

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

June 2004
Vol. 14, No. 8

How many?

It was a question of “how many” from the very beginning. How many people could actually go from our small Mennonite church at Ridge down to the Jamaican seaside 45 minutes away? The prospect of fitting 26 people of all shapes, sizes, and ages into my little 10-seater bus seemed nothing less than an impossibility. And yet, somehow, all of us did eventually get squeezed, stacked, settled or pinched into place somewhere. Even my six-foot-four roommate, Jesse Bergey, somehow found a corner to fit into. Everyone seemed ready now to endure whatever pain or discomfort there might be for the entire trip. Obviously this was no normal beach trip or church outing, so what exactly was the reason for all of the excitement that was buzzing through the bus on that last Sunday in February?

The second baptism service in the two-year history of Ridge Mennonite Fellowship was to be held that morning at Treasure Beach. The two people to be baptized were 16-year-old Richie and Kerry-Ann, 14, both coming out of non-Christian families into the light of truth and salvation which is in knowing Jesus Christ. They had been attending an instruction class for weeks and were ready to let the world know that they were unashamed followers of Jesus.

My excitement was also high as I prepared to take part by assisting the pastor out in the waves. Together we had been teaching and encouraging these two friends of ours in both formal and informal settings, and we had seen them grow a lot in their faith. Thus we shared a great joy in seeing them take this next step of faith in their Christian walk.

They stood on the beach and told their testimonies in turn as the rest of us stood around them in a semi-circle, facing the wide expanse of ocean. I'm sure all of us were either encouraged in our faith or challenged by our lack of faith as they spoke. We sang joyful Jamaican praise songs in response, and then we experienced a neat mix of cultures when I read from Romans and my father prayed a prayer of dedication for the new spiritual lives of these two blessed children of God. Two cultures were brought together into one family by a shared love of Christ.



As I reflect on it now, it's hard to believe that several months have passed since that day. Richie and Kerry-Ann have come so far already! Indeed, God continues toward completion the work he once started in their lives. Even yesterday, we had a meeting for members at the conclusion of the church service, and both of them took on new responsibilities, joining in the work of the church in new ways. Richie takes great pleasure in being the sound man, bringing to church every Sunday the big speakers that were once used to blast out bad music at secular reggae parties. Richie also volunteered to help clean the church whenever needed. Kerry-Ann is now on our church board as newly-elected secretary and is also the music coordinator.

And so it is a question of “how many” when it comes down to the end, isn't it? How many people will see us—like Richie and Kerry-Ann—with excitement in our eyes when we speak of our awesome Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? If so, they may want to know more! Will these onlookers be like another 25 trying to squeeze into a bus with us in their excitement to see our next steps of faith? So be it! So be it!

• Philip Rhodes
St. Elizabeth, Jamaica

Philip Rhodes (L) was thrilled to take part in the baptism of Richie and Kerry-Ann in February.

By sight or by faith?

“The amount of your offering is the measure of your faith.” So said the pastor before the offering one Sunday morning. It made sense to me. What we keep to ourselves doesn’t require faith. We can see, feel, and spend that. Living with what we keep to ourselves represents living by sight.



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

When one gives some of those resources back to the Lord’s work, that portion of life must be lived by faith. The amount of our offering represents a measure of how much we trust God. So went the pastor’s logic that Sunday morning. That made me think, “On such a test of faith, what is my score?” Even ten percent didn’t look that good.

This week I got the results of a recent 2003 survey from the Barna Group. Nationwide, 2.2 percent of household income was given to religious causes. Among people who consider themselves born again, that figure goes up to 3.8%. What segments of the population were more likely to give 10%? They included evangelicals, people who attended church, prayed, and read their Bibles the previous week, African-Americans, charismatic Christians, and households with gross income over \$60,000. I’ve heard elsewhere that Mennonites would be in this “more likely” category too.

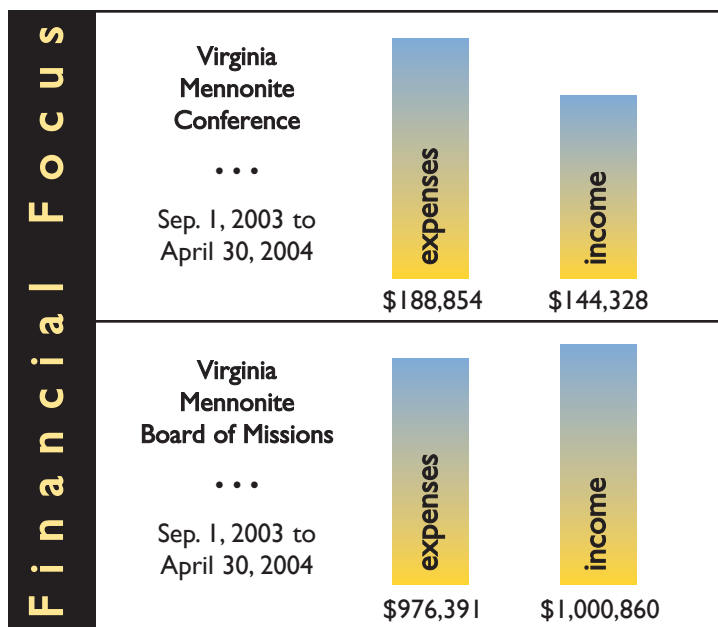
Among people with whom I spend most of my time, people are serious about their faith and their

life. People are trying to figure out how to do more for God, not less. Regular commitments are made to support the work of God through service, prayer, and contribution. And if I am to take that pastor’s thoughts just a bit further, a decision of sacrifice and generosity could be a decision of spiritual renewal.

Yesterday a mother told me that her daughter had placed all on God’s altar and had given up basketball, something very important to her. Not money perhaps, but nevertheless, a very significant and visible part of that young woman’s life was turned over to God in a new way. Her faith is increasing. Today I got a response from a couple who are more than willing to meet a financial need they heard about. A portion of their visible life is being given away. Their faith too is increasing.

All of us have prayed the prayer of the disciples, “Lord, increase our faith.” I think that pastor helped me see another way it might happen.

Loren Horst



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What I learned on the walk to school

In July, Steve Campbell will conclude his year of service near Lushnje, Albania, where he taught Alecia and Jyrell Hess.



Steve Campbell (L) discusses many things with (L-R) Themmi, Lazarus, Staveri, and Lazarus as they drink coffee together in a shop near Lushnje, Albania.

I begin each day by going to the coffee shop behind my apartment to drink coffee and have a discussion with my Albanian friends. This activity is repeated each evening. Our discussions have ranged from the nature of my work here to living under communism to what Jesus wants to do for them. Most days it is a stretch for me to communicate with them in the Albanian language, but I sense from the Spirit that I am to be with them day in and day out. These friends have taught me about the Albanian culture and language.

After leaving the coffee shop, I begin the walk to school. Along the way I pass the same students who I see each day. Some of them come to the church in the village, some live nearby, and most I have seen in the local school, as I have had the opportunity to help teach English there. On more than one occasion I was able to talk about Jesus.

As I walk to school passing student after student and sharing the road with all kinds of animals, I look around at the daily activities of the village. In one area I see people bringing milk from their only cow, pouring it into a community vat, and receiving pay. I see people starting work in their greenhouses, raising cucumbers or tomatoes. I see a farmer loading his donkey cart with grass to take home and feed the cow. I also see trash in many areas, which is one of the downsides of village life.

In addition to seeing many students, I see some of the same men each day. We greet each other with a handshake and a wish of “may the work go well,” or perhaps a wish for good health. I have learned the importance of greeting each person with at least a handshake.

I enjoy my morning walks to school because I get to see so many people and I have many moments to pray and meditate on God’s work. I often feel God leading me to pray that the Albanians will see the need for Jesus in their lives. I also pray that the Albanians will learn to trust and that they will have open eyes to see the

beautiful world that God created. On my walk to school, I have learned how true it is that God is jealous for the praises of His people, that He wants all people to come to the knowledge of salvation, and that God wants more people to come join in the labor, for the harvest is coming.

• Steve Campbell
Lushnje, Albania

Journey through Jamaica

With our hair blowing in the warm tropical breezes of Jamaica, Loren (President of VMBM) and I were just beginning the journey from the Montego Bay Airport through Bamboo Alley and past the coconut trees to Maranatha School for the Deaf. Danny and Shirley Trobaugh broke into our relaxing mood with a question, “Would you like to accompany us to Abrams tonight for a Bible study for some new believers?”

We wholeheartedly exclaimed, “Sure!” Thus began our three weeks of moving among the 13 churches of the Jamaica Mennonite Church. Our goals were to become better acquainted with the Jamaican churches, pastors, and leaders and to preach and lead discussions on missions.

After two days of holding and hugging children, making “God’s eyes” in craft time, and trying to learn sign language at Maranatha, we were hosted in Liston and Juline Aiken’s home in Kingston for a week. The first missions seminar that Loren led was on Sunday evening at Alpine in their beautifully remodeled building. During the week Good Tidings, Faith, and Waterloo met two evenings in Good Tidings’ building, which is under construction. Temple Hall invited their leaders to meet on a rainy Saturday with lunch between the two sessions.

Earlene Horst enjoyed getting to know Sheena Parchment, a student at Maranatha School for the Deaf, while she and Loren were in Jamaica.

This Is What I See

by Loren Horst

...in answer to the question I was asked repeatedly in Jamaica, "What are your observations of the Jamaica Mennonite Church?"

- Energy and vitality of the 13 congregations
- Gifted leaders—but more are needed
- Stretched people and financial resources
- Positive and appreciated contribution of VMBM workers, and requests for more
- Vision for a total of 20 churches by 2020, with actual planning for two more of these
- Broadened ministry at Maranatha School for the Deaf (deaf school, Ridge congregation, youth retreats, hospitality for international and Jamaican groups)
- Open eyes and hearts to new areas and avenues of ministry
- Four current building or renovation projects
- Interest in engaging in mission beyond their own borders



Sunday morning we left the Kingston area to drive four hours, arriving at Salters Hill in time to join the lively worship music already in progress. We led two sessions there before traveling to the Ocho Rios area, where we settled in at the home of Ralph and Laurice Purcell for several days. The cool night breezes blew through the Calvary Mennonite Church as the Ocho Rios congregation joined them for two evenings of lively discussions on missions.

Back in the St. Elizabeth area, Joyland invited the Retrieve and Abrams congregations to join them for an evening missions seminar. Ridge Mennonite, the newest fellowship meeting in the Maranatha School chapel, hosted us on Friday. As we gathered in the cool of the evening, two young boys picked some fresh flowers to place at the front of the chapel.

Saturday we met with the Council of Ministries and extended an invitation for a Jamaican leader to visit and minister among Virginia Conference churches in the near future. Our departure date seemed to be arriving fast, but not before we enjoyed worshipping and presenting a seminar Sunday morning and evening at Bethel in Mandeville. Richie Tyson, president of the Jamaica Mennonite Church, and his wife Verna hosted us and delivered us to the airport in Montego Bay on Monday.

We were leaving with hearts overflowing with memories of sweet, sweet fellowship and precious, new friendships. The thirteen churches of Jamaican Mennonite Church are alive and well!

• Earlene Horst
VMBM Ministry Assistant

Counseling the grieving

Family Life Resource Center provides grief counseling for children, adults and families. The most common grief counseling is initiated following a tragic loss of some kind. The loss could be a family member, job, body part, dream, divorce, etc. Grief can also be a part of forgiveness for past wrongs. The more important the loss is to the person, the greater the adjustment will be.

Contrary to the common American view that grief from a major loss lasts only about three months, the most intense grief can often hit between the third and ninth months. Grief from a major loss can last from one to two years depending on various factors. Grief can also be prolonged or delayed if not directly addressed. Time is needed to heal, but in and of itself, time won't do the healing.

Consider the 23-year-old male who spent the last three years "disconnected" from himself and the world around him following the sudden death of his sister. Six days after her funeral, he started college for the first time. After experiencing extreme disorientation, poor concentration, low energy, a muddled head, and realizing he was blocking many feelings, he left college. Later he tried again, but experienced these same feelings. Over the course of three years, he became discouraged and depressed.

With the help of grief counseling, he became aware how much his life had changed after his sister's death. Along with the loss, his developmental age threw him into a whirlwind of confusion. As he began to reconnect with his story, and talk about his loss, he started to make sense of the last three years. He was greatly relieved to know that he was "normal." After making the statement, "I am beginning to step back into life," he has begun to dream again and plans to return home this summer to reconnect with his parents.

FLRC provides grief training for pastors and churches. Learning to grieve is learning to live, but we need to learn how. FLRC can give you the tools.

• Jim Glanzer
Clinical Director

Mennonite Men gather for their first retreat

The first Virginia Conference Men's Retreat was held on the weekend of March 12-14, 2004, at the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center (WCRC) in Williamsburg, Va. This was co-sponsored by Mennonite Men of Virginia and WCRC. The retreat was well attended by 80 men representing the following Mennonite congregations: Asheville, Christiansburg, First (Richmond), Gospel Hill, Huntington, Lindale, Mt. Pleasant, Mt. Vernon, Mtn. View, Northern Virginia, Park View, Powhatan, Ridgeway, Springdale, Staunton, Stephens City, Williamsburg, and Zion.

Participants enjoyed and were challenged by the teaching of Dr. Myron Augsburg as he spoke on "Keys to Being Covenant Keepers." Myron's messages included "Integrity In Our Commitments," "Opening Ourselves To Intimacy," "Accountability in Our Social Settings," and "Living By Kingdom Priorities." Following each message participants met in small groups to discuss the topics and enjoy fellowship with men from all over Virginia Conference. A blend of contemporary and traditional worship was provided by Herb Lantz, Jim Thornton, and George Bottles.

The facilities were very good and the meals were excellent. During the free-time men enjoyed a variety of activities, including hikes on wooded trails, the challenge course with the zip-line and tree climbing, tennis, and horseshoes.

One of the real blessings of the retreat was the opportunity to fellowship with other men from

throughout Virginia Conference during the intermissions and around the meal tables. There were a number of positive comments. One participant stated "I needed this retreat to re-charge my spiritual batteries." Another said that the most exciting thing about the retreat for him was "...realizing that brothers from all over Virginia Conference are eager to know more of God and grow spiritually."

Plans are already moving forward for the 2005 Virginia Mennonite Men's Retreat, so mark your calendars now for the weekend of March 11-13, 2005. Also, plan to join us for the Men's Breakfast at the Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly.

• Mark Kniss
Ridgeway Mennonite Church



Program Director Bob Briscoe offers a helping hand to Myron Augsburg on the high ropes course during the Mennonite Men's retreat in March.

Stephens City gives Crest Hill a fresh look



Members of Stephens City Mennonite Church spent a day at Crest Hill Community Church in Wardensville, W. Va., giving it a "face lift." Along with Crest Hill Pastors Milford and Carolyn Lyndaker, the group painted the sanctuary, bathrooms, and shed. Several women from Crest Hill provided a lunch and fellowship break.





More than 500 high school students combined for a mass choir finale at two public programs on April 18 under the direction of David L. Brunner in the University Commons at Eastern Mennonite University.

EMHS hosts “the only event of its kind”

Some 540 high school students representing 16 choirs across the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico joined in a grand finale under the baton of guest conductor David L. Brunner of Orlando, Fla.

The program was part of the 42nd annual Mennonite High School Choral Festival April 16-18 hosted by Eastern Mennonite High School. Public concerts in the University Commons at Eastern Mennonite University showcased individual choirs and the mass choir.

“It’s the only event of its kind in the country,” said EMHS choir director Jay Hartzler. “There are all-state choirs, auditioned groups of students from schools, and other large gatherings of high school singers, “but a festival of this magnitude—with the number and size of choirs coming together for this many years—it doesn’t happen anywhere else.

“It’s a festive atmosphere,” Hartzler said. “They’re a very talented group of singers. It’s fun to get together and renew acquaintances.”

Students aren’t the only ones having fun. Hartzler said he enjoys the camaraderie of other directors and their performances as well.

The festival provided a common ground for diverse Mennonite choirs and differing music styles. The Philadelphia Mennonite School choir sang primarily black gospel music, while singers from Academia Menonita in San Juan, P.R. offered music in the Caribbean tradition. Other choirs—from Florida, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Iowa, Ohio, Indiana and Ontario—presented music from traditional sacred to contemporary Christian gospel.

In addition to the quality music performed, the mass choir fosters interaction among students from across the Mennonite Church, Hartzler said, noting that most choirs sing in two to seven churches during their travel to and from the festival. During the festival, choirs are hosted by area churches who provide lodging and food. The choirs sing during the Sunday morning worship service of their host churches.

From its beginning in 1962 with 200 students, the festival has grown in size and tradition. Individual schools host the event approximately one time every 10-11 years, with the exception of schools too small or at too great a distance.

“The music festival is a well-kept secret,” Hartzler said. “Many people don’t know about it. Music is an important part of the Mennonite Church and [the students] are helping to keep the tradition alive.”

• Jim Bishop
Eastern Mennonite University

Congregational Resource Center

Take advantage of summer to spend time together as a family. Read, exercise, and enjoy God’s creation. Here are some items from your family-friendly Resource Center to help you do just that.

- **Upper Room Children’s Bible Stories and Fascinating Facts** by Stephanie Jeffs & Derek Williams
- **Are You My Friend?** by Janice Derby
- **The Book of Jonah** by Peter Spier
- **The Bedtime Rhyme** by Walter Wangerin, Jr.
- **The Amazing Book** (actually a video!) tells interesting tidbits about and from the Bible in a catchy way.

For your own inspiration, check out:

- **Answering God: The Psalms As Tools for Prayer** by Eugene H. Peterson
- **Messy Spirituality** by Mike Yaconelli
- **Devotional Classics** edited by Richard Foster & James Bryan Smith

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.

June 2004 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

Many, O Lord my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. Psalm 40:5 (NIV)

6 Pray for Overseers Michael Shenk and Sam Weaver and the pastors and delegates of Northern District as they meet together tomorrow evening for prayer and to conduct church business.

7 Bobby & Wanda Alger from Winchester, Va., are speaking and leading worship at the Mediterranean Missionary Retreat this week. Pray that all will be refreshed and renewed in body, soul, and spirit.

13 Ricky Stoner, a ministry intern from Bluffton College, is working with the youth of Hope Mennonite Church in Trinidad this summer. Pray for perseverance as he communicates the Gospel to everyone he meets.

14 Pray for Maurita Eberly as she begins a month-long Partners in Mission assignment in Italy. Pray especially for the children (and their parents) whose lives will be touched through her music ministry both in Palermo and in Bari.

20 Pray for the Congregational Resource Center's Advisory Board as they meet tomorrow to review usage, budget, and operations. Pray that this important resource will be a blessing in VMC churches and beyond.

27 Richard and Margaret Keeler worship with each Mennonite congregation in Trinidad each month. Pray that God will bless them as they worship and as they fellowship with the believers in each church.

Tuesday

1 Pray for wisdom for the board for MC USA's Covenant Mutual Benefits, which provides health insurance for congregational employees. They meet tomorrow via conference call to review the plan's financial performance and set rates.

8 Pray for the YES team that has been serving in Lushnje, Albania. They are planning activities for the missionary children at the Mediterranean Missionary Retreat.

15 Omar and Dolores Beiler have included twelve-year-old Karene in their home since her mother died in February. May God bless their interactions each day.

22 Each day Paul and Esther Kniss in Charleville, Trinidad, relate God's principles into their lives and radiate this to those around them. Pray that God will give them a special blessing today.

29 The advisory committee of Eastern Carolina District's "Triangle-Triad Vision 2006" is meeting in Durham tomorrow to review and plan efforts to expand the Mennonite witness and presence in eastern and central North Carolina.

Wednesday

2 Pray for the VMC and VMBM staff as they plan for Conference Assembly. Pray also for those who are involved with the worship committee, children's activities, YouthFest, and EMU's Conferences & Events Office.

9 The Hmong Ministries Advisory Group is meeting in Hickory, N.C., on Saturday. Pray for this group as they review outreach programs and maintain support for Chaiya & Aranya Hadtatsunserm as they reach out to Hmong families.

16 Pray for safety for high school students who are graduating and enjoying new-found freedom. Pray that they will make wise choices and care for those around them.

23 Pray for MC USA's Executive Board as they meet this weekend in Harrisonburg. Park View Mennonite Church is hosting their gathering which will include lunch on Friday with the Trustees of Eastern Mennonite University.

30 About 500 new Hmong immigrants are expected to arrive in Hickory, N.C., next month. Pray for church planter Chaiya Hadtatsunserm as he explores ways to help them integrate into the local community and churches.

Thursday

3 Jesse Bergey went with the Ridge Mennonite Fellowship to the Family Fun Day at Cranbrook Flower Forest held by Jamaica Mennonite churches. Thank God for Jesse's relationship with brothers and sisters in JMC.

10 Pray for VMC's Finance Committee as they meet together today to review and revise a budget for next year. VMC's fiscal year ends August 31.

17 Family Life Resource Center, one of VMC's Related Ministries, provides grief counseling to children, adults, and families at various stages in the grief process. Pray for FLRC as they minister healing and hope in a hurting world.

24 Thank God for Highland Retreat, one of VMC's Related Ministries. They will celebrate on Saturday with a steak barbecue in Bergton, Va. This is a fundraiser for the summer youth camp program.

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by RidgeWay Mennonite Church in memory of "Pastor Dick."
Richard Headings passed away of cancer on June 26, 2003.

Friday

4 Pray for Jason and Donna Martin and their family as they return to Ontario next Thursday for a 3-month furlough. They will be meeting with churches and friends there and sharing the vision of what God is doing in Italy.

11 Pray for Pastors Mark Wenger & Kathy Weaver with the leadership team of Springdale Mennonite Church for a planning retreat tomorrow. Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter will lead the process.

18 The term ends at Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica at the end of this month. Pray for Danny and Shirley Trobaugh as they say goodbye to the students for the months of July and August.

25 The fourth missional church training workshop will be held today and tomorrow at Grace Mennonite Fellowship near Harrisonburg. Participants will be discussing ways to bring the training to district and congregational leaders.

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

Saturday

5 The annual Mediterranean Missionary Retreat is being held this coming week near Foggia, Italy. Pray for safe, uncomplicated travels for the missionaries from Albania and Kosovo.

12 The Mennonite Cross-Cultural Ministries advisory group is meeting in Knoxville tomorrow. They will review the outreach and evangelism activities of Aseer & Kamala Rampogu as they relate to Hindus and Muslims in the area.

19 Pray for churches in Virginia Conference who will be looking for youth workers for the following year. Pray that God will speak to those whom He has gifted for this purpose.

26 Thank God for the ministries of the late Harold and Arlene Eshleman, who will be honored today at a Celebration of Ministry banquet. Pray for generous support for the work of VMC and VMBM through the evening's offering.

Announcements

The Executive Committee of **Mennonite Women of Virginia** is currently looking for a vice-president, publicity secretary, and missions needs secretary. Not only is this committee compiled of great women, but the work is rewarding and there are numerous opportunities to meet other women from across Virginia Mennonite Conference. Meeting dates and times are flexible to meet the needs of those on this committee. For more information, contact President Deb Pardini at 540-942-9612 or pardinsp@hotmail.com.

A **Steak Barbecue Fundraiser at Highland Retreat** will be held Saturday, June 26. Special activities include a bicycle tour, horse drawn wagon rides, a zipline and super swing for teens, swimming, and funyaks at the pond. Special activities begin at 3:00 p.m. The barbecue will be served at 5:00 p.m. Bring a potluck salad and dessert. Blue Mountain Sunrise will provide special music. Donations given at the meal will benefit the summer youth camp program.

A-frame cabins are available and free for families and individuals that weekend. Advance reservations are required. Contact the camp office at 540-852-3226 or info@highlandretreat.org.

Spirit led!

Virginia Mennonite
Conference Assembly

July 8-11, 2004

on the campus of
Eastern Mennonite University

Registration deadline: June 23

Thurs.
7 p.m.



Loren Swartzendruber
President of Eastern
Mennonite University

Fri.
7 p.m.



Natalie Francisco
Pastor at Calvary Community
Church, Hampton, Va.

Sat.
7 p.m.



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister,
Virginia Mennonite Conf.

Sun.
10 a.m.



John Powell
Mennonite Mission Network

Fri. &
Sat.
11 a.m.



Duane Yoder
Pastor at Lindale Mennonite
Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

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friends

youthfest

July 8-11

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Eastern Mennonite University

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speakers

Battle of the Bands

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