

# Connections

Virginia Mennonite  
Conference &  
Board of Missions

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Vol. 15, No. 2

## Keeler receives 'Distinguished Service Award'

Inspired by the example of his college professor, Richard Keeler (EMC class of 1960) chose to march to the beat of a different drummer. As a young doctor, he chose to practice medicine on distant shores. Thirty years later, the curse of "leper" is no longer spoken on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

For his legacy of uncommon service, Dr. Keeler was named the 2004 recipient of EMU's distinguished service award at Homecoming weekend, Oct. 8-10.

As a pre-med student at EMU in the late 1950s, Richard admired the commitment of professor Daniel Suter, his willingness to stay at a church school rather than accepting a job at a large medical school with a much higher salary and his commitment to serving the church through pastoring a congregation as well as through teaching.

Richard continued his medical training at the University of Virginia, earning his M.D. in 1964. He then accepted a service assignment with the Mennonite Central Committee and moved to Kentucky with his young family. He worked to upgrade the health standards in the schools and Appalachian communities and embarked on an extensive measles immunization program in Harlan and Letcher counties. In 1968, the governor of Kentucky bestowed on Dr. Keeler the honorary title of Kentucky Colonel for his effective public health work.

That same year, the Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions called him to serve on the Caribbean island of Trinidad. The government wanted to end the long-standing practice of shipping leprosy patients off to a small island, separated from their families and doomed to eek out a hopeless existence for the remainder of their days.

In 1971, after completing the measles campaign in Kentucky and advanced training in both public health and leprosy, Dr. Keeler arrived in Trinidad with his family. He brought new methods of combating the scourge of leprosy. Rather than accepting the limiting role of primary care physician to his leprosy patients, Dr. Keeler developed a broad public health strategy to enlighten medical, nursing and citizen communities about the disease they feared and considered an incurable curse. Education was his weapon. He wrote articles and booklets, spoke on radio and television, and conducted training sessions.



Richard Keeler (I) is presented with a clock by EMU president Loren Swartzendruber in honor of his life of service in Trinidad.

Over time, Dr. Keeler's efforts took root and bore fruit. Patients began to be released from Chacachacare, "the leper's island." After long years of separation, they were reunited with their families, husbands and wives. Patients who no longer had families were extended government aid to build homes in the communities of their choice. Eventually, the leper's island was closed.

His successful efforts were noticed by neighboring countries. Dr. Keeler was invited to Guyana, St. Lucia, Jamaica and other islands of the Caribbean to advise and encourage similar programs. The World Health Organization used Richard's expertise in the region, especially in St. Vincent.

Dr. Keeler's work in his adopted Caribbean homeland is now focused on developing church leaders. He gives oversight to four congregations of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago, all led by national pastors. He comments on the ways his medical training has shaped his pastoral assignment.

"I am goal oriented, possibly more organized and alert for what could cause problems (the preventative approach), dealing with them before they develop into serious issues. Still another way is that I look at what will strengthen a pastor or a congregation behind the scenes. What is visible is not always what is most important."

• Paul Souder

Director of EMU Marketing Communications  
(taken from a longer version published in  
EMU's Crossroads magazine, Fall 2004)

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap...” Luke 6:38. Use the attached envelope to send a contribution to Virginia Mennonite Conference or to Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions. Thank you for your “good measure” of support!

## An old man and a baby

A crowd had gathered at Park Cabin on the north edge of Harrisonburg. These young adults, mostly former James Madison University students, had gathered for a time of reunion. What called them together? Several years earlier an elderly couple from Harrisonburg started a Bible study. It began with seven JMU students. That mentoring ministry would eventually touch more than 200 people. Those young people, many of them now married with small children, were the ones meeting that afternoon.



**Loren Horst**  
President of VMBM

The elderly couple? Lloy and Elizabeth Kniss, former missionaries to India, former pastoral couple, parents of missionaries and church leaders, and now retired. Lloy lay in a hospital bed dying of cancer. Sometime during the afternoon, Lloy and Elizabeth's son, Mark, arranged for an ambulance to transport Lloy to this gathering at Park Cabin to be with these dear friends one last time. Richard Early, one of the original seven, recalls it as an emotional time of reunion and reminiscing. As the afternoon wound down, Lloy took the babies, held them, and blessed them. One person remembers that he affirmed that afternoon as the “crowning moment” of his life. They ended the time together by singing Lloy's favorite song, “My Jesus I Love Thee.” Within weeks Lloy was gone—now with Jesus whom he dearly loved.

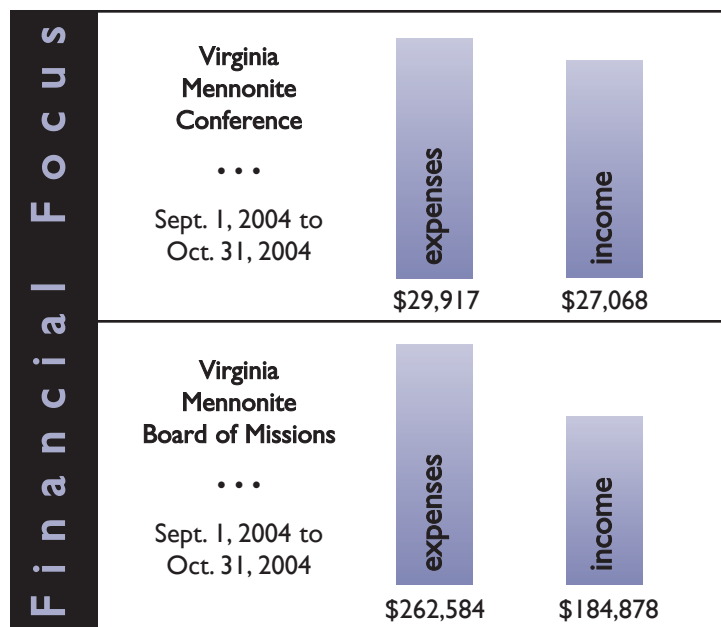
An entire life condensed to a few moments! Of course, we know many things of significance hap-

pened in Lloy and Elizabeth's lives. But, oh, to be able to see life's meaning and purpose condensed to a few moments. The old man Simeon also had his “crowning moment” when he held the baby Jesus in the temple. “You may now dismiss your servant in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation.” Simeon too had likely lived long and well. But at that moment, he saw his place, he recognized its meaning, and he embraced it in peace.

I don't know if I will recognize my “crowning moment,” even if I have one. Do others? Was Richard Keeler's recognition with EMU's Distinguished Service Award his “crowning moment?” Was Eva Eberly's translation of *Exploring Worship* into Italian her “crowning moment?” I'm not sure. I suspect though, if we even recognize our “crowning moment,” it will be found in these two things—in selfless service and in relationship to Jesus.

Two old men and two babies suggest the way. This Christmas may we join Lloy and Simeon in selfless service and in worship of Jesus.

*Loren Horst*



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## Virginia Relief Sale nets over \$241,000 for MCC



Jim Rush of Harrisonburg transports some of the 16,000 homemade donuts that volunteers worked through the night to make to sell.

Mild temperatures and hazy sunshine, instead of forecasted rain, provided a pleasant backdrop for the 38th annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale held Oct. 1-2 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds.

The sale raised over \$241,000 in gross receipts for the worldwide relief program of Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa. Last year's sale, after expenses, netted \$166,000 for MCC.

An auction of more than 300 handmade quilts, wall hangings, knotted comforters and afghans, artwork and wooden handcrafted items accounted for \$109,000 of the total funds raised.

A 102" x 112" off-white grape design quilt made by Anna Mary Burkholder of Waynesboro took the top quilt bid of \$3,000.

A grandfather's clock handcrafted by Harry Kraus, Sr., of Harrisonburg, went for \$4,000, the highest auction item.

A "Penny Power" project, initiated in 2001, raised \$11,585 at the sale. Some 28 area congregations and other groups collected coins and currency in large water jugs for weeks or months and brought their containers to the sale for sorting and tabulating. The money given to MCC this year will support the Bolikamxay Forestry and Agriculture College in Laos, and Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions will use its portion to support a ministry with the Hmong people of Hickory, N.C.

"I was impressed again this year with the generosity exhibited by buyers at the sale and with the way that everyone pitches in to make things happen," said Marvin Nisly of Harrisonburg, planning committee chair. "The relief sale is an intergenerational, community event that involves everyone from youngsters to teenagers to older adults, all working together to respond to the needs of others around the world," he added.

• Jim Bishop  
EMU Information Officer

## Exploring Worship translated

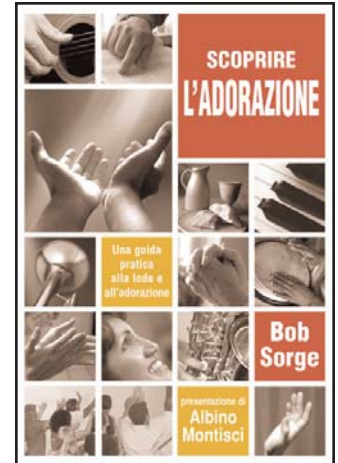
A new resource for evangelical churches is available in the Italian language, thanks to the translation work of Eva Eberly. *Scoprire L'adorazione* (Exploring Worship) is being published and will soon be available in Christian bookstores all over Italy.

This is Eva's seventh translation project. The first booklet titled "Welcome to Your New Life," helped new believers understand their conversion experience. The next major one was "Experiencing God;" it is presently among the top 10 books sold to evangelicals. Another project, "Seven Things Children Need" by John Drescher has gone into a second printing—more than 1500 have been sold, an exceptional record in the Italian context.

The primary objective of VMBM translation projects is to provide helpful teaching/training material for the discipleship school and for pastors to use in their congregations on subjects that are not currently available in Italian. Books are carefully selected with these criteria in mind, as well as their cultural suitability. Publishers advertise these books and they are displayed in bookstores. Also a widely viewed evangelical web site promotes some of Eva's books.

More than a theological treatise, "Exploring Worship" is a practical guide to praise and worship. Albino Montisci (compares to Michael W. Smith in the US) wrote the introduction for the Italian version. Eva's assistant, Rosa (a Christian musicologist), compiled a list of music resources for worship leaders. How to lead worship, how to write songs and evaluate them, how to plan a worship service, and how to organize a worship team are just some of the practical suggestions included. The book sells for 12.50 euros.

Next possible projects are "Good Sense Budget Course" and "Coping with Cancer." Eva's translation work is intensive, but she adds, "because of the dearth of resources available to the Italian church, it brings me joy to serve in this way." We thank God for this unique service that Eva provides to the international church.



Jon Michael Eberly, Eva and Willard Eberly's son, designed the cover for this new book. Family members' hands are used, adding a personal touch.

The mass chorus at the third annual Festival of Praise combined the members of different men's a cappella groups for the closing numbers, directed by Jay Hartzler. The event was held at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, on November 7, and raised \$2,223 for Eva Eberly's translation work.



# Where will you serve this year?



jamaica



puerto rico



trinidad



israel



# Partners in Mission

short-term service opportunities



albania

Serve with Partners in Mission from  
one week to one month...

albania  
evangelism  July 2005

argentina  
peacemaking team   
february 2005

belarus  
july 2005

belize  
work & evangelism  August 2005

costa rica  
serve with pura vida  July/August 2005

dominican republic  
work team  July 2005

ghana  
work team  July 2005

gulf states churches  
youth work  Summer 2005

haiti  
work teams  January 2005

italy  
youth work  July 2005

jamaica  
monthly work teams  starting nov. 2004  
teach Bible school  July 2005

liberia  
work team  September 2005

nazareth & bethlehem  
work group  May 2006

new york city  
inner city ministry  Summer 2005

nicaragua  
work team  June 2005

philadelphia, pa.  
inner city ministry  Summer 2005

puerto rico  
work team  July 2005

south africa  
support new zion ministries int.  July 18-  
August 6, 2005

tanzania  
work team  September 2005

trinidad  
teach Bible school  July 2005

ukraine  
teach English  June 2005

want more info?

contact  
Ken Horst, Director

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a program of  
Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions



When I was farming in the Newport News area, I had a cornfield on the back of the farm where the corn would get mashed down every year by young guys in their cars or 4-wheel drives. This was when the corn was real tall and just about ready to harvest. They would run their vehicles right through the cornfield at night, when I could never catch them. I would lose a couple of loads of silage every year because of this. However, I knew that it was a neighbor boy who was involved because I saw corn stalks under his car. I could also tell by the tire treads in the field that they were his.

One day we were at the nearby service station at the same time, talking in a group of people about hunting, etc. When we were all about ready to go, I suddenly turned to him, grabbed him on his collar, looked him in the eye and said, "Leroy, what would you do if you were me and I was you and I kept racing cars through your corn field?" He immediately looked down, embarrassed, and said, "I'm sorry, I won't do it again." It never happened again and we remained good friends.

• story told by Myron Ross  
Newport News, Va.,  
who died October 2004, leaving a legacy of peaceful living

## Community Health Day

On September 25, the women of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago (MCTT) held a Community Health Day at the Charleville Mennonite Church. The gates opened at eight in the morning, and 180 men, women and children came for information regarding various aspects of health. Tests for diabetes, cholesterol levels and blood pressure were given. Risha Kalloo taught about diabetes prevention, Lisa Kalloo on mental health, and Linda Gunpath on HIV and other STDs. Margaret Keeler witnessed to people while they waited to see a doctor, and the children watched "Veggie Tales." Women from every congregation of MCTT participated in some way and were instruments of Christ's love as they cared for the persons who came. Linda said, "People were grateful for this service and wondered when we will go this again." All the activities of the day demonstrated God's love and message to those who do not know Christ.

• Babes Jaimani, Risha Kalloo, Linda Gunpath  
MCTT "In Your Hands" Ministry

## Congregational Resource Center

The fall 2004 issue of LEADER focused on the theme of discernment and since then, the CRC bookshelves have been adding materials on this subject. LEADER has posted several supplemental materials on discernment online at [www.leaderonline.org](http://www.leaderonline.org). Marlene Kropf has written two of the pieces. "Discernment: Grounded in God," offers four biblical foundations for individual and group discernment and "Flowing with the Current of the Spirit in Church Meetings" is a practical and practiced piece about discernment in church-related meetings.

New books available at the CRC include:

- **Hearing with the Heart: a gentle guide to discerning God's will for your life**, Debra Farrington
- **Hearing God: developing a conversational relationship with God**, Dallas Willard

• **In tune with God: The Art of Congregational Discernment**, Sally Weaver Glick

• **Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community & Manual for discussion leaders**, Farnham, Gill, McLean & Ward

• **Uncovering Your Church's Hidden Spirit**, Celia Allison Hahn

The Resource Center is open 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact Jill Landis at 540-432-4219 or [crc@emu.edu](mailto:crc@emu.edu) to make arrangements for evening use.

Visit our website at [www.emu.edu/mcrc](http://www.emu.edu/mcrc) to browse our catalog.

# December 2004 Prayer Calendar

## Sunday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by Marvin and Carolyn Slabaugh in loving memory of their parents, Moses and Mary Slabaugh and Lester and Naomi Campbell.

*If you would like to sponsor one or more months of the prayer calendar, contact Gloria Lehman at [gloria.lehman@vmbm.org](mailto:gloria.lehman@vmbm.org), 540-434-9727 or (800) 707-5535.*

**5** The Hmong Ministries Advisory Committee meets this evening in Hickory, NC to review progress of the Hmong ministries. Pray for Pastor Chaiya and continued growth in the Hmong fellowship.

**6** Krista Swartzentruber interacts each day with the students at Maranatha School for the Deaf and the surrounding community of the Ridge district in Jamaica. Pray that she will bless the students and guide them in God's path.

**12** Praise God for the renewal and spiritual awakening that has come to many in the congregations of the Italian Mennonite Church and pray that these renewed commitments will continue into the future.

**13** Omar and Dolores Beiler will experience the Christmas season on the Santa Cruz mountains in Jamaica. May it be particularly meaningful to the Beilers this year.

**19** Today the annual Christmas program will be given at the Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica. This community event brings deaf and hearing people together, including the parents and grandparents of the students.

**20** Several churches in Eastern Carolina District are experiencing pastoral transitions. Pray that they will get in contact with the persons who can best lead them forward toward growth and faithful witness.

**26** Is there anything that you can "box up" and give to those in need today, Boxing Day? This tradition helps us share our resources with those who have less than we do.

**27** Pray for Heather, Alecia, and Jyrell Hess as they interact with their peers in Albania. May God let their witness be clear in every situation.

## Tuesday

**"With my own eyes I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples..."**

**7** Pray for the staff of VMBM, VMC and the Va. Menno. Property Aid Plans as they gather together this evening to celebrate the Christmas holiday in an annual staff banquet.

**14** Ask what God is doing in your sphere of influence today — commit to being a part of God's work.

**21** Pray for Allen Umble as he returns to Pennsylvania today to spend the holidays with family. He will return to Albania in January to complete the current school year of teaching English since no one has been found to replace him.

**28** Phil Lehman asks for prayer that God would raise up strong Italian leaders in his church. These leaders are bi-vocational and this is often challenging.

## Wednesday

**1** Richard and Margaret Keeler visit with people in Trinidad who are seeking God sometimes for the first time in their lives. These visits make the love of God real to those hungering for this. Ask for God's grace to flow through them.

**8** VMC's four elected officers and two executive staff will be preparing for January's Conference Council meeting via a conference call tomorrow afternoon. Pray that they may experience God's grace and divine insight.

**15** Mary Hess attended a women's conference in Vlore, Albania, and three women from the church joined her. They were all deeply blessed. Thank God for this inspiring event.

**22** During this Christmas season we pray for peace and that God's will be done. Pray especially for those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Russia, Israel, Palestine and many other regions who are experiencing the terror of war.

**29** Longer-term workers are needed in Italy, Albania and Kosovo. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest will call forth new persons to serve in community development, church planting and support roles.

## Thursday

**2** Pray that God will show us during this Christmas season a proper balance between our 'wish list' and our 'gift list.' If you can add VMBM to your gift list this month, it will be appreciated.

**9** Dr. P.T. Yoder is chairing VMC's Health & Mutual Care Commission meeting today. Pray for wisdom as they wrestle with how our congregations can address access to health care.

**16** A work team from Lindale Mennonite Church is serving at the Maranatha School and surrounding community in Jamaica. May God grant them strength for the work that needs to be done.

**23** Emily, Sara, and Luca Martin are celebrating Christmas in Bari, Italy, this year. As they experience this, ask Jesus to touch them with special blessings.

**30** Philip Rhodes is returning to the Maranatha School and Ridge MC for several weeks to help rebuild hurricane damage and encourage the young believers there. Ask God to give him strength and guidance.

## Friday

**3** Pray for the Eastern Carolina District leaders as they consider ways to strengthen the Mennonite presence in the Triangle and Triad areas of North Carolina with a stronger focus on planting new churches.

**10** Many of the institutional development officers within VMC will gather this morning at a quarterly meeting under the leadership of Joseph Lapp, MMA Representative and Steve Carpenter, VMC Conference Coordinator.

**17** Pray for Paul and Esther Kniss who have postponed their return to Trinidad until Esther's recovery from stroke effects is more complete. May she experience God's healing touch.

**24** O holy child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

**31** Thank God that the members of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago bring in the new year by worshipping and praying together.

## Saturday

**4** Pray for Owen Burkholder as he joins Conference Ministers from across North America for the annual CM meeting near Dallas, Texas.

**11** Pray for the special outreach ministries that will take place in Italy and Albania during the Christmas season. These are special opportunities that often reach new persons and families with the message of Christ.

**18** VMBM workers are far from family during the holiday season. Ask for Christ's presence to be very real to them so that loneliness doesn't impact them greatly.

**25** For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 (KJV)

**"...a light to reveal your will to the Gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel"**

**Luke 2:30-32 (GNB)**

## Announcements

Financial help is urgently needed to continue reaching thousands of Muslim and Jewish children with the story of Jesus at Nazareth Village. For details on how individuals, Sunday school classes and/or churches can be involved, go to [www.nazarethvillage.com](http://www.nazarethvillage.com) and click on "Loaves and Fishes Program." You may also contact Dave Eshleman at [DMEshleman@aol.com](mailto:DMEshleman@aol.com) or at (540) 432-6585.

A Used Book Sale will be held at the Congregational Resource Center January 18-19, 2005, at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, during the School for Leadership Training. You are invited to participate by purchasing books or by donating books for the sale. Donations can be taken to the Congregational Resource Center, M-F (7:30-4:30). Books should be in good condition: please no journals, periodicals, or novels. Children's books are welcomed.

## Pastoral Transitions



Ben Risser was ordained as lead pastor of Ridgeway Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, on September 12. He and Kathy have three young adult daughters.

Martin Rhodes was licensed towards ordination as an interim pastor at Christiansburg Mennonite Fellowship, Christiansburg, Va. He is married to Sylvia (Witmer) Rhodes.

Donate Your Car to Virginia Mennonite Conference! The IRS rules are changing. Take a tax deduction for the full Blue Book value if you act before Dec. 31st. Contact Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter at [Steve.Carpenter@vmconf.org](mailto:Steve.Carpenter@vmconf.org), (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535 for details or with questions.

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