

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

February 2004
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North Carolina couple leads by following

Keith Nice, a nice Mennonite optometrist, stood outside his nice house in a nasty thunderstorm and chastised the sky that battered and soaked his piñata, popped or blew away his balloons, and drove his yard party into the garage.

He reflected, "It has been humbling again to be reminded that God is in control."

The yard party was to have been the grand finale of the Nice family's five-evening Backyard Bible School, one of a series of events that Keith and Tami Nice have hosted in recent months in their continuing efforts to attract friends and neighbors to join them in Christian fellowship.

They wince at the designation "church-planters." But, by default, that is what they have become. If they're still in discernment, their four-year-old son, Jacob, knows what it's about. One day, for no reason apparent to a sensible adult, he stood waiting on the front porch, holding open the door, expectantly looking out.

"What are you doing?" his mother asked. "Come in and shut the door."

"I'm waiting for the people to come," Jacob said. But it's not that time just yet.

Keith and Tami Nice are intentionally at the bottom of a kind of "trickle-down" church economics whose profits are these: furtherance of the "great commission" of Jesus Christ—to carry a message of love, peace and forgiveness to every person everywhere.

The Nices comprise a tiny portion of a group of Mennonite church-affiliated partners that last winter received a \$21,000 City On a Hill grant through the Mennonite Mission Network. The program targets church-planting and urban ministry, and is funded by donors who entrust their charitable giving to the Mission Network, the mission agency of the 114,000-member Mennonite Church USA.

Here in the "Triad-Triangle Region" of North Carolina, a grant oversight committee was formed and is discussing possibilities—perhaps an Anabaptist resource center somewhere in this area so rich in



knowledge and home to several respected universities. These Anabaptist planners also hope to establish a student center somewhere in the area, to serve as a kind of thought-hatchery for those who long for more peaceful alternatives to conflict, or thirst for faith in something, or a theology they can embrace.

In Graham stand Keith and Tami Nice, metaphorically holding open their front door, "waiting for the people to come."

Graham is a small town midway between Greensboro and Durham where, with help from churches in those two bigger towns, the Nices are active in a ministry that doesn't cost much more than the price of a tureen of soup, to serve when guests arrive.

They didn't start out intending to plant a church, Tami Nice said; it was the windfall of the City On a Hill program that caused the couple to start thinking that way. Having overseers "kept us accountable—kept us moving along with other programs," she said.

Along the way, the Nices have come in contact with Methodists who "don't really go to church," people who are "kind of New-Agey," followers of the Ba'Hai faith, and a woman whose husband "doesn't believe in organized religion," but felt she needed to

Children participate during a five-day vacation Bible school at Keith and Tami Nice's home in Graham, N.C.

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God's fairness



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

I hurt someone's feelings on Valentine's Day. I didn't mean to and was, in fact, trying to be generous. I was in third grade and we had prepared for the special occasion by designing simple bags to receive the expected outpouring of Valentine cards.

A few brought for the whole class. Most of us didn't, choosing rather to give only to our best friends and those we most admired. Now that I think about it, the outcome could have been predicted. Some of my classmates got a card from everyone. Many of us got a dozen or more. A few received only a few. A celebration that was intended as an expression of friendship and generosity ended up causing pain for those few. I regret that I had not thought to include them.

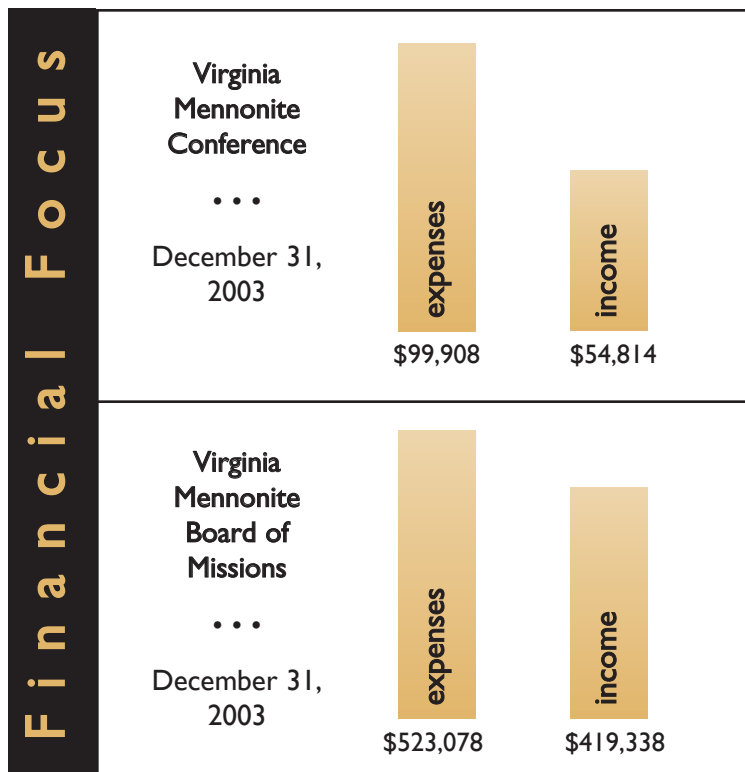
The teacher could have implemented a plan that would have determined equal Valentines for all. If my memory serves me correctly, that is what happened a couple years later. I am not opposed to such guidance, although the resulting spontaneity and generosity seem more contrived. Fairness that needs prompting doesn't always seem very fair. I actually wish that more of us would have simply understood

that those less popular classmates could also be friends. We could have expressed our friendship equally to all.

I'm reminded of one of several crucial aspects of the Gospel. God's grace is open to all. "Whosoever will, may come," says the old revival hymn. "God is not willing that any should perish," Peter said. God's fairness would even make it sometimes appear that he prefers the poor, downtrodden, and friendless.

The world we live in doesn't appear quite so evenhanded. Like that school teacher, we can impose some kind of equality on the unfairness. I don't object to some of those efforts, although they do make generosity seem more contrived. At times the imposition of fairness seems hard to differentiate from the inequality it presumes to address. Even more, I wish for a church and Christians who rise up and express their compassion and friendship across boundaries of race, culture, nationality and economic standing. We do so by sharing with others salvation through Jesus, extending the invitation of warm fellowship, and joining God's work of compassion and justice in the world. As a missional church, we join a missional God.

Loren Horst



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Raising the roof in Salters Hill, Jamaica

On November 22, a Partners in Mission team of seven men from three churches left from Dayton, Va., bound for Jamaica. Team members were Jesse Showalter, Clint Showalter, Joel Rhodes, Dennis Rhodes, Dietrich Rhodes, Woody Driver, and Terry Cline. The goal of the trip was to put a roof on a house for Donovan Smith, pastor at Salters Hill Mennonite Church, and his family.

We were met at the airport in Montego Bay by Phillip Rhodes, Jesse Bergey, and Richie and Verna Tyson. Jesse and Phillip were able to spend the entire time with us; both are missionaries at Maranatha School for the Deaf. It was a real blessing to have them with us, as they acted as guides, drivers, and interpreters throughout the week.

The work at Salters Hill went well, and we were able to accomplish the task we set out to do. Doug Senior and a small group of volunteers from Good Tidings Mennonite Church in Kingston showed up and helped us one day. Their help was greatly appreciated. Another blessing of our time at Salters Hill was the friendship and hospitality we experienced each day as Maxine, Donovan’s wife, greeted us, provided our lunch, and reminded us that we were both a blessing and being blessed as we gave of our time and efforts.

We stayed at the Youth With a Mission base overlooking Montego Bay. They provided our breakfast and our evening meals. It was an unexpected blessing to learn to know and to interact with both the students and the staff. Their dedica-

tion to the task of spreading of the gospel was a challenge to us all.

If there was a theme for the week, certainly it was “blessing.” It was both a term we heard throughout the week, as well as a feeling we experienced. There was the sense of accomplishment in a job well done. And there was wonder as we experienced the blessing of answered prayer, the beauty of God’s creation, and the fellowship of God’s people in another culture.

• Terry Cline
Dayton Mennonite Church



Jesse Showalter’s wheelbarrow can carry rock to fill in a floor—or a whole load of energetic children.

As Christmas drew nigh

At Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica, the excitement of Christmas began in November. That was the time when the teachers and children began to prepare their parts for the annual Christmas program. Each teacher found something interesting and unique to share. There were songs to learn how to sign and poems to recite and act out. There were also many lines to memorize for the Christmas play entitled “The Little Drummer Boy.”

All of us here at Maranatha were incredibly happy to have Danny and Shirley Trobaugh join us in mid-November. They added so much to our school life and to our assortment of talents. We were overjoyed to find that Danny is a veteran of the stage, having been involved in the Christmas and Easter plays at Weavers Mennonite Church over the past several years. He was happy to take the position of play director, and we were more than willing to follow his direction. He made neat stage props, such as a stable and a manger, and he wowed us all by rigging up a star that moved on a pulley system from the back of the church to the front.

After many hours of practice and hard work, the great moment arrived. Two days after Maranatha School dismissed for the holiday, the teachers and students returned for the program. All of the guys looked handsome in their fine clothes and sporting their new haircuts, and all of the girls looked angelic; they wore beautiful skirts and dresses and had their hair in cane-rows in a variety of neat patterns. They were all so proud that their parents and relatives were there to watch them tell the Christmas story. Likewise, I can't imagine that there was a parent there who was not proud of their son or daughter.

The program went very well with Omar Beiler taking the role of emcee. With his help, it went along smoothly and he inspired us to see the advent of Christ through worshipful eyes and praising hearts. I celebrated Christmas during the next few weeks by going to community celebrations and church services—all with new friends, brothers, and sisters. Time and again, the picture of young children with faces beaming while the story of Christmas was upon their signing fingertips helped me to remember the awesome joy that was born with the baby-child long ago and lives on in us!

• Philip Rhodes
St. Elizabeth, Jamaica



Top: Johni Nephew signs his part in the Christmas program at Maranatha School for the Deaf.

Center: Joseph (Kevon Swaby) reacts to Mary's (Tonya Brooks) news.

Bottom: Philip Rhodes and Jesse Bergey sign “Merry Christmas.”

Honoring a widow

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd... Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins... Calling the disciples to him, Jesus said: ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more in the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty...’” (Mark 12:41-44).

I met the widow that Jesus spoke of. Not the specific Jerusalem widow he saw during his passion week, but one of her kin. She lives in Wheeling, W.Va., in a modest home in a crowded neighborhood. Her name is Rosie Jones.

Rosie is well known by the staff of Virginia Conference because of her faithfulness. Each month Rosie mails a \$10 check (sometimes more, occasionally less) to support the ministry of Virginia Mennonite Conference. Since 1994 she has contributed \$1,500 through her consistency. Wow!

Rosie Long came to faith as a young girl at Riverside Mennonite Church in Harman, W. Va. Her father and uncle donated property from their farm to build the church along the Dry Fork River. Her sister, Ella Mowery, still lives in Dry Fork and receives care from Joseph Mininger, Riverside’s retired pastor.

This saintly woman was raised with her four brothers and four sisters on her father’s farm in West Virginia. She moved in the early 1950s to Hatfield, Pa., to work as a nurse’s aide at the Mennonite Convalescent Home. In 1960 she married Russell Jones and returned to his family’s home in Wheeling, W. Va., to care for his widowed mother. They never had children; rather, Rosie has helped support her nephews. She also has a love of pets, adopting many stray cats over the years. Patty, a friend from the Lutheran church who regularly visits Rosie, aptly observed, “Rosie has a big heart.”

At age 79, Rosie still loves the Lord and the church that nurtured her faith. There are no Mennonite churches in Wheeling, so she joined a local Lutheran congregation. Her late husband, Russell, who died in 1991 at age 65, was Lutheran.

Rosie lives simply, and she isn’t surrounded by lavish things. Rather she chooses to bask in Rejoice Broadcast’s 24-hour Christian radio programming. She loves the preaching of Charles Stanley and the Back to the Bible Broadcast. They too receive a small monthly check, just \$5 each, from this widow’s social security stipend and modest retirement income.

Age has taken its toll on Rosie. She suffers from arthritis, high blood pressure and borderline diabetes. She walks with a cane and sometimes forgets things. When I arrived for our 9:00 appointment on a Thursday morning she said, “You’re early.”

“It’s 9 o’clock; I’m right on time,” I replied.

She was in curlers, getting her hair done. Apparently, she was expecting me on Friday. “I’ve got leakage of the brain,” Rosie confessed. “I don’t have many things that I enjoy anymore. So I like to get my hair done.”

Rosie still drives, but her arthritic shoulder and West Virginia’s severe winters limit her trips to just church and the grocery store. “I can’t do much at church anymore, but I can pray,” Rosie said. Meals on Wheels helps maintain her independence with deliveries five days a week.

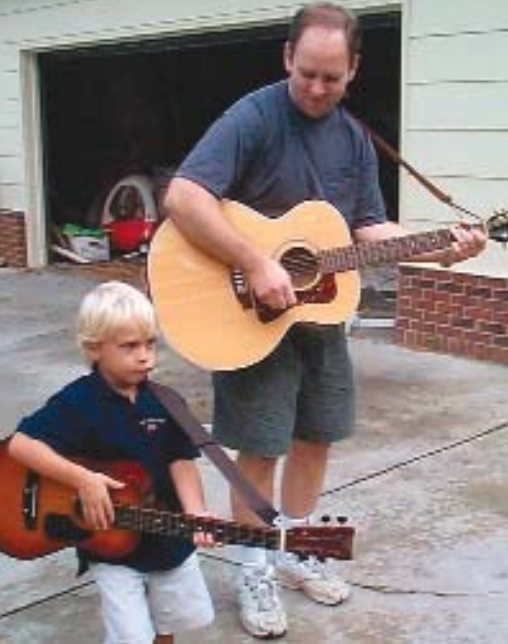
“Thank you for your visit. I feel reconnected to the Mennonite church,” Rosie remarked as I was leaving.

A small glass plaque hanging in Rosie’s kitchen reads, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” This is Rosie’s life motto. We know from scripture that God has a special place in His heart for widows. This particular widow has a special place in my heart.

• Steve Carpenter
Conference Coordinator



Rosie Jones faithfully contributes her financial and prayer support for Virginia Mennonite Conference from her home in Wheeling, W. Va.



Keith Nice plays guitar along with a young boy during a five-day VBS that was held at the Nices' house.

continued from cover

“find an organized faith,” Tami Nice said. “If there’s going to be a Mennonite church in Graham, it’s not going to be a place for displaced Mennonites,” she said. “God put so many people in our path, expressing these needs that just aren’t being met.”

So last summer, Tami followed a longtime calling to minister to women, and she led a women’s Bible study class that introduced many young moms to the Scriptures, which they’d heard talked about, but never really read.

In July, Keith and Tami hosted their Backyard Bible School, which attracted children and moms who weren’t committed Christians, but had decided their children could do with some Bible education. Tami taught the lessons, part of MC USA’s Jubilee summer series, from a coffee table on the grass, and Keith hauled out and played his big Guild 12-string guitar.

In August, they invited “Drumming for Peace” guru Leo Hartshorn to town. Hartshorn, minister of peace and justice for Mennonite Mission Network, held a preaching-and-drumming revival billed as “A Joyful Noise,” in a local Presbyterian church that attracted about 50 people who’d brought the buckets to beat on. Hartshorn served up the drum sticks and gospel. Youth from Durham Mennonite Church cooled the parched percussionists with an ice cream social.

In October and November, the Nices hosted a popular eight-week study series in their home, called “Boundaries with Kids,” using videos they’d borrowed from Virginia Mennonite Resource Center. That endeavor attracted about eight couples.

All the while, the Nices have been urged and assisted by members of Mennonite congregations down both directions of US Highway 40—they get prayer support and come-to-town hands-on help from members of Greensboro Mennonite Fellowship west of Graham, and from Durham Mennonite Church to the east.

The Nices didn’t set out to be “church planters,” yet, by their persistence, they have strode to the vanguard of an unassuming Mennonite boost to share the words and deeds of Jesus in their portion of the world.

Along the way, Keith Nice, 37, had stood beneath a howling thunderstorm, angry that his vacation Bible school party had been forced into the garage.

Soon after, he remembered something important. Sometimes, the wind is going to blow.

“I felt like God was reminding me, ‘Remember when you were standing in the rain yelling at me? What did you mean by your party? This is *my* party. You can’t control the wind. You can’t control the rain. You can’t build a church any more than you can control the weather. If I want to see a church plant in Graham, it isn’t because of your clever ideas. Just stand out of the way and watch the door.’

“Maybe the best way to plant a church is to begin by opening the door to our homes and to remember that it’s still God’s party,” Nice said.

• Charles T. Jones
Mennonite Mission Network

Correction: Annika Maust, pictured on page 5 of the January *Connections* is the daughter of Robert and Gretchen Maust. Sorry, Annika!

Congregational Resource Center

February offers an opportunity to tell those around us how much we love them and to work on strengthening our relationships. Check out the following resources—and more—from the Congregational Resource Center.

Video kits on marriage:

- **Boundaries in Marriage** - Cloud & Townsend
- **A Biblical Portrait of Marriage** - Bruce Wilkinson

Books for pre-marriage by H. Norman Wright

- **Before You Say “I Do”**
- **Premarital Counseling Handbook**
- **How to Counsel a Couple in 6 Sessions or Less**

Videos for young adults by James Dobson:

- **Love Must Be Tough**
- **The Keys to a Lifelong Love**

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 25. Mennonite Publishing Network has already circulated suggestions for worship in the winter “Leader.” Visit us to find other ideas including details on a Seder meal and Stations of the Cross. Books available include:

- **Where’s Noah: A Lenten Program of Services & Activities** - Arley Fadness
- **Lenten Resources for Worship Leaders**, An Anthology

The Resource Center is open 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact Kathy Weaver Wenger at 540-432-4219 or wengerkw@emu.edu to make arrangements for evening use.

Visit our website at www.emu.edu/mrcr to browse our catalog.

February 2004 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

1 Good Tidings Menn. Church, Kingston, Jamaica, requests prayer for the Jamaica Menn. Church's building projects and for their conference leaders. Let's join our brothers and sisters in praying for these areas of God's Kingdom.

8 Pray for Norma Teles as she returns to Albania this month after three months in Brazil. Pray for emotional stamina, as the sudden death of her mother and the burden of finding sufficient support have added stress to her life.

15 Pray for the leaders of the regional conferences of MC USA (including Franconia, Lancaster, Virginia, Atlantic Coast, Franklin, Eastern District) as they gather on Tuesday for fellowship and an exchange of ideas.

22 Paul and Esther Kniss are returning to Virginia after spending several months in India. They are preparing to return to Trinidad in a few weeks. Ask God to bless them with stamina and wisdom for the tasks ahead of them.

29 Pray for Milford and Carolyn Lyndaker as they pastor Crest Hill Community Church in Wardensville, W.Va. Pray that the group will grow in numbers and maturity and that they will influence the local community for good.

Monday

2 Pray for Steven and Karla Francisco and the leadership team for the new church plant in Smithfield, Va. Pray for team unity and for effective ministry to new attendees.

9 Is God calling you to serve Him full-time? Learn about service opportunities by talking with representatives from Mennonite mission agencies at EMU today and tomorrow. Pray that you and others will hear God's voice clearly.

16 *President's Day* "I urge... prayers... for all those in authority... that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2). Pray that God would give President George W. Bush wisdom in his decisions.

23 Thank God for Beryl Brubaker's effective service as interim president at EMU. Pray for Loren Swartzendruber who began as president in January.

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by Elizabeth Hostetter. She encourages you to maintain strong connections with people in your life through letter writing and prayer.

Tuesday

3 The VMC Missional Church Team is cooperating with MMN to provide training for persons who will assist congregations that want to engage their communities missionally. Pray for the appointment and training processes.

10 Jesse Bergey plans activities for the children in the Ridge community in Jamaica while the youth have their meetings. Pray that Jesse will have energy, insight, and patience to guide the children and to show them unconditional love.

17 Willard and Eva Eberly return to Bari, Italy, today, following their stateside assignment in Virginia this winter. Pray for safety in travel and for their re-adjustment to ministry in Italy and Albania.

24 Pray for vision, wisdom, and leadership as VMC and VMBM consider helping to plant a church in Charlotte, N.C., in conjunction with MC USA's Assembly there in July 2005.

Wednesday

4 Persons in Eastern Carolina District are beginning the Blenheim Bible Study Course, which provides basic biblical knowledge in a systematic way. This will strengthen the churches and believers for mission to their community.

11 Pray for Ron Baker of Rehoboth Prison Ministries as he visits and leads Bible studies in several prisons in central Virginia. Pray also that financial needs of the ministry will be met.

18 Praise God for the excellent Christmas program in New Settlement, Chaguanas, Trinidad. The message of Christ and why He came to earth was clearly presented to the hundred people who attended this service under a tent.

25 Pray for Truman Brunk, Overseer for the Harrisonburg District, as he completes his term this year. Pray for the District leaders as they look for his replacement while redefining their needs and expectations, Trinidad."

If you would like to sponsor one or more months of the prayer calendar, contact Gloria Lehman at gloria.lehman@ymbm.org, 540-434-9727 or 1-800-707-5535.

Thursday

5 Chaiya and Aranya Hadasunern will share with the World Mission Prayer Fellowship in Harrisonburg today. Pray for the Hmong outreach in Hickory, N.C., and for the families that are coming to Christian faith.

12 Pray for the Diego Martin Mennonite Church in Trinidad as they find new life in a Sunday afternoon service (in addition to the morning service), spend more time in prayer, and desire to reach out more to the community.

19 Pray for Urban Ministry Director Leslie Francisco as he encourages the outreach efforts of churches in Warwick and Norfolk Districts. Pray that vision for ministry will be implemented in effective ways.

26 Richard Keeler writes: "Thank God for keeping us (church members, Margaret, and me) safe in this year of significantly increased crime (robberies, kidnappings and murders) and reckless driving in Trinidad."

Friday

6 Pray for Moderator Joe Longacher and the VMC delegates as they gather for the Winter Delegate Session at Springdale Menonite Church tomorrow. Ask for wisdom as they discuss and make decisions.

13 Pray for the executive committee of the VMBM Board as they lead meetings today and tomorrow. They are Marvin Slabaugh, chair; Jim Foster, vice-chair; Carol Rhodes, secretary; and Milton Heatwole, treasurer.

20 Pray for the pastors, ministers, and spouses who are gathering in Williamsburg this weekend for the Ministry Retreat. Dennis and Linda Gingerich will be speaking, and Ralph and Lucinda Swartzendruber will lead worship.

27 Pray for European Menonite mission leaders and laypersons as they meet in Holland this week for fellowship and conversation about Menonite missions in Europe. Willard Eberly and Italian delegates will attend this conference.

Saturday

7 Pray for Conference Minister Owen Burkholder as he speaks at Stephens City Menonite Church tomorrow morning. Pray also for the continuing ministry of Pastor Jim Musser.

14 Pray for Lindale Menn. Church's Leadership Retreat this weekend as they discuss what it means to be missional and listen to God's call. Resource persons Beryl Jantzi and Steve Carpenter will help guide the discussions.

21 The "Creating a Congregational Culture of Call" effort continues. Pray for the persons who have been tapped through these efforts. Ask God to show you whom you should be encouraging to consider a call to pastoral ministry.

28 Pray for Francesco Picone, president of the Italian Menn. Church, and the Italian pastors as they work together to clarify their confession of faith and overall identity in the context of the evangelical movement in Italy.

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

John 13:35 (NLT)

Announcements

Highland Retreat will hold its Annual Auction at a new time and place this year. The event will be held at Shady Oak at Weavers Mennonite Church on March 6. The auction benefits the youth camp summer program at Highland Retreat. New merchandise, artwork, quilts, ethnic meals, baked goods, theme baskets and coins are items typically for sale. For more information call 540-852-3226 or e-mail info@highlandretreat.org.

A Men's Retreat will be held at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center on March 12-14. Myron Augsburg will be the guest speaker. The registration deadline is February 27. For more information, contact WCRC at 757-566-2256 or programs@wrc.info. The event is co-sponsored with Mennonite Men of Virginia.

A Missions Celebration of God's activity among us will be held on March 13 at 7:00 p.m. at Park View Mennonite Church, hosted by Mennonite Mission Network and VMBM. Watch for more details about this evening of stories and songs.

Jamaica Mennonite Church announces openings for two family practice physicians to work in church clinics at Good Tidings Mennonite Church, Kingston (urban), and Joyland Mennonite Church, St. Elizabeth (rural). Physicians are responsible for overall health of

patients and oversight of nurse assistants and medical records personnel. Physicians must be currently licensed, committed to the Anabaptist faith, available for 3-5 years, and start by September 2004 or as soon as possible. For information, contact Beth Brunk, HR Coordinator at VMBM at 540-434-9727 or info@vmbm.org.

Turkey canning for Mennonite Central Committee will be held at the Mennonite Relief Center, Hinton, Va., March 1-5. The designated day for members of Virginia Mennonite Conference to volunteer is March 2, but you are welcome to help on any day.

MCC has asked the Mennonite Relief Center Board not to can beef this year, due to the case of Mad Cow disease in the U.S., which has made exporting beef impossible. We will process turkey instead.

Funds are needed to purchase turkey for processing. Please send your contributions to Mennonite Relief Center, P.O. Box 519, Dayton, VA 22821.

For more information, contact Leon Rhodes at 540-867-9751.

"Pieced Together—Encore!" an original musical production of local stories of birth, growth, and change in the community, will be presented at the Yoder Barn in Newport News, Va., on March 5-7, 12-14, and 19-21. For more information visit www.yoderbarn.com or contact the box office at 757-249-4187.



during the annual Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly

improv
comedy
team



panic squad

July 8-11
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worship
speakers
Battle of the Bands
...and more!

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