

Praying for direction, following God's call for Asheville pastor

The worship service at church that morning had been a rich blessing. The congregation in rural eastern Montana was small, but our worship was “in spirit and in truth.” I loved the life we had experienced here for eight years and was looking forward to many more. I returned home to the parsonage with warmth in my heart and a vision in my mind of what our ministry here might look like five and ten years from now.

I kicked off my shoes to change clothes. Then, an unmistakable word from an undeniable Presence—“Get ready for a change.” I had sensed God's direction clearly before, but nothing as distinct and startling as this. I decided to process this privately before saying anything to my wife, Jan.

We felt fully woven into the fabric of our community; we loved the people, the pace, the peace, and the predictability of an existence that revolved around seedtime and harvest, summer fallow and snow removal. Our children were involved with their friends and active in their school programs. Jan found opportunities for using her gifts in creativity, counsel, and hospitality. I enjoyed my pastoral ministry, relationships with the farming and ranching families, and hunting or horseback for relaxation.

A week later I finally asked Jan, “Have you felt any distinct leading of God lately?” “Oh sure,” she responded without hesitation, “Last week during worship I sensed God was telling me we are in for a change.” Two years later we were in Asheville, North Carolina!

In our marriage we have always tried to discern things together, to sort out if “leading” was just a personal preference or a genuine sensing of God's Spirit. While I was working for a manufacturer of livestock feeds back in 1981, we were involved with the youth ministry of our church. We eventually went to seminary because our pastor, Larry Wilson, many friends, and our own families encouraged us to prayerfully consider full-time ministry. The benefits of our seminary experience are extensive and incredibly valuable, yet we sensed God's calling to us before seminary, and we would have gone into ministry even without it because of the encouragement, insight, and discernment of friends.

Churches we have attended encouraged each person to participate in a gift discernment process to help

identify and nurture gifts that could be used for Kingdom building. Some, like Asheville Mennonite Church where we are presently members, use a gift discernment team instead of a nominating committee to fill church positions.

When I consider what has helped us “hear” God's call throughout our life, I believe that the manner in which the call has come and the methods by which our direction has been determined are many and varied. We have had the discipline to pray for that direction in nearly all circumstances, and for the most part we have had the willingness to respond to the call once it has been discerned. If we aren't willing to follow, then why pray for direction?

We have sought the input of family and friends; we have intentionally tried to discern our gifts, talents, and skills. And we have been open to the miraculous, that God Almighty, the Creator of the universe is actually able and willing to use us, glaringly imperfect as we are. We have learned that occasionally that may mean being “used up” for a season; however, God is also the Restorer, the Reconciler, and the Redeemer of lives and of time and of experience.

Some ministries have been clearly presented, allowing us time to evaluate and plan. Others have been “out of the blue” and “on the fly.” Some experiences have been on the mountain top and some have been in the deep valleys. In all situations I believe it is the availability of a person's heart in which God delights and through which God works.

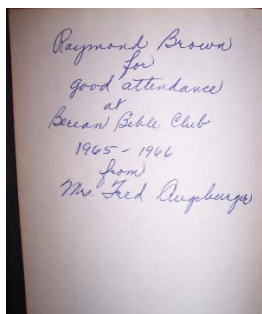
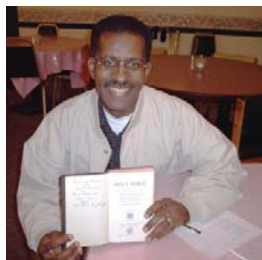
We are all capable of a ministry, the scriptures tell us that. I encourage each person to intentionally sort out what yours may be, and trust that the Lord who has called you to it will see you through it.



Pat McFarren, Pastor of Asheville (NC) Mennonite Church, and his wife Jan.

• Pat McFarren
Asheville Mennonite Church, Asheville, NC

Missional lives: my in-laws



Reverend Raymond Brown displays the Bible he has saved since 1965.

In 1954, Fred & Carolyn King Augsburgers were invited by the Ohio Mission Board to move to Youngstown, Ohio, to follow up on some contacts that had been made by Norman & Ella Bauman on front porches in Youngstown. So began 30 years of ministry for the Augsburgers that planted two churches, linked country folks to city folks, and provided urban service opportunities for many. These ministry efforts were engaged in the 60s and 70s when racial tensions were very high in U.S. cities.



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

Some 50 years after the Augsburgers arrived, there remains one small congregation in Youngstown that is connected with Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA. But that is not the complete story...

In October 2004, my wife, Ruth Ann (eldest daughter of Fred & Carolyn), and I spent several days in Youngstown interviewing persons who were somehow affected by the ministry of the Augsburgers. Raymond Brown (pictured at left) was a school classmate of Ruth Ann's brother Samuel through whom I was able to make contact with Raymond.

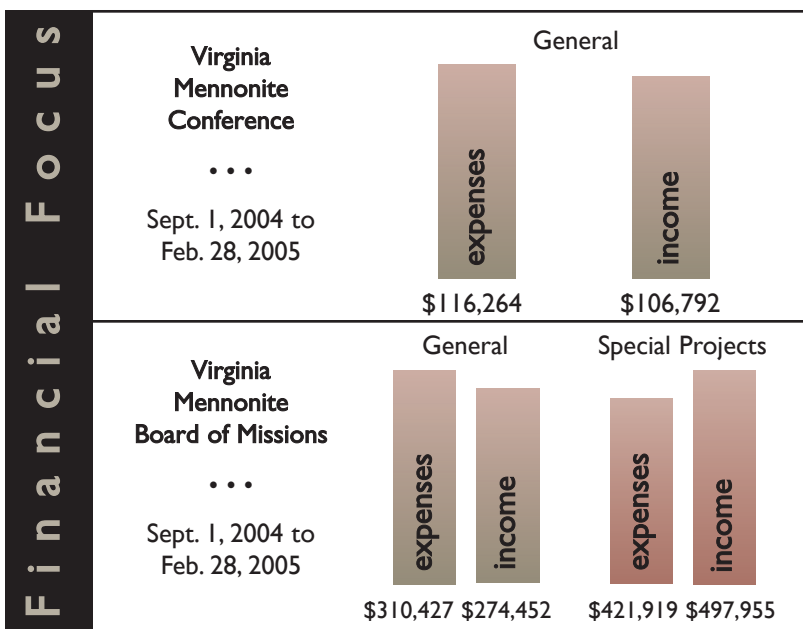
Raymond brought to our interview a Bible (pictured at left) which had been given to him for faithful attendance at Bible club on Thursday afternoons during the school year of his elementary school days. The church bell would ring and the children of the neighborhood would gather to hear Mrs. Augsburgers

tell stories illustrated by flannel graph characters. Of that Bible, Raymond says, "you hold onto things that are significant to you."

Raymond has now served for 18 years as Pastor of Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Masury, Ohio. In his words, "The Augsburgers took time to teach. Those things are compiled. A foundation needs to be laid in some way. They remain a part of my life and ministry. Nothing is ever wasted."

It is now time to wonder, how many churches are benefiting from the missional lives of Fred & Carolyn Augsburgers?

Reminder: *I would like to gather stories about persons in VMC who have lived or are living "missionally."* Send such stories to me at 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802 or owen.burkholder@vmconf.org



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Editor

Gloria Lehman

Assistant Editor

Jon Trotter

Circulation manager

Beth Brunk

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Phone 540-434-9727

1-800-707-5535

E-mail info@vmbm.org

info@vmconf.org

Web www.vmbm.org

www.vmconf.org

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I couldn't shoot him!

They called it Peace-time Conscription, even though it wasn't peace time. It was 1940. War had started in Europe, and it was now apparent that the U.S. was also getting into the war. I first registered in western Ohio, but my number came up after my family moved to Newport News, Virginia. At the time of registration, we asked for papers for conscientious objectors (COs) to complete. I have to appreciate our church officials back then. They had made preparations with the Selective Service for COs, and went to great effort to prepare us young COs for this time. They held meetings in our churches and had COs from World War I talk, some who had been terribly mistreated.

But the army had learned from that experience that they didn't really want COs inducted into the army. They set up the Civilian Public Service (CPS) Camps. I spent several months in a CPS Camp in Galax, Virginia, working on the Blue Ridge Parkway. There was lots of opposition to us COs in that town. They wouldn't allow us to go into town alone. There always had to be at least two of us. When we did go, there was a lot of hollering at us, calling us many names.

But then I was moved to Terry, Montana, where I spent nearly 2 years working on an irrigation project. The people there seemed to accept us very well. In fact, our camp chorus was even invited to sing at various churches in the area. Eventually I was moved to Michigan, where I spent the remainder of my time working as a dairy tester. I was expecting a lot of flack from these dairy farmers, whose fathers, brothers, and friends were in the army (some who had been killed). But I really didn't have a problem there.

When the draft first came up, I had to do a lot of self-examination. I knew what my family expected of me, and I knew what my church wanted me to do. But what could I do? It had to be my decision. After a lot of thought, I imagined myself in the army with a gun. I saw myself coming up on what they called the enemy. We each had guns. I realized then that I couldn't shoot him, he'd have to shoot me. I asked myself, what would I be accomplishing in that situation?

My alternative service experience had an impact on the rest of my life. Right after the war, I

I couldn't shoot him! continued on page 4

A dream takes shape

For more than 30 years, Naomi Roberts (Harrisonburg Mennonite), has been encouraging the development of a "farm" where persons with persistent mental illness can find a supportive community. Based on the model of Gould Farm in New England, this would be a place where persons could find meaningful work in a therapeutic community while moving toward integration with the larger society.

Virginia Conference Mennonites have been deeply involved in moving the dream forward to the purchase of a 156-acre farm bordering George Washington National Forest just south of New Market, Va. This beautiful place is now home to several residents and the community has begun!

I had the privilege of convening some of the earliest conversations that led to the formation of a board and a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation in the 1990s. The VMC Executive Officers were affirming and VMC provided the accounting umbrella until the fledgling organization became incorporated. Though this effort was designed to be broader than Mennonite from the beginning, VMC Mennonites have provided much volunteer time to date. Most notable of these volunteers has been Earl and Pat Hostetter Martin from Shalom Mennonite. They have provided heart and soul along with personal fund-raising efforts. The list of board members (past and present) from Mennonite congregations in addition to Naomi, Earl & Pat, includes: Janelle Myers Benner, Shalom; Jason Myers Benner, Shalom; Joanne Benner, Broad Street; Alta Brubaker, Community; Owen Burkholder, Park View; Carl Harman, Park View; Sharon Harman, Park View; Crystal Horning, First, Richmond; Phyllis Basye Liskey, Grace; Edgar Miller, Park View; Kent Smith, Shalom; Nancy Smith, Shalom; David Wiens, Shalom; and Tilli Yoder, Park View. The current board chair is Liesel Yoder Showalter, Immanuel; and the current executive director is Sam Nickels, Shalom.

There have been many more who have volunteered in other ways in addition to these who have served on the board. I am very pleased that we have this community-based mission out of the dream stage and into a beginning reality. Visit www.crossingcreeks.org for further information on the program and how you can help.



The manor and grounds of Crossing Creeks, a therapeutic community for people with mental illness, located on 156 acres near New Market, Va.

Winter Delegate Session Convenes at Calvary

Twice a year Virginia Mennonite Conference's delegates gather to discuss, discern and decide on the issues facing our conference. After ten consecutive years at Springdale Mennonite Church, the Winter Delegate Session was held for the first time at Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Virginia, on February 5. Approximately 125 delegates, staff and observers enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the Calvary Community. Bishop Leslie Francisco III led in devotions while Minister Steven Brown, who is also the Assistant Conference Moderator, helped steer our deliberations. Pastor Natalie Francisco led the worship team as they drew those gathered into the glorious praise of our God.

With deep regrets delegates took action to honor Shalom Mennonite Church's request to be released from VMC in order to affiliate with Central District Conference. Delegates also welcomed the Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church into Conference membership with great joy. Trissels Mennonite Church's pastor Phil Kanagy and Conference Minister Owen Burkholder explained the Missional Action Team pilot project. This seven person team will explore adaptive change as a means to help us to be more outwardly focused in our missions and ministries. Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter unveiled a new initiative called the Retired Church Workers' Aid and Enrichment Fund which has been jump started with a \$50,000 contribution from an anonymous donor. This endowment will help retired pastors and missionaries, who labored for many years without adequate monetary compensation, meet emergency living expenses. It is also structured to

help encourage their continued spiritual growth by paying for some enrichment activities. Youth Minister Kimberlee Greenawalt handed out flyers for a joint high school youth 30 Hour Famine planned for March 4 and 5 at Eastern Mennonite High School. Teenagers will learn about world hunger while fasting and raising support for World Vision.

Delegates learned about the implications of plans to dissolve the Virginia Mennonite Property Aid and Auto Aid Plans (VMPAPs). They will continue operations but in a more focused region as an agency of a regulated insurance provider, MutualAid eXchange (MAX), rather than as an unregulated fraternal organization. MAX was formed, with the help of VMPAPs, as a means of practicing mutual aid in the 21st century.

With sadness those gathered said goodbye to Mark Wenger, former Assistant Moderator, and Kathy Weaver Wenger, co-pastors of Springdale Mennonite Church, who will be moving to Lancaster County, Pa., this summer. Mark will assume leadership of Eastern Mennonite Seminary's extension program for pastoral leadership. Mark encouraged us by saying, "Virginia Mennonite Conference is in a good place" and expressed his appreciation for the fellowship and growth he experienced here.

It was a good gathering. We adjourned until July 28th when delegates will come together again, this time at Virginia Commonwealth University, for the summer Assembly. Delegates, spouses and observers are all welcome and encouraged to come for a time of worship, workshops and decision-making as we explore what it means to be "Sent...Across the Street." Please join us in Richmond, July 28-30, 2005.

• Steve Carpenter
Conference Coordinator



Members of Virginia Mennonite Conference and the Mountain Valley District volunteer at the Hinton Relief Center canning turkey thighs for MCC.

I couldn't shoot him! continued from page 1

volunteered with Mennonite Central Committee to go to Poland. The United Nations had sent in 4000 tractors to the farmers there, farmers who were only used to oxen and mules. About 10 of us went and did our best to teach these farmers how to use tractors, in spite of poorly-trained interpreters.

I've never been sorry that I took the stand that I did during the draft. The older I get, the more I realize that this was the only stand that I could take. I thank God often. I believe that it was because of God that I was able to do these things.

• Story as told by Dan Huber
Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro

Mission Connections

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Celebrating Our Mission

Joe Bontrager

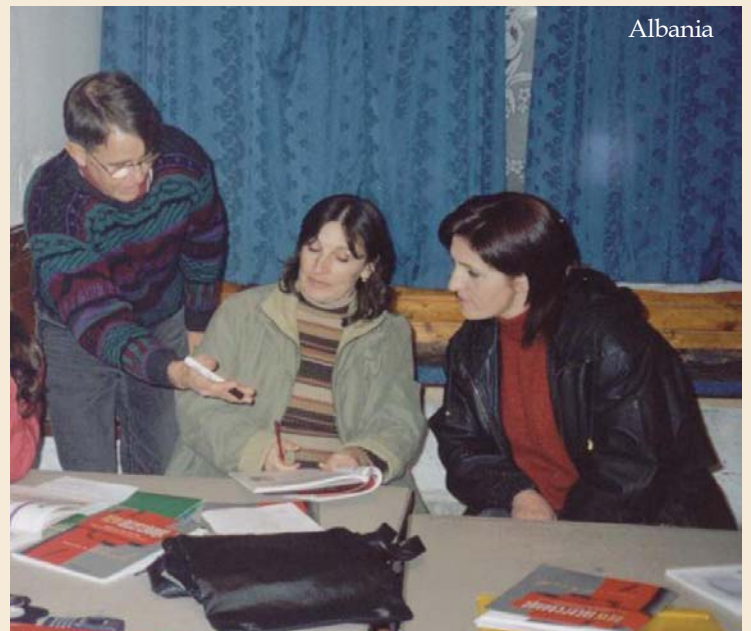


Hickory, NC



Jamaica

Jon Trotter



Albania

courtesy Allen Umble



courtesy Joe Bontrager

Hickory Hmong joins VMC

(Above) Members of the Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church pose for a picture.

The newest Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation is Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church in Hickory, North Carolina. HHMC was received as a VMC member congregation at the delegate session on February 5, 2005.

Pastor Chaiya studied theology in Bangkok and was a pastor at an evangelical church in Thailand before he enrolled at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana. Following his graduation in May 2002, he accepted an invitation to be a church planter with TCK District in Hickory, supported by a partnership that includes TCK District, Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions, and Hickory Mennonite Church, where the Hmong worship and activities are centered. Pastor Jim Roth of Hickory Mennonite Church provides spiritual support as mentor.

Pastor Chaiya and his wife, Aranya, moved to Hickory in January 2003. He has a clear strategy for church development. The first step is building relationships in the Hmong community, followed by Bible study and prayer. Social services that meet the felt needs of immigrants are visible expressions of the gospel and partnerships connect them with other local churches and conference. These efforts are undergirded by prayer,

which Pastor Chaiya says "is the major key issue of evangelism."

The Hmong are immigrants to the United States from Southeast Asia, where most Hmong live in China, Laos and Thailand. Their relationship to the USA began during the Vietnam War when they were recruited by the CIA to fight alongside American soldiers. The outcome of the war put them at risk. Many were killed and others received assistance from the US to resettle in refugee camps in Thailand and immigrate to other countries. Many were resettled in California, but soon spread to other places in North America to find jobs and join growing Hmong communities.

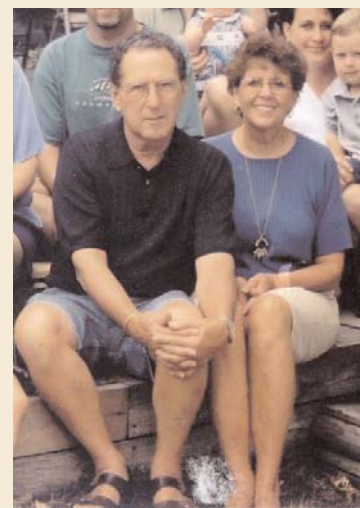
A minority ethnic group from China and Southeast Asia, they have experienced opposition and occasional migrations as they sought places to live in peace. Traditional Hmong culture is strongly family-oriented and places high value on kinship ties and ethnic identity. Shamanism is the main religion and less than ten percent are Christians.

Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church is the fifth Hmong Mennonite congregation in North America. Others are in Kitchener, Fresno, Denver, and St. Paul.

■ Joe Bontrager
Hickory, NC

Schrocks return from Maranatha

Leaving warm Jamaica for the snow covered peaks of Colorado meant leaving the warm and friendly people we met, people who were always ready with a smile or an 'all right, Mon' or



Ed and Irene Schrock

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Managing editor:
Gloria Lehman
Assistant editor:
Jon Trotter
Circulation manager:
Beth Brunk

Phone: 540-434-9727
1-800-707-5535
Fax: 540-434-7627
E-mail: info@vmbm.org
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'good night' – their way of saying 'good evening.' It meant leaving the warm friendships of the 64 people on 6 work teams, the warmth of the beautiful sunrises over the Caribbean Sea viewed from the School's south balcony with a cup of coffee or tea; and the warmth of Joseph's huge smile, one of the students. We will leave with many warm and fond memories.

We marveled at what each work team accomplished and were blessed with willing workers as well as skilled professionals. When Hurricane Ivan blew the roofs off, the electrical was pulled up in the process so three buildings were essentially rewired, painted inside and out, along with fixing many other problems caused by Ivan.

Memories with the work teams include -

- playing games in the dining hall
- early morning coffee on the balcony and watching the community 'wake up'
- eating sea food at Little Ochie
- swimming, sunsets and pizza at Treasure Beach
- visiting the nearby Deaf Church
- interacting during the work day and at meal time
- visiting Anna's Ice Cream Shop

We enjoyed connecting with the community as we walked or when they used the public path through the school property. Irene particularly enjoyed her Monday, Wednesday and Thursday hour and a half homework supervision at 'Anna's Shop.'

We will leave with many memories:

- students and staff at Maranatha
- many trips to town to get supplies
- driving in Jamaica - on the wrong side and dodging pot holes
- early morning sounds - dogs, goats, cows, birds, roosters, water trucks grinding their way up the steep roads

In some small way, we trust God has used us to enhance His Kingdom. But, we are the ones who received the richest blessing.

■ Ed and Irene Schrock
St. Elizabeth, Jamaica
November 2004 - February 2005

Making repairs and friends in Jamaica

On January 15, eight of us from Powhatan Mennonite Church flew from Richmond to Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica. We were to be the eighth team to help repair damage caused by Hurricane Ivan back in September. Ivan was a category five hurricane that came up from the south hitting the island like, as one local man said, an "angry beast" leaving both death and destruction in its wake.

Upon arrival, we were pleased to see how much the preceding teams had accomplished in getting things cleaned up and rebuilt. Ed and Irene Schrock, from Colorado, were overseeing the work of the teams keeping the work-flow continuous from team to team. They made us feel very welcome, taking great care of us while we were there.

On Sunday, we went to the church that is held on the Maranatha campus. Pastor Keith Allen preached. We sang and clapped our hands, praising the Lord in what could only be described as the "Jamaican way."

The entire week of work went exceptionally well. We had no problems to speak of and, thankfully, no injuries. We were able to put up new ceilings in most of the Alice House. Old screens got torn down and new screens were put up. Painting, wiring, new glass, and many other things filled our to-do list. We never lacked for something to do.

Between projects and in the evenings, we were able to spend time interacting with the kids. We played a lot of basketball. Many of the other kids made sure we learned sign language, too. If you were willing to learn, they were more than happy to teach you. They took great delight in our fumbling fingers as we tried to make some of the signs. During our downtime, we were also able to see some of the local sights. We walked the beach at Little Ochie, ate delicious seafood, and played keep away at Treasure Beach.

Before we knew it, it was time to pack our bags and say goodbye. It was then that we realized that though our mission was to do repairs, we had done something far more lasting and rewarding. We had made friends!

■ Ben Powell
Powhatan Mennonite Church

Vietnam Mennonite Church on 'Stormy Seas'

courtesy Peter Nguyen



(Back row l-r) Huong (Lisa) Pham, mother of groom, Nhan Ai (Ruth), bride, Bao Quoc (Sam) Le, groom, Can Ngoc Le, groom's father. (Front row l-r) Peter Nguyen, pastor, Vietnamese Christian Fellowship, Falls Church, Va., Phuoc Huu Nguyen.

Nguyen Hong Quang, vice president and general secretary of the Mennonite Church of Vietnam was arrested on June 8, 2004. Three of his associates had been arrested in March and in July, a children's teacher was also imprisoned. Quang had made a prophetic statement the day before his arrest: "The church is now on stormy seas but the boat still goes out... Be at peace. I ask you and the church to pray for us." On November 4, "the Mennonite Six" were brought to court and sentenced: Quang to three years; Thach, two years; Phuong, one year; and two brothers, nine months. The teacher, Ms. Lien, could not perform in court because of mental health reasons but was given a one-year sentence.

When we left Vietnam in 1975, our church numbered about 150 people. The main congregation began in Gia Dinh, a suburb of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) where we had started a community center and primary school. At our mission headquarters and main student center, another church had started in 1974 with fifteen charter members. Both properties were taken over by the new government after 1975, so our original church became "house churches." Members were also encouraged to worship with other Protestant groups. Brother Trung and his wife Bich have been providing leadership since 1975.

At the same time, hundreds of house churches were starting in many places. Vietnamese leadership was urgently needed. Nguyen Hong Quang (not a Mennonite at this time) was overseeing many of the churches in

central Vietnam and in the highlands among the tribal peoples. For years up to the present time, he has been in the Saigon area, leading a house church, and as a trained lawyer, is often called on to give legal counsel to an association of house churches.

In the early 1990s, "Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective" was translated into Vietnamese. A copy was sent to Brother Trung who shared it with Mennonite house church leaders and other house churches. Trung also presented it to some government officials.

In the US and Canada, nine Vietnamese Mennonite congregations had been established since 1975. Their leaders occasionally got together for conferences and fellowship. In 1997 they organized the North American Vietnamese Mennonite Fellowship (NAVMF) with the clear purpose of evangelism and church planting in Vietnam. Can Le and Lisa Pham were pastors of the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship in northern Virginia, a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation with "sending ties" to Park View Mennonite Church. Pastor Can served as executive secretary for NAVMF and made several trips to Vietnam to encourage and train church leaders there. He met Brother Trung and the Mennonite groups as well as Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang and the growing house church movement. Here at home each NAVMF congregation was encouraged to give \$100 per month to help the work in Vietnam.

On July 27 - 28, 2003, a historic meeting of twenty-some delegates from the scattered Mennonite-related groups in Vietnam met in Siagon. They adopted the Confession of Faith they had been using. There had been considerable discussion on the article on peace and non-resistance, especially the statement "...we neither participate in war nor prepare for war..." which was not acceptable to government officials. An amended draft stated that they would nevertheless fulfill their "civic duties to protect the homeland." But at Quang's urging, they agreed to retain the original statement. Trung was chosen as president and Quang as vice president and general secretary. Membership of the group is approximately 10,000 with 85 percent ethnic minorities.

After 1975, Can spent time in re-education camps because he had been on the city council of his home town (Can Tho) under the "old regime." Pastor Can and Lisa came to the US in 1984. They moved to Harrisonburg in 1986 to attend Eastern Mennonite Seminary. During their last year of study, they spent a weekend a month

courtesy Paul Schrag/MWR



Nguyen Hong Quang

courtesy Paul Schrag/MWR



Le Thi Hong Lien

in northern Virginia to help us prepare for a new congregation. After graduation in 1989, they moved to northern Virginia and began Sunday services in a small Lutheran Church chapel where the Vietnamese Christian Fellowship continues to meet today. After thirteen years of pastoring there, in 2003, Can and Lisa joined their son, family members and Lisa's aging mother near Birmingham, Ala., where Can is presently serving a Vietnamese Baptist congregation, and Lisa continues Bible translation work with the American Bible Society.

On January 15, 2005, Can and Lisa's only child, Sam (Bao Quoc) was married in Anaheim, Calif., to Ruth (Nhan Ai), daughter in a Vietnamese pastor family. In the 1960s their fathers had worked together in InterVarsity in Saigon. It was a lovely wedding, held in a large Methodist church where a good Vietnamese friend of the couple is on the pastoral team (English), serving the Vietnamese group who worships there. "Uncle James" Stauffer gave the wedding meditation. Each part of the ceremony was beautifully done in Vietnamese and English including "Great is Thy Faithfulness," "Above All," and "Be Thou My Vision."

Of the several hundred wedding guests, very few were Caucasian, but the value of including both English and Vietnamese languages seemed never in question. Many of the young people don't understand 'church Vietnamese.' Either they came to the US at a young age, or were born here and are much more comfortable in English. Certainly the signing in both languages was good and the bilingual comfort level was delightful.

Many Vietnamese parents decided to come to the US, not for themselves, but for the future of their children. They also passed through "stormy seas," weathering a very materialistic culture with many changing social and moral codes. In face of those sacrifices, it is rewarding to see their children stay with the church in important life decisions.

Our present interaction with our brothers and sisters on both sides of the Pacific Ocean humbles us with a profound sense of amazement and gratitude. God has privileged us to be a part of His kingdom work, here and halfway around the world. Because of brothers and sisters here, we have brothers and sisters there. When people who have been supporting the Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions or Eastern

Mennonite Missions or Mennonite Central Committee read in a recent article from *Mennonite Weekly Review* about the "Mennonite Six" suffering in prison in Vietnam or see Mennonite World Conference request prayer that our Vietnamese brothers and sisters have courage and wisdom, we can all know these are our family – we helped bring the Gospel to them and we share in their suffering.

And when we hear about Sam Le marrying a Christian bride in a Bible-based ceremony, praising God for His faithfulness and holding Jesus "above all," we can thank God we are part of a group who could meet Sam and his parents on the journey, help make high school and seminary study a possibility, and be part of their community and their pastoral ministry among the Vietnamese community in northern Virginia.

The words of the verse and chorus of "Great is Thy Faithfulness" may come through with a little different impact to someone sitting in prison in Vietnam compared to hearing it in your son's wedding, or singing it in a Sunday morning service in the Shenandoah Valley. The application is different but appropriate for each setting. And "Above All" brings focus, meaning, courage and strength, through whatever comes our way. Praise the Lord.

■ James and Ruth Stauffer
Family of Hope and
Vietnamese Christian Fellowship

Above All

**Above all powers, above all kings,
Above all nature and all created things,
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man,
You were here before the world began.**

**Above all kingdoms, above all thrones,
Above all wonders the world has ever known,
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth,
There's no way to measure what You're worth.**

**Crucified, laid behind the stone,
You lived to die, rejected and alone,
Like a rose, trampled on the ground,
You took the fall and thought of me, above all.**

Crossing Borders, Breaking Ground in Southeast Asia

courtesy Skip and Carol ****

Skip is an inveterate explorer. He always wants to see what surprising view unfolds over the top of the next hill, or around the next bend. Thus, when we were living in Thailand, and his eyes wandered across the mighty Mekong River into little land-locked L**s, it took considerable self-restraint for him to stay put. God's word seemed to be, "Wait until you are invited."

But, it seemed unlikely that we would be invited!! Caught in a stranglehold of corruption, communism, and anti-American suspicions spawned in the Vietnam War era, unable to enter the global economic scene due to imposed economic sanctions, the country seems cut off from the help it needs.

But last fall, as we set our sights on going back to Asia, invitations began to come. A friend working in a relief agency wrote: "There are two openings for Southern L**s. Both job descriptions fit. Can I send you the specs?" Another friend asked, "We've started a small exporting business. Do you want to be involved?" And, closer to our hearts, came a plea from our L** friends in the Seeker's Class at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, "Please go. We're concerned about our relatives." And guess what happened when EMM President Richard Showalter asked us to escort him across the border when we traveled with him last fall? During a brief stop at a market, a local English teacher approached us, offering me a teaching position, and a visa!

To top it off, conversations began with yet another friend who has spearheaded the successful operation of a feed mill factory and a variety of animal raising projects. He has asked us to help open a new branch office, thus expanding the capacity to impact the economy and improve the quality of life of subsistence farmers in the region. It's this last scenario that we hope becomes the crux of our assignment – with Carol free to explore teaching possibilities.

We are now jointly appointed through VMBM and EMM for a 3-year assignment. We are working with a local support team to raise the financial and prayer support needed to allow us to leave the US by the end of July. Our sense is that this is not only a new invitation for us, but for Virginia Conference as well. Can you stretch out your eyes across yet another border and see that God wants these people to experience His love, as expressed through His people?

■ Carol *~*~*



Skip and Carol **** served with EMM in Thailand from 1992-2002. They are members of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. They have 6 daughters: Hosanna (****) Thomas, Bethany, Dawn, Noelle, Melody and Jessamyn.

Love in Heaven

(Carol ****, March 2003)

Do you ever look to heaven
Or gaze upon a star strewn sky
Do you know the mercy
That reaches out from on high

Do you know of love in heaven
Of mercy deep and wide
That draws you to his side
Do you know the Lamb in heaven
The One forever slain
He bears your every pain

Red dust
Rutted lanes
Scorching heat
Before the monsoon rains
You and the buffalo -
You wander wide
For a spot of shade
And some grass come high

The Silent World

Terrain and turf
You know the dirt
You see its cracks
But you know its worth
It's mud or dust
Each and every day
And always someone
You've got to pay

Look, look to heaven
There's a Lamb forever slain
Who's calling out your name!

The busy street
The friend to meet
Starbucks on the run
No time to eat
Your life as rich and tended
As your landscaped yard
So why the sense at night
That it's all so hard

Mind fixed on the here and now
Make the break in business
Get ahead somehow
They call this the good life
But you're running scared
Afraid some trigger-finger's
Gonna say it's not fair

But do you know of love in heaven
Of mercy deep and wide
That draws you to His side
Do you know the Lamb in heaven
He's the One forever slain
He's calling out your name.



Since coming to teach at Maranatha School for the Deaf I've been faced with the difference between the world I live in and the one my students live in. The world in which they live is void of sound. They will never know the sound

of waves crashing on the sand, the wind in the trees, a dog barking, a bird singing, or even the sound of their own name. They communicate not by sound but by sight. I've wondered how I would I respond if I lived in a world of silence? I had a chance to find out.

Monica, my roommate, and I often communicate by sign language to practice our signing. We went into Junction one day pretending to be deaf. We were wearing shirts with the school name clearly displayed on them. We walked into a store and communicated using only signs. No one talked to us but I felt people watching us. Our fate was sealed even more by our deaf friends that came in and were signing with us. No one questioned if we were deaf. When we checked out, the cashier simply motioned her question instead of talking and let us see the total on the computer. As we walked through the town some guys tried to get our attention with their usual "Psssst, hey whitie." Then I overheard someone say, "Can't you see they're from the deaf school; they can't hear you." Since we didn't respond, no one doubted the truth of the statement. We continued through the town this way seeing how different people responded.

As we drove home I thought about all that had happened. I was only pretending to be deaf and at any moment could communicate with people if I wished. I could hear what people were saying about me. What if I could never do that? What if I couldn't defend myself against what people were saying about me? What if I was forever trapped in a world of silence? It gave me a greater appreciation for the gift God has given me in allowing me to hear. It also gave me a new love for my students and made me want to teach them all I can so they can communicate with the world around them.

■ Krista Swartzentruber
St. Elizabeth, Jamaica



courtesy Joe Bontrager

Melissa Wenger was commissioned at Riverside Mennonite Church on Sunday morning, February 27 for service at Poarch Community Church, Atmore, Alabama. Melissa was appointed by VMBM to a two-year term of service for children's and youth ministries in the Poarch Indian community.

Removing the termites

by Joe Bontrager
Director of USA Ministries



Recently, while I was preparing a sermon during Lent on hearing God's call, I remembered the story of Clyde Shenk, pioneer missionary in Africa.

Clyde was the only son of a farmer in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in the early 1930s, in line to inherit the family farm. But he felt God was calling him to mission work in Africa, so in 1935 Clyde and his new bride, Alta, sailed for Tanganyika. They left behind, not only a productive farm, but also a family that could not understand why they would give up the opportunity to have a comfortable life for the uncertainties and risks of life in far-away Africa.

The Mennonite Mission assigned Clyde and Alta to a village, Bumangi, about 40 miles inland from Lake Victoria, where they made plans to establish a mission station that would eventually include a small medical clinic, a primary school and a church.

They contacted the village chief for approval. After conferring with village elders, the chief offered a vacant plot of ground, an entire hill near the center of the village. Clyde was grateful for the cooperation and set to work.

What the village chief and elders did not tell Clyde was that there was a reason the hill was vacant - it was full of termites and anyone who tried to build there soon found his work destroyed. Reality was, the village leaders did not want missionaries in their village, but considered it disrespectful to refuse, so they gave the termites the task of chasing them out!

Clyde's response surprised the village leaders; he became an expert at digging up termite nests and soon the hill was free of termites and suitable for building!

I heard this story in 1986 at the 50-year celebration of the Bumangi Mennonite Church, as an illustration of the impact of the gospel in their culture. As they told the story, "Clyde Shenk was a termite digger, not only in the ground, but also in our culture. Clyde taught us the gospel and helped us remove things in our culture that were destroying us."

In our time and place, Pastor Chaiya is teaching the gospel to the Hmong people in Hickory, North Carolina, and is helping to remove "termites," things in their culture that keep them from experiencing the wholeness of living God's way. From removing religious shrines from homes to presenting Jesus as the source of true well-being, Chaiya is leading this witness to the Hmong people and the Hmong church is growing.

Keith and Tami Nice, in Graham, North Carolina, invited neighbors into their home for a parenting class based on Christian principles. Most of the neighbors had had negative experiences with churches and were determined not to enter a church building again, but found this approach acceptable. The relationships that developed are becoming the basis for a new house church. Through their hospitality, Keith and Tami were helping to remove "termites" from the lives of their neighbors so they can experience God's blessing.

Do we have "termites" — attitudes, values, actions — that are destroying us? Effective mission depends on removing the "termites" in our lives.

tranSend
a one-year mission program of VMBM

An introductory tranSend DVD is available at no charge from VMBM.
Contact Laura Moyers at (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535 or laura.moyers@vmbm.org.

Lehman shares ministry gifts and skills in Italy

"The evangelical bookstore in Bari will need to be closed!" was the verdict of CLC (Christian Literature Crusade) several years ago when money was lacking to pay the manager. Pastors and churches rose up in dismay at this disconcerting news! How could this happen to the only place in Bari where Bibles, Christ-centered literature and music are available to its half million residents and to the churches in this region?! The CLC accepted the pastors' proposal that their churches give monthly to fund minimal support for local "volunteers" who would keep the bookstore open. Since the evangelical presence is small in Italy, bookstores are often forced to function as "mission" rather than as business.

Since then, various Mennonite missionaries and believers have contributed significantly to keeping the Bari bookstore in operation. For the last five years Phil Lehman, VMBM missionary, has faithfully served there on a regular basis. Although he is presently able to give only one morning each week because of responsibilities at Centro Koinonia (a new church plant), he receives many invitations to be more involved in management. His fellow volunteers greatly appreciate his gifts of administration and accounting and praise his dependability.

Phil says that this experience has been invaluable in learning to use the Italian language more proficiently and in becoming acquainted with the churches, pastors and believers of this area. It puts him in touch with their needs and challenges and develops a network of connections and friendships. Naturally, Phil is also on the "inside track" regarding Christian books and music in the Italian language, all of which contribute to his formation as an effective missionary in this setting.

• Eva M. Eberly
Bari, Italy

Steve Carpenter's 50th birthday helps VMC

Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter celebrated his 50th birthday a little differently than most: he held a fundraiser for Virginia Mennonite Conference. Guests were treated to soda, popcorn, and a private showing of the 1981 classic *Chariots of Fire*, at Court Square Theater in Harrisonburg, followed by cake and ice cream. The party and other gifts mailed in for Steve's birthday raised more than \$5,000, above expenses, for the ministry of VMC.



Phil Lehman, VMBM worker, works in the only Christian bookstore in Bari, Italy, which is kept open with volunteer support and funds from churches. Lehman says his five years of service at the bookstore have contributed to his formation as an effective missionary in Italy.

An easier way to donate

Would you like to avoid the effort of writing out a check each month? Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions is now set up with Park View Federal Credit Union's electronic funds transfer for easier contributions. This is an automatic transfer program which allows you to make regular gifts without writing checks. Once you authorize the transfer, your specified contribution is electronically transferred directly from your checking or savings accounts to VMBM's account, no matter at which bank you have your account. Contact Ed Bontrager at ed.bontrager@vmbm.org or Evelyn Kratz at evelyn.kratz@vmbm.org at VMBM for a form which specifies the amount and the transfer date each month, or for more information.

Pleasant View: serving those with disabilities

Pleasant View, Inc. was founded in 1971 by members of the Virginia Mennonite Conference out of a concern for people within the church and the wider community who have mental retardation. John R. Mumaw and other leaders of the church and community saw that people with disabilities were living with aging parents who were concerned about what services would be provided to them after the parents were no longer able to care for them. Reaching into the churches long history of caring for others, these concerned citizens opened the first group home for 6 people, now known as the C. C. Turner House, in Broadway, Virginia, in March 1971.

From this beginning, Pleasant View has grown into an organization which serves over 80 people in residential settings and 95 people in day support services in 9 locations throughout the City of Harrisonburg, Rockingham County, and beyond. Residential services provided range from structured home-based care on the intermediate care level for people with severe and profound disabilities to independent apartment living and home living. Residences include larger living arrangements such as the 15-person Harrison Residence, small community-based homes for 4 to 6 people, and 10 apartments. Day support services include highly structured center-based programs for people with severe needs, community-based programs of volunteer service, employment enclaves in which staff members and 2 or more clients fill jobs in the

community, and individual supported employment. Pleasant View also provides a ministry program that creates meaningful interactions between those we serve and the wider community.

Our mission is to serve people who have disabilities by providing support services necessary for them to live in and enrich the community and to assist each individual in choosing and achieving his or her own vocational, family, emotional, and spiritual goals. Pleasant View practices this mission by providing caring environments that promote opportunity for each person to reach his or her desired level of independence while maintaining a sense of community and providing an equitable environment that values all people while promoting teamwork, open communication and vision. Through the years, Pleasant View has maintained a reputation for excellent service and innovation.

People who are served today come from across the state and from some neighboring states. Applicants are selected regardless of race, gender, creed, or religious affiliation. Many people receive financial assistance from state sources. Charitable donations received by the agency help to supplement those who do not receive assistance or receive only partial assistance. For additional information, call us at (540) 896-8255 or visit our website www.pleasantviewinc.org.

• Rosa C. Bare
Pleasant View, Inc.

Congregational Resource Center

New Resources

- **Games for families, church groups and people of all ages.** The perfect book for a youth leader! Over 200 games of all kinds.
- **New Testament Bible Sketches for Children: 15 interactive scripts for youth and adults to perform for children,** by Lillenas Drama. These are great dramas for children to do as well!
- **Reconciliation for the 21st Century: Believers church essential.** A video series by Myron Augsburger.

Mennonite Central Committee: Videos and DVD's

- **Christian faith and public witness** - question and answer interview with John Remple, former MCC representative to the United Nations. For adult study groups, and Sunday School.

Coffee, Corn and the Cost of Globalization: Are we responsible to our global neighbors and their well-being? For grade 10 to adult.

Listening with our hearts - stories from Bangladesh, Canada, Honduras, Palestine and Tanzania. "The more we listen, the more we learn and the more we hear the voice of God." DVD includes Spanish, German and French translations and subtitles. Grade 5 to adult."

Peace: the ultimate trick. How do young people who are pacifist react when involved in violent incidents? Study guide included, grades 5-9."

The Dividing Wall - "explores the humanitarian, social and political impact of the Israeli built 'security fence.'" Study guide included, for grade 9 to adult.

The Resource Center is located on the first floor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary and is open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For after hour use - contact the CRC director at (540) 432-4219 or crc@emu.edu to make arrangements. Browse the catalog at www.emu.edu/seminary/crc

April 2005 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by **Elizabeth Hostetter**. Her support of missions through the years is appreciated. *If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, please contact Gloria Lehman at (540) 434-9727 or gloria.lehman@vmbm.org.*

Monday

3 Pray for Joe Bontrager as he preaches at North Baltimore Mennonite Church and shares a report on the Hmong ministry in Hickory. North Baltimore has contributed financially to the Hmong ministry in Hickory.

Tuesday

4 Pray for pastor Chaiya and the Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church, the newest VMC congregation. Pastor Chaiya is giving priority to training leaders, including elders, a treasurer, and leaders for women's and children's ministries.

Wednesday

**"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light."
— Luke 8:16 (NIV)**

5 Springfest in the Valley with Steve Wingfield is being held April 8-10 in Harrisonburg. Pray for a deep moving of God's Spirit in this setting.

Thursday

6 Tomorrow Willard and Eva Eberly and Loren and Earlene Horst travel to Albania. Pray God's protection, guidance and wisdom over them this week, and as they meet with missionaries and the Albanian Menn. Mission Foundation.

Friday

1 Pray for Conference Minister Owen and Ruth Ann Burkholder as they travel to Washington, D.C. this weekend. Ask that God will lead Owen to the right person to provide oversight for the Potomac District.

8 Pray for Mennonite Mutual Aid's Stewardship University held at Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Va. tomorrow. Ask that those who attend may be able to learn and apply these biblical truths of good stewardship.

Saturday

2 Pray for Loren and Earlene Horst as they worship with the Centro Koinonia congregation in Italy tomorrow afternoon. This growing congregation is regularly welcoming new friends to their services.

9 Thank God for the gift of hearing, even if it is enhanced by hearing aids. Ask for God to bless Krista Swartzentruber today as she teaches young deaf students at the Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica.

10 Paul and Esther Kniss recently returned to Harrisonburg after 6 weeks in Trinidad. Their ministry in Trinidad encouraged the church members, some very young in faith. Ask God to compound his blessing on the Knisses' lives.

11 Praise the Lord for the responsiveness of God's people—both in Virginia Mennonite Conference, Jamaica, and elsewhere—to the devastation of Hurricane Ivan.

12 Mauricio Chenlo is Director in Eastern Carolina District. His role includes cultivating vision and resourcing church planting efforts in the District, in addition to being youth minister at Raleigh Mennonite.

13 Jason and Donna Martin need your prayers as they're in the process of concluding their missionary service in Italy due to family needs. Pray that other believers will be able to connect with and continue these relationships.

14 Pray for the Albania Mennonite Mission Foundation as they meet today for their annual board meeting. The foundation coordinates ministry and outreach and is made up of representatives from VMBM, EMM, and Albania.

17 Springdale Mennonite Church hosts a Music Festival tonight for the congregations of Southern District. Pray that God may be glorified in their singing.

18 At least one morning a week, Phil Lehman works as a volunteer at the evangelical bookstore in Bari, Italy. His administrative gifts are greatly appreciated there. Pray the Lord will bless this ministry.

19 Pray for Pastor Ganesh Kalloo and his wife, Risha, as they give leadership to the Mennonite Church of Chaguanas, Trinidad. This small congregation is seeking land to build a place for worship. Pray for their search for this.

20 Pray for Eva Eberly as she works on a new translation project, "Good Sense Budget Course," to be used in the discipleship school in Italy. Ask God to indicate the right language assistant to help contextualize this course.

21 Strong marriages build strong families and congregations. Ask God to bond persons together well, helping them to resist the distractions to commitment.

24 Pray for the planning for Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly being held July 28-30 in Richmond at Virginia Commonwealth University. Persons who have responsibilities need God's guidance.

25 Pray for Ken Horst, director of Partners in Mission and *tramSend* programs as he makes arrangements for persons to serve in various locations. Ask for God to give him insight for placement of persons, and forwarding God's work.

27 Today is Administrative Professionals Day. Please pray today for your church's secretary, whether paid or volunteer, as they earnestly labor to assist in carrying out the work of Christ's church.

28 Families with young children face stresses of various kinds, including lack of sleep and demanding schedules. Pray for parents that they will be the role models God intended them to be, and attend to their children's spiritual needs.

29 Pray for the senior class of Eastern Mennonite Seminary as they complete their studies and graduate tomorrow. Ask God to give them a sense of His call and direction for their lives and future ministry.

30 Pray for Mark Wenger as he speaks to the Central District Pastors' Fellowship on Thursday afternoon, May 12. He will be encouraging pastors in sermon preparation and presentation.

22 Conference Council, the executive body of Virginia Mennonite Conference, meets this weekend from 4 - 9 pm today and 8 am until noon tomorrow. Pray for their deliberations and decision making at this meeting.

23 The season of spring encourages us to nurture plants of all kinds. Taking care of God's earth, is a responsibility that we must not take lightly. Ask God what new way you could be a better steward of this great gift of creation.

15 Omar and Dolores Beiler enjoy the beauty of Jamaica all around them—the flowers, birds, butterflies, and most of all, the people. May God grant them many moments of beauty as they meet physical and spiritual needs there.

16 Tomorrow, many Mennonite believers gather in congregations in and around Palermo, Sicily. Pray for Loren and Earlene Horst as they worship and fellowship with leaders and church members.

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Announcements

Gift and Thrift, Inc., in Harrisonburg, Va., seeks two full time positions: one as manager for A World of Good thrift shop and one as manager for Artisans' Hope a partnership store of Ten Thousand Villages. Experience in retail business and management is desirable. Responsibilities include demonstrating Christian principles, training and supervising volunteers, marketing and promoting the mission of MCC. Both positions carry fulltime salary/benefits including health coverage and retirement plan. For more information or to receive an application form call Glendon Blosser 540-434-0657 or email GBlosser@aol.com.

Bike riders are invited to **Pedal the Peninsula** on May 7. This event offers a fun way for riders to raise funds for the ministries of the Williamsburg Christian Retreat

Center. Choose from a 10, 20, 32, or 55 mile ride through James City County, that begins and ends at WCRC. The registration fee is \$35 plus a suggested \$1/mile. Email wrcr@wrcr.info or call (757) 566-2256 or (866) 566-9272.



Be a part of the 95th annual **Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly!** This event will take place July 28-30, 2005, at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Va. Mark your calendars now! Registration forms will be mailed April 12.

Warwich River Christian School Inc., a growing Mennonite sponsored school with 350 students from K3 thru G8, is seeking one or two qualified applicants for Administrator and Director of Development to replace, Gordon Zook, who plans to retire summer 2005. A vision for Christ-centered education and relevant experience in education, administration, and/or development is required. Contact: Mr. Lynn Showalter, 252 Lucas Creek Rd., Newport News, VA 23602; or LJShowalter@aol.com

The **Hymn Sing for Peace** is scheduled for April 9 at 2 p.m. in Lafayette Park, Washington, DC, just across from the White House. Held annually, singers gather to share songs of peace with one another and as a witness to those who pass by. This event is sponsored by the Anabaptist Peace Center, Washington, DC. Visit www.apcwdc.mennonite.net.

Pastoral Updates



We rejoice with **Pastor Bong Gi Choi and his wife Young Hee** on receiving Pastor Choi's permanent resident status (the coveted "green card"). In addition to serving as pastor of Peace Fellowship Church (a congregation in formation with VMC),

Choi serves as dean of a Baptist seminary in Annandale that serves 300 Korean theology/ministry students in the DC area.



Roy Hange (center) was installed as overseer of Harrisonburg District on January 20. The service was held during a Harrisonburg District Council meeting at Park View Mennonite Church.

