott Hotel, the site for the gatherings.

### “Atlanta 2003” continued from pg. 1

Central Committee and the Eastern Mission Board, now Eastern Mennonite Missions.

About 1,100 delegates at the adult assembly also brought many perspectives on church business to small-group tables in their sessions. At these tables they adopted churchwide statements on health care, immigration and abortion and worshipped in unity despite diversity in race, convictions, and age.

In a first-ever program—Young Adult Delegates to Assembly, or YODA—young adults ages 18 to 30 served as delegates with the guidance of older mentors as a way to inspire increased involvement by younger generations in the denomination.

About 6,000 youth heard such speakers as Michele Hershberger, chair of the Bible department at Hesston (Kan.) College, speak of God’s table prepared in the valley spoken of in Psalm 23.

“You don’t have to have life all fixed up before you come to God’s table,” Hershberger said during worship July 7. “God’s table is made especially for people like us, people who know we won’t make it without the Good Shepherd, who specializes in lost sheep.”

Several hundred youth came up to the stage for anointing with oil and prayer, as they asked Jesus to heal wounds born in the valley of suffering.

Junior high kids discovered God’s abundance in a valley of loss. In response to about \$1,500 of stolen items such as shoes, cameras and cash during a field trip July 6, the adult delegates collected about \$2,100 in offerings to replace their misfortune.

“One child was shoeless because his only pair of shoes was stolen,” said Sue Conrad, assistant director of the Office of Convention Planning, after adult worship July 7. “The day it happened, the junior high worship had focused on what to do when the table is empty. And today, they are to celebrate the table of fullness. ... This is our chance to demonstrate what mutual aid is all about.”

Mutuality and acceptance were concepts that

Carol Grieser, coordinator for the children’s convention, and Rosemary Widmer, creator of the children’s curriculum, conveyed to about 200 participants. For example, Andre Baker, a student of Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., befriended Sally Kauffman, a blind fourth grader from Surrey, N.D., to serve as her guide.

“We saw our children really respond to the idea that God’s love is for everyone, no matter who you are or what level your abilities are,” said Widmer, a pastor of College Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., where Grieser is also a member.

No matter what their ages, all people at Atlanta 2003 were challenged to come to God’s banquet, acknowledge their brokenness, and bring others with them.

“It’s not enough to simply say the words of Jesus about coming to the table,” said Addie Banks, adult worship speaker July 4 and longtime Mennonite leader and peace advocate in New York City, where she is a member of King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

“We must become bread, broken, kneaded and baked in a hot oven. ... God is calling us to lay ourselves before him, to expand our table beyond what our natural eyes can see. I believe the Mennonite Church is leading the way. I believe this is a historic moment.

“I still remember when it was ‘Y’all get to the back of the bus, y’all stay in the kitchen.’ Now God is saying at Atlanta, ‘Y’all come to the table. This is my table.’”

Jonathan Larson, an Atlanta Mennonite and worship leader, said July 7 before communion, “This is the Lord’s table, and he yearns for you and me to come. The Lord yearns for all of us to come from all our different tables—from the east and west and north and south.”

• Laurie Oswald  
Mennonite Church USA



## Longeneckers minister as a couple again

After 13 years of service, a Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community employee has made a change that allows him to work with his wife again.

Director of Pastoral Care Dan Longenecker has left VMRC to pursue interim pastoring with his wife, Catherine. “We suddenly saw the opportunity to work together again,” said Dan.

With a background in clinical pastoral education, Dan and Catherine devoted many years to pastoral ministry. From 1990 to 2000, Dan and Catherine Longenecker were co-chaplains at VMRC.

Dan was ordained approximately forty years ago, but Catherine was not ordained until 1991. She was the second woman ordained by Virginia Mennonite Conference. “This was a great enhancement of our experience together,” Dan said.

For ten years, Dan and Catherine were a team in meeting the pastoral needs of VMRC and its residents. Then, in 2000, Catherine left VMRC, and Dan became Director of Pastoral Care.

During his tenure, Dan has seen numerous changes, started new programs and contributed greatly to VMRC.



Dan and Catherine Longenecker are looking forward to working together in ministry again.

Lindsey Shantz

Dan started a vesper worship program called “My Neighbor’s Church.” This was a series that highlighted various church denominations and their beliefs.

“Ecumenical differences are something to be celebrated. We really need to hear each other,” Dan said.

Dan also developed a Pastoral Friend Program using volunteers to create what he called a wonderful rhythm of spiritual support at VMRC, a workshop on experiential learning in the older years, a vesper planning group, and worship events for residents and staff such as “Footsteps of Faith.”

“We are dependent on volunteers,” said Dan. From three Sunday services to weekly Bible studies to special events, Pastoral Care relies on volunteers from within VMRC and from the community.

Dan said he was happy to have Shirlee K. Yoder join the Pastoral Care team. As Pastoral Care Associate, Shirlee has been instrumental in leading pastoral care programs and working with residents.

Dan and Catherine are now shifting their focus to meeting the needs of interim pastoring. “We don’t know where God is leading us yet, but opportunities are there,” Dan said.

• Lindsey Shantz  
Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community

## Congregational Resource Center

It’s back into the swing of fall schedules and programming! Be sure to call or visit the Mennonite Congregational Resource Center for help on your educational programs for all ages. Note the following video kit resources for small groups:

- **Jesus, The New Way** by Dr. Tom Wright
- **Margin: Prescription for the Pain of Overloaded Lives** by Richard Swenson, MD
- **Secrets of the Vine** by Bruce Wilkinson

We also have some great new resources:

- **Making Disciples** and **God’s Story, Our Story**—a preparation for baptism curriculum (F&L Press)

- **Kids and Values**—a mid-week or S.S. curriculum (F&L Press)
- **Centered Teaching** (Cycle A, Fall)—new approach for Jubilee materials
- Two **CPR** improv videos (Did you catch them at Atlanta?)
- **“Just Curious”** kit—introductory materials for ALPHA, a well-respected evangelistic tool

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 for use after 5:00 p.m.

Visit our website at [www.emu.edu/mrcr](http://www.emu.edu/mrcr) to browse our catalog. Contact us at 540-432-4219 or [wengerkw@emu.edu](mailto:wengerkw@emu.edu).

# September 2003 Prayer Calendar

## Sunday

**1** Many new youth workers are beginning ministry this month. Pray that those who have the privilege of nurturing youth will have the wisdom and patience to really connect with the youth in their churches.

**7** Pray for the congregations and leaders of Central District as they install Richard Bowman as overseer today and celebrate the ministry of Glendon Blosser as he retires.

**14** Pray for Pastors Steven and Karla Francisco as they lead a new church plant in Suffolk, VA. This month their ministry team plans to do community outreach and begin a Saturday evening "celebration."

**21** Joe Bontrager is leading Staunton Menn. Church through the Natural Church Development assessment this evening. Pray that this tool will strengthen their church fellowship and ministry to the Staunton community.

**28** Prayer is a pillar of the fruitful congregation. Thank God that Paul and Esther Kniss provide the strength of prayer for the Hope Mennonite Church, along with the pastoral couple and the leadership team.

## Tuesday

**2** Pray for new pastors as they adjust to their congregations and the culture and systems of Virginia Mennonite Conference. VMC will hold an orientation tomorrow to help new pastors in their adjustment.

**9** Pray for VMC staff Owen Burkholder, Steve Carpenter, Kimberlee Greenawalt, Jill Landis, Rachel Smith, and Ken Weaver as they meet tomorrow morning to discuss business and prepare for Conference Council.

**16** The staff at Highland Retreat and Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center worked hard this summer. Pray that the campers will maintain their decisions and commitments made at summer camp.

**23** Pray for Eastern Menn. Seminary Dean Ervin Stutzman and other faculty and staff as they train new leaders for our congregations and denomination. Students are enjoying Spiritual Life Week with Sally Schreiner Youngquist.

**30** Praise God for the wonderful experiences Maurita Eberly had in Sicily working with the children's choir. The 23 children who came to the week-long music camp presented a concert to an enthusiastic audience at the end of the week.

## Wednesday

**3** Pray for Christine & Harold Wenger as they share about their years in Mozambique with MCC at the World Mission Prayer Fellowship tomorrow. Harold is the new pastor at Stuarts Draft Mennonite Church.

**10** Pray for Sandy Snider, chair of the VMC Nurture Commission, as the group meets tomorrow evening. Pray also for new members Louise Alderfer (Springdale Menn. Church) and Leanna Beiler (Valley View Menn. Church).

**17** Pray for the leaders of Harrisonburg District as they meet at Park View Mennonite Church tomorrow evening for business and fellowship. Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter will lead a reflection on God's way of peace.

**24** Pray for Pastor Barry Loop and First Menn. Church of Richmond, Va., as they plan to build a sanctuary in a new location. Their present land and structure have been purchased by a developer and they must vacate by July 2004.

Paul and Catherine Mishler sponsored this month's prayer calendar.

*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.*

## Thursday

**4** Classes at the West Indies Theological College have begun for the new school year. Richard Keeler is teaching an Old Testament course. Pray for him and the students who come from various islands in the Caribbean.

**11** New teachers, new classes—it's a lot at once! Pray for the children, youth, young adults, and adults in your congregation who are students this fall. Pray that they will enjoy and thrive in their new schedule.

**18** Pray for Moderator Joe Longacher and Assistant Moderator Steve Brown as they lead Conference Council meetings this weekend. Pray for a spirit of wisdom and that they may be able to do worshipful work together.

**25** The Junior High Retreat is being held this weekend at the Smith Mountain Lake 4-H center. Pray for safety for the kids and for God's message to flow through speaker Lisa Veltman.

## Friday

**5** Jesse Bergey, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, had a full summer, which included relating to the youth and sponsors at the youth camps and helping with Bible School. Thank God for his interest and energy for these experiences.

**12** The Hmong Advisory Committee meets tomorrow evening at Hickory Mennonite Church. Pray for the Hmong worship services that are held each Sunday afternoon and for the literacy classes that Chaiya Hadtasunern teaches.

**19** Pray for Wayne North in his role as Interim Pastor at Ridgeway Mennonite Church. Pray also for the congregation as they continue to grieve and adjust to the loss of Pastor Dick Headings.

**26** Pray for good weather tomorrow for the annual "jubilee picnic" that Ron Baker holds for prison ministry workers and former prisoners. Join with Ron and others in thanking God for blessing the prison ministries during this past year.

## Saturday

**6** Tomorrow Joe Bontrager, USA Regional Director, will speak on the "missional church" at Stuarts Draft Mennonite Church. Pray that those who are respond to God's call.

**13** In August, Steven Hayle and Deidre Jones from the Jamaica Menn. Church participated in the youth camp in Trinidad. Thank God for this interaction of youth from two islands and pray that the relationships will flourish.

**20** Tom & Karen Yoder and family spent a busy two months in Kosova this summer. They hosted two teams while they were there. Pray that the seeds that were sown will sprout and grow.

**27** Pray for the young adults from Mennonite Church USA and Canada who have gathered in California this weekend. Pray also for the women attending the Mennonite Women of Virginia Retreat in Williamsburg.

**The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.**

Psalm 119:130 (NIV)

## Announcements

**A Central District Overseer Installation and Celebration** will be held on Sunday, September 7, at Weavers Mennonite Church. At 3:00 p.m. Richard Bowman will be installed as a new overseer. At 4:30 p.m. there will be a time of food and fellowship at Shady Oak. A celebration of Glendon Blosser's 34 years of service as an overseer will begin at 6:00 p.m. For more information contact Lee Martin at 540-867-5885.

**Bike Shenandoah**, a fundraiser for Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions, Mennonite Mission Network, Mennonite Central Committee, and Roberta Webb Child Care Center, will be held September 27 in Harrisonburg. Bike routes range from 5 to 100 miles. For more information contact Beth Brunk at 540-434-9727 or [beth.brunk@vmbm.org](mailto:beth.brunk@vmbm.org) or visit [www.bikeshenandoah.org](http://www.bikeshenandoah.org).

A major consultation, "**The Church Meets the Muslim Community**," will be held Oct. 23-26 at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. This forum will explore, from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective, the calling and challenges of the church meeting the 'unmah' (Arabic for community) in trust-building relations between Christians and Muslims around the world. For more information, visit [www.emu.edu/churchandislam](http://www.emu.edu/churchandislam), call 540-432-4260, or e-mail [stutzmal@emu.edu](mailto:stutzmal@emu.edu).

**Un estudio nuevo de banquetes en la Biblia** ya está en línea como folleto en una forma fácilmente imprimido. En "Pan para fortalecer el corazón," autora Heidi Regier Kreider (traductora Zulma Prieto) le ofrece actividades interesantes para comenzar su reunión, estudios bíblicos pensativos, y rezos de cierre en las lecciones cortas diseñados para el uso de los grupos de mujeres. Una segunda serie de lecciones cortas del libro filipenses está disponible en línea también. Se encuentra estos recursos gratuitos de Mennonite Women USA y Canadian Women in Mission en este sitio de la red: [www.MennoniteWomenUSA.org](http://www.MennoniteWomenUSA.org).

**Mennonite Central Committee** is looking for a single or couple to work as volunteers for 3 years in Croatia. The location is a farm with a chicken house, sheep and horses run by a church agency. For more information contact Tim Pannebecker at 717-859-1151 or visit <http://www.mcc.org/servicetree> for a complete job description.

## Pastoral Transition



**Jeff Kauffman** was ordained as lead pastor at Weavers Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., August 10.

## Make a difference in the life of a deaf child

Could you or your Sunday school class become a sponsor for Shaneen, Dasha, or Johni at the Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica during this school year? Sponsors commit to \$30 per month for 10 months (\$300 per year).

Exchanges of letters and cards connect the student with their sponsor. To select a student or to receive more information contact Gloria Lehman, VMBM Caribbean Regional Assistant, at 540-434-9727 or [gloria.lehman@vmbm.org](mailto:gloria.lehman@vmbm.org).

