

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

January 2004
Vol. 14, No. 3

A gift for Centro Koinonia... and beyond

The very first Italian family God sent to Centro Koinonia, the new church in Bari, Italy, was Giorgio and Valeria Moncelli, a young couple with two small boys. They were longing and praying for a church fellowship characterized by authentic love and acceptance—a place to truly belong. In their natural families they were practically alone in their evangelical faith, and the church they had previously attended left them empty, disillusioned, and hurt. Where could they find Christian friendship and nurture for themselves and their children, especially in Bari where churches are few? How could they serve the Lord and His purposes with their gifts?

Meeting Jason and Donna Martin at an inter-church event sparked an immediate heart-level relationship that eventually led to their commitment to participate in the life of our new church. Receiving them into our fellowship was an answer to our prayers as well. It was amazing to discover each other!

Giorgio, a Bari businessman, studies the Bible in the lulls of his work day. His quiet depth of faith and profound insights into Scripture move and warm our hearts. Valeria's joy in praise and worship is contagious. We discovered that God has given her a special gift to lead worship and to compose new songs. Although she has never studied music, these songs have musically rich melodies, and are easy to sing and harmonize. The lyrics express praise, affirm personal faith, and proclaim great themes of truth. Valeria accepts no personal credit or compliments for these songs because, as she testifies, they are a gift the Lord gives His church through her life.

One evening during a study of Romans 8, Willard Eberly suggested, "Valeria, here's a theme for a new song—nothing can separate us from the love of Christ." Within a week, God had graciously given her that song! It is among the favorites of our church fellowship. On another occasion, the testimony of a new believer inspired Valeria to write a song. Can you



imagine how encouraging that song must be for that new Christian?!

While serving in Italy this summer in a music ministry, Maurita Eberly worked with Valeria to write down the scores for two of her songs. They will be added to an Italian songbook to be published in the near future. This gift of a "new song" that has blessed and inspired Centro Koinonia will soon be enjoyed by many other believers throughout Italy!

"Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things" (Psalm 96:1).

Valeria Moncelli and Phil Lehman lead worship songs during the Sunday service of Centro Koinonia. This new congregation is now meeting in a rented facility in Bari, Italy.

• Eva Eberly
Mediterranean Regional Associate
Bari, Italy

On trials and inspiration

Have you ever had a day filled with frustration? One morning in late October, I was dropped off at the airport, ready to fly to Canada to attend a convention. As I approached the United ticket counter, I saw they use a customer operated computer that reads a credit card for identification. My first problem occurred when the machine couldn't read my card. After several attempts it finally established who I was, but there was no record of my reservation. At that point the United employee intervened.

"Where are you traveling to?" she asked.

"Winnipeg," I replied.

"That is not a United flight."

"My ticket says United Airlines flight 8667, operated by Air Canada," I protested.

"The key words are "operated by Air Canada," she countered. "You have to check in around the corner."

Obediently I trudged to the next counter lugging my bags. Sure enough, they had my reservation. "May I see your passport or birth certificate, please?" the attendant asked.

I didn't have either document with me. After all this was a trip to Canada, our friendly neighbor to the north. "I'm sorry. We can't let you board without proof of citizenship," she insisted.

I couldn't believe this was happening, and I wasn't happy about it. I considered rescheduling for a later

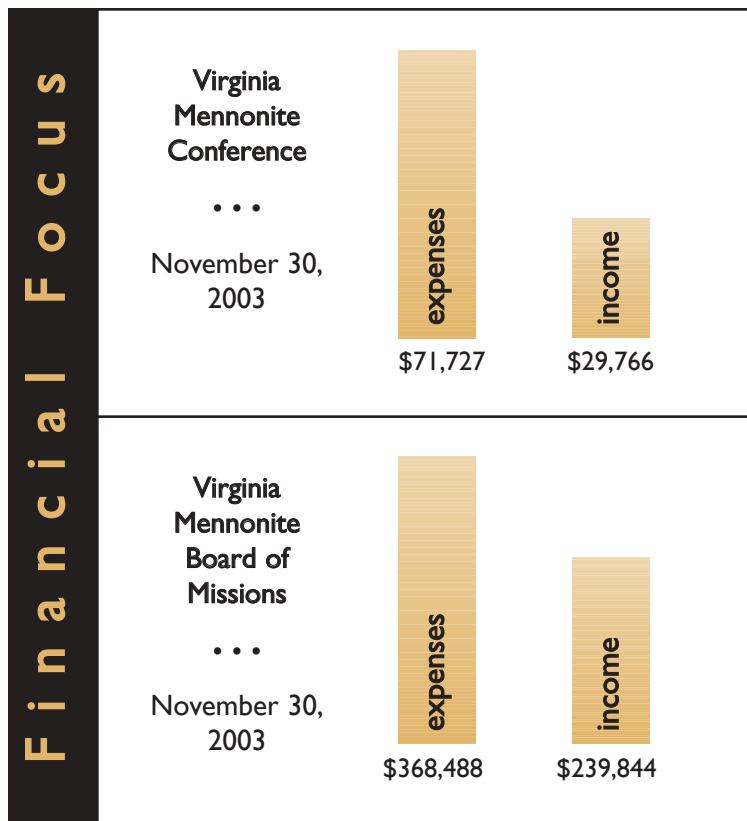


Steve Carpenter
Conference Coordinator

flight but it was a four hour trip home and I didn't have a car. After further discussion I learned they would accept a faxed copy of my birth certificate. I phoned my wife, who agreed to fax it.

As I waited in the terminal, reading Psalm 119, I saw a custodian replacing bulbs. After quickly setting up, he easily lowered the hinged light cover, deftly removed the U-shaped glass and replaced it. The problem was corrected in just 45 seconds. Reflecting on what I had just witnessed, I wished all of life's problems could be solved so easily, but we all know they cannot.

As I read Psalm 119, I was encouraged by the words, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees" (v. 71) and "Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed" (v. 116). As you read God's Word, I trust you too will find the inspiration you need to bear the many frustrations life brings your way.



Connections (USPS 007-205) is published monthly by Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions and Virginia Mennonite Conference to connect congregations with each other and conference agencies.

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Connections is distributed free to each household of supporting congregations. Subscription rates: \$5 per year, 2 years for \$9. Send subscriptions to *Connections* Circulation Manager, 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802

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POSTMASTER Send address changes to 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg, VA 22801.

Jesus transforms lives in Esperanza

We first met Angie and Stephan in 2002. The Gunpaths and Keelers were going from door to door in Esperanza, Trinidad, learning to know people, inviting children to our new Sunday School, and encouraging adults to attend our new Bible study on Sunday afternoons. Two of Angie and Stephan's four children came regularly to our Sunday School. Another child, Sherry, a mid-teenager, had given her life to Jesus before we met her. Their oldest son, Terry, has not yet come to our services.

In December 2002, Angie made her first appearance with the Hope Mennonite Church folks at their first Christmas banquet. She felt comfortable with the group and began attending Sunday worship services regularly, even though she felt she would always remain a Hindu.

Stephan re-committed his life to the Lord early in 2003, and in March he was baptized. In April, Angie and Stephan were present for the outdoor Easter Sunrise service. They drank in the Good News about Jesus coming to earth, dying for our sins, and then being raised to life again. They continued to attend the Sunday services and offered their home for the mid-week cell group meetings.

A crisis in August brought Angie so close to the edge of despair that she took a handful of all kinds of medicine. By God's grace her life was spared. That same day she invited Jesus into her life, finding no other way to deal with her problems.

Their pastor and wife, Lalman and Rafina John, have been and continue to walk closely with Angie and Stephan, encouraging them in the way of the Lord. Angie and Stephan are also receiving counseling and the Lord has dramatically transformed their relationship. The times of cursing, tongue-lashing, throwing things, drinking, smoking, and calling in the police, are now things of the past.

Expressions of love and care have taken the place of verbal abuse. They are now able to discuss their differences calmly and without exploding in anger. Their children, other relatives, neighbors and friends are seeing the wonderful change Jesus has made in their lives and in their home. The younger children are even doing better in school.

On the first Sunday in November 2003, Angie publicly identified herself with believers by being baptized, along with another new believer from Esperanza. It was wonderful to hear these two mothers publicly declare that they were following Jesus. They are eager to keep on growing in Christ and to share the Good News of Jesus with others. We and they praise God for the marvelous way Jesus has changed their lives. New people are coming to their cell group in response to Angie's outreach to others.

• Richard Keeler
Trinidad



Trinidadian children concentrate on a craft project during Vacation Bible School in Summer 2003.

Serving in Jamaica: Danny & Shirley Trobaugh

Danny and Shirley Trobaugh arrived in Jamaica on November 12 to serve at Maranatha School for the Deaf for one year. Danny and Shirley teach vocational classes such as woodworking, sewing, cooking and computer skills. In addition to being a loving presence around the school, they will assist with drama and other programs given by the students. The Trobaughs relate to the Mennonite churches in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, and are members at Weavers Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg.



Springdale learns about peacemaking

In the weeks following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center, a group of men from Springdale Mennonite Church who meet for prayer breakfast every Thursday at the local pancake house found themselves discussing ways that the church could appropriately respond. Of the many ideas discussed, the formation of a 13-week adult Sunday school class on peacemaking was the one that received the most support.

In the fall of 2002, Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va., began an adult Sunday school class with a goal of raising the peacemaking consciousness of the 70 adults who attended. Four Mennonite professors taught on four topics: George Brunk III on “The Biblical Basis for Peacemaking, Nate Yoder on “The Church’s History of Peacemaking,” Gerald Shenk on “Difficult, Practical Questions about Peacemaking,” and Cal Redekop on “The Social and Cultural Context of Peacemaking.”

The topics that were presented helped guide the class participants to develop deeper peacemaking convictions especially in a time when a non-resistant Christian stance might be viewed by the broader culture as inappropriate. The material presented provided a broad perspective on and a fresh, deep, spiritual insight into Christ’s teaching of non-resistance and peacemaking.

The local newspaper published an article on the Mennonite Church’s teaching on non-resistance, then sent a reporter to one of the class sessions, and published a follow up article on the peacemaking class. The publicity attracted several participants from other churches who were interested in peacemaking, as non-resistance was not taught at their church. One family eventually transferred their membership to Springdale.

The feedback on the class was very positive. Several participants suggested that a follow-up class be taught on interpersonal peacemaking. This

class would focus on peacemaking at the relationship level in our everyday lives. In response to this request, a second 13-week adult Sunday school class is currently being taught at Springdale. Four Mennonite professionals—George Brunk III, Jan Jenner, Jim Glanzer, and Mark Wenger—are teaching the class, which will cover four topics: “The Biblical Foundation for Building Relationships of Blessing,” “Conflict Transformation: Theory and Practice,” “Peace with Oneself in Marriage and in Family,” and “Forgiveness.”

• Steve Pardini
Springdale Mennonite Church

Our missional identity

The VMC Missional Church Team met with Mennonite Mission Network staff at Northern Virginia Mennonite Church in Fairfax on November 2-3 to discuss a plan to bring renewal to conference and congregations. Mennonite Mission Network staff persons have been developing a transformation process, “Cultivating Missional Identity,” that will help congregations move toward renewal of vision and missional engagement in the world. This meeting discussed implementation in Virginia Mennonite Conference.

“Cultivating Missional Identity” will focus on several key aspects or “pivot points” of church life: understanding who we are, finding our spiritual center, discerning God’s movement among us, empowering leaders, equipping disciples, relationship with God and each other, practicing hospitality and partnering with others. Local persons will be identified and equipped to lead congregations through a series of training “modules” for missional change.

The projected “kick-off” time for “Cultivating Missional Identity” is summer 2004 with some training

events beginning earlier. Look for more information about this opportunity to walk and learn together as a Conference toward our goal to be agents of healing and hope in our world.

• Joe Bontrager
USA Regional Director



John Powell of Mennonite Mission Network and Joe Bontrager of VMC’s Missional Church Team consider ways in which Virginia Conference can cultivate a missional identity.



Justine Maust, daughter of Dennis Maust and Rachel Hess; Annika Maust, daughter of Robert and Gretchen Maust; and Alyssa and Addison Shenk, daughters of Duane and Tanya Shenk, get into the act of making commemorative tiles for Park View's 50th anniversary.

Park View Mennonite celebrates 50 years

Dennis Maust, 51, has fond memories of Sunday school discussions in the Faith and Issues class at Park View Mennonite Church, which helped shape his worldview.

On Thanksgiving weekend, he put images to those memories in the shape of ceramic tiles that were installed in the church foyer as part of the church's 50th anniversary celebrations. Maust, son of Evelyn and the late Earl Maust, now a ceramic artist living in Lititz, Pa., was born into the congregation which was formally organized on November 27, 1953, on the campus of Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg.

Reflecting the anniversary's theme "Through these Doors," the symbolic paintings on the tiles, said Maust at a reception recognizing his artistic work, "represent the church in a worldwide sense, the vision of its people and the building." He used motifs such as the dove and the olive branch, grapes and wheat as the Eucharist of "good worship" and the orthodox "Circle of Christ" taken from the ancient Coptic Christians in the Middle East.

Members of the congregation purchased the tiles in honor of loved ones. Maust then installed the tiles on the doorposts leading into the fellowship hall.

The three-day celebration, beginning with a concert by present and former musicians on Friday evening, was filled with music, an art exhibit by some 17 artists from the 350-member congregation, a book-signing by Harold Lehman who was commissioned to write the church's history in a 96-page, full-color book entitled "Through these Doors: a Journal of Faithfulness," a Body and Soul

health fair, a children's tile project, a fellowship dinner followed by a recognition of the 56 charter members, 24 of whom are still living, and the viewing of a video memoir produced by Robert Maust.

Among the storytellers at the memorial program were Grace Hostetter, widow of B. Charles Hostetter; G. Irvin Lehman, a retired Old Testament professor at EMU and the oldest living charter member; Evelyn Maust; J. Lester Brubaker; Doris Miller Rosenberger; Duane Shenk and Myron Augsburger.

The late Ira E. Miller was the first pastor of the congregation with the dual role of college dean and pastor, followed by A. Don Augsburger, Harold Eshleman and Owen Burkholder, during whose tenure a team ministry was formed. Assisting Burkholder were Shirlee K. Yoder and Shirley E. Yoder Brubaker. Later Paula Hochstedler joined the team as the first youth pastor. Myron Augsburger, then college pastor at EMC, assisted Miller by conducting Sunday morning worship services in the college chapel in those early years.

Miller was not salaried, but received a money gift at Christmas. Don Augsburger, who at one time had 21 ordained pastors sitting in his audience as members, was the first salaried pastor.

Currently the pastoral team is Phil Kniss as lead pastor, Barbara Moyer Lehman as associate pastor, and Ross Erb as associate pastor of children, youth and families.

"For a congregation whose membership has hovered in the 365-400 range over the past 25 years," Lehman reflected in his book, "the numbers suggest a striking mobility within our fellowship. . . . While we may not have the family continuity of the typical rural Mennonite congregation, we recognize this mobility as a means of spreading our witness and service."

• Dick Benner
Park View Mennonite Church

EMS hosts major consultation on Islam



Consultation participants break into small groups to process and form response statements to the massive input presented by numerous speakers.

The original plan was to hold a small meeting of people who live and work among Muslims to talk about trust-building relationships and what constitutes an appropriate witness to them. But as word spread about plans to hold such a forum, more groups and organizations who have been engaged within Muslim communities over the years asked to come and to be involved in whatever would be presented.

The result: more than 220 registrants gathered at Eastern Mennonite Seminary for an Anabaptist Consultation on the Church and Islam, October 23-26. Representatives came from across North America, Africa and Asia and from a variety of denominations and theological traditions. Attendance at some sessions was over 300.

The forum was jointly sponsored by Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Mennonite Mission Network and Eastern Mennonite Missions, with participa-

tion from more than 15 other global agencies, groups and organizations.

“Christians and Muslims have gathered in various settings to reflect on their journeys together,” noted Linford L. Stutzman, associate professor of culture and mission at EMU and planning team member. “But this meeting has been designed as an Anabaptist Christian retreat to hear the counsel of the Holy Spirit and to listen to each other in a spirit of discernment.

“You see before you an incredibly full program schedule, with more than 70 presenters over these four days,” Dr. Stutzman told the assembly at the opening session. “It’s feeling at times like taking a drink from a fire hose,” stated James Krabill of Mennonite Mission Network later in the conference.

Richard A. Showalter, president of Eastern Mennonite Missions, said, “The consultation was a heady mix of academics, missionaries, farmers, administrators, students and international church leaders from a wide cross-section of the North American Mennonite community and beyond. There was hardly a dull moment with a rare blend of heart and mind—testimony, analysis, worship, debate and discernment—one of the finest inter-Mennonite meetings I’ve ever attended.”

• Jim Bishop
Eastern Mennonite University

Congregational Resource Center

It's Vacation Bible School Planning Time! The Center will have a display of the new Vacation Bible School kits from Augsburg, Group, Standard and Mennonite Publishing House from January 14 to February 10. This is a good opportunity to look through the materials, listen to the music and see the videos to find what fits best for your church's needs. We also have VBS kits from other years.

The theme for this year's School for Leadership Training at Eastern Mennonite Seminary (January 19-22) is Preaching. In addition to textual helps for pastors, you might enjoy reading some good sermons in:

- **Gospel Medicine** by Barbara Brown Taylor

There are a variety of styles of sermons:

- **Between the Bible & the Church: New Methods for Biblical Preaching** by David I. Bartlett
- **Preaching Verse By Verse** by Gilbert L. Bartholomew
- **Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching From the Old Testament** by Ronald J. Allen & John C. Holbert

- **Story Journey: An Invitation to the Gospel as Storytelling** by Thomas E. Boomershine
- **Worship: A Symphony for the Senses, Vol. 3 - Sermons: Words of Grace in Seasons of Mercy** by C. Welton Gaddy

Thinking more broadly:

- **Preaching and Culture in Latino Congregations;** edited by Kenneth G. Davis and Jorge L. Presmanes

Don't overlook the periodicals and the filing drawer on preaching.

- Leadership, Winter 2002 - **Preaching to the Times: How you discern and present the Word for today**

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.

January 2003 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105 (NIV)

Monday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by Bettie Wilson in loving memory of her husband, Hal, whose birthday was January 17. Prayer undergirds the Christian's life—pray without ceasing!

Tuesday

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

Wednesday

Thursday

1 New Year's Day is Albania's most significant holiday. Pray for the missionaries in Lezhe and Lushnje as they join in the celebration and use this occasion to deepen relationships with their Albanian friends.

Friday

2 Pray for the youth who are attending Xtreme Impact at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center this weekend. The youth will be learning about Christian leadership, teamwork, and spiritual gifts.

Saturday

3 Richard Showalter recently retired after serving more than 22 years as overseer in Southern District. Pray for the Southern District congregations as they experience this transition and search for a new overseer.

4 As a new year dawns, pray that you, your pastors, and your congregation, will have eyes to see what God is already doing in your midst.

5 Pray for John Schaefer as he spends the month in Haiti, coordinating groups affiliated with Partners in Mission. His years of work there have opened many doors.

6 Pray for the members of the pastoral search committee at Gospel Hill Mennonite Church as they meet tomorrow. Pray for the congregation and for Pastor Ken Horst as he resigns at the end of February.

7 Pray for VMC and VMBM staff as they gather today to continue planning for Summer Assembly and YouthFest at EMU in July. Pray for wisdom and grace as many decisions and arrangements are made.

8 Pray for the members of the YES team assisting the missionaries in Lushnje, Albania, since December. Pray for them as they learn the language and culture and develop meaningful connections with the people.

9 Conference Council is meeting this weekend at EMU. Pray for Moderator Joe Longacher as he facilitates discussion in preparation for the VMC Winter Delegate Session on February 7.

10 A missions festival is being held at Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church this weekend. Pray that passion and interest for involvement in God's work in the world would be stirred in many hearts.

11 Pray for the board of the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale as they meet tomorrow evening in Staunton to make plans for the next Relief Sale in October. Pray for Marv Nisly as he leads this meeting.

12 Pray for the board of the Congregational Resource Center, located at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, as they gather today to help direct that important ministry which is directed by Kathy Weaver Wenger.

13 Commission as they meet at Springdale Mennonite Church today and consider how Virginia Conference can nurture faith among children, youth and adults.

14 Pray for the new church planting team in Isle of Wight, Va., as they begin worship services this month. Church planters Steven and Karla Francisco lead the team, and the goal is a multi-cultural, multi-racial church.

15 Angie, a Trinidadian woman whom we prayed for in October, was baptized in November along with another new believer. Pray for their growth in discipleship to Christ as they live their daily lives in Trinidad.

16 Pray for Lynn Miller as he presents biblical principles for handling money at Calvary Community Church tomorrow. Pray for all who are attending this Stewardship University.

17 Pray for four new believers who attend Centro Koionia Church in Bari, Italy. Pray for the transforming work of the Spirit in their lives and spiritual insight as they study in a baptismal class, a major step in a Catholic culture.

18 Pray for those attending the EMS School for Leadership Training this week with a focus on "Preaching - Renewing the Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew and Bible." Pray also for Dr. John Kinney, the keynote speaker.

19 As we remember the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr. today, pray for racial reconciliation among all peoples. Pray particularly that persons of color in leadership in VMC congregations will be affirmed in their ministries.

20 Pray for Norma Teles as she visits the Brazilian Mennonite churches and prepares for another term of service in Albania after her furlough. Pray for God's blessing on these believers who often give out of their poverty.

21 Dolores Beiler writes from Jamaica: "We find ourselves drawn into deeper levels of commitments and relationships... We pray that God will provide the means to continue that which we've begun..."

22 Pray for Rachel Swartzendruber, who began working part-time as Staff Assistant for Virginia Conference in December. Pray for a smooth adjustment as she learns many new things.

23 Pray for the youth-workers from Virginia Conference congregations as they gather in Williamsburg for a time of growth and refreshment this weekend. Pray also for Erik Swanson as he teaches about spiritual formation.

24 Many individuals and families are beginning to consider how they will spend their vacation time this summer. Pray about whether God is calling you to join a short-term Partners in Mission team this year.

25 Milford and Carolyn Lyndaker provide pastoral leadership to Crest Hill Community Church in Wardensville, WV. Thank God for the positive relationships that are being built and for growth in the church.

26 Pray for Sonya Harnish as she completes language study this month and moves to Lushnje, Albania. Pray for quick re-adjustment to village life as she begins her 3-year assignment with EMM in collaboration with VMBM.

27 Pray for Francesco and Martha Picone as they give leadership on many levels within the Italian Mennonite Church. Thank the Lord for the gift of encouragement and wisdom in their ministry.

28 Pray for the annual meeting of the Council for International Anabaptist Ministries being held in Chicago this weekend. Pray for VMBM President Loren Horst as they discuss the formation of a North American mission fellowship.

29 Durham (NC) Mennonite Church is exploring ways to provide services to the local multicultural community. Pray that they will see opportunities to build bridges and respond appropriately.

30 Philip Rhodes leads the youth meetings at Ridge Mennonite Fellowship in Jamaica. Pray that God would work through Philip and Pastor Allen in powerful ways as they reach this group with the truth of Jesus' teachings.

31 A new house church fellowship is growing out of relationships that Keith and Tami Nice have developed in Graham, NC. Pray for the persons who are exploring the meaning of Christian faith in their lives.

Announcements

A **Men's Retreat** will be held at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center on March 12-14. Myron Augsburger will be the guest speaker. Come for a time of meaningful worship, inspired teaching, great fellowship, recreation, and reflection. For more information, contact WCRC at 757-566-2256 or programs@wrcr.info. The event is co-sponsored with Mennonite Men of Virginia.

Ed Bontrager joined the staff of Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions on January 1 as Director of Development. Ed previously pastored Huntington Mennonite Church, Newport News, Va.



The **Service Adventure unit** in Raleigh, N.C., urgently needs to replace its aging and costly mini van. A replacement fund has been established with \$1000 seed money, and additional help is needed. If you would like to contribute, please designate your gift to the van fund, payable to Raleigh Mennonite Church, PO Box 25545, Raleigh, NC 27611. Or if you have a reliable, inexpensive mini van for sale, contact John or Marilyn Bender at 919-833-1182.

Dave and Krista Powell are serving as Peace Coordinators for Virginia Conference as part of the Nurture Commission. They have a unique commitment to peaceful living 24-7, and their testimony rings true. They will be working on forming a core group of persons to serve with them in peace ministry throughout the conference. Dave and Krista are members at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.



Rachel Swartzendruber joined the Virginia Mennonite Conference staff on December 1 as Staff Assistant. Rachel is from Indianapolis and attends EMU.



World Day of Prayer is March 5. The theme of this year's material distributed by Church Women United is "In faith, women shape the world." To order the leader's guide, contact CWU at 1-800-298-5551 or cwu@churchwomen.org. Ask for item #1401; cost is \$3.30 (includes S&H).



July 8-11
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speakers
Battle of the Bands
improv comedy team
panic squad
worship

Virginia Mennonite Conference is hosting a **BIG** event for youth at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA. You won't want to miss it!

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