

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

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Measure of the missional church

Our Virginia Mennonite Conference has included 175 congregations at one time or another, founding about one per year since the first Mennonites began meeting as congregations in Virginia. Not a bad piece of work for “the quiet in the land.” On the other hand, we have also closed, on average, about one every three years. Open three, close one, net two, triennium after triennium. Every four or five years on average, too, a congregation departed more or less of its own accord. Current count is 66 with another half dozen or so in various stages of planning and formation.



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

Counting churches is not very sophisticated missiology. It does, however, reveal something very important about who we think we are as Mennonites, indeed who we think we are as Christians. We are a people. Not just persons. Not just a culture, or ideology, or theology. We are a people, formed and oriented around congregations. When “missional” language found its way into our church, we instinctively applied it to congregations.

Mission, missionary, missional: all good words. They all refer to the outward impulse of the church. This impulse prompts congregational behavior that reaches from the church to the world, from the Kingdom to those who have not heard, from the saved to the lost, from our own communities to the world beyond. The addition of “missional” to current discussions has clarified and sharpened several points that have always been, more or less, a part of mission theory and practice.

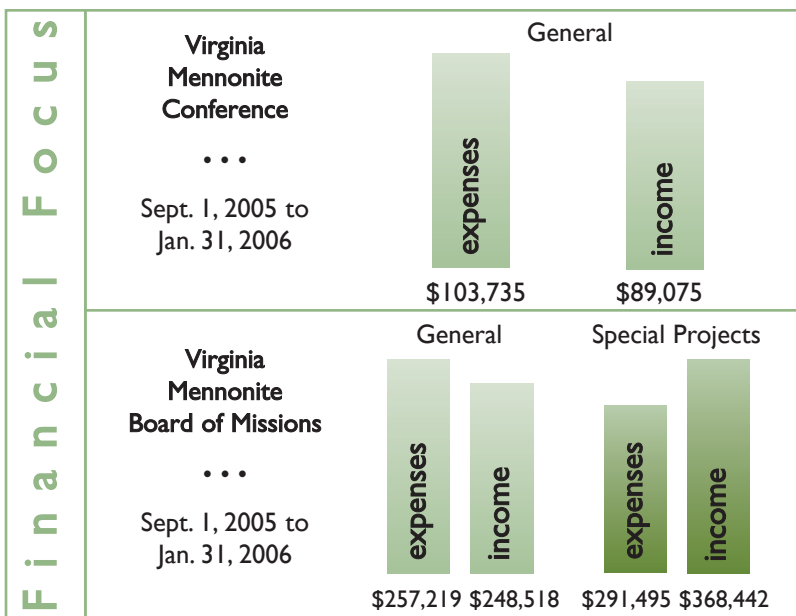
- We are involved in God’s mission, not our own. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.” God is on a mission, with or without us.
- When God gets excited about something He always seems to involve His people. All of God’s people are, properly understood, participants in God’s mission.
- All of a congregation’s activities are, properly understood, oriented around God’s mission.

Missional language has pushed our congregations from thinking of our ministries as primarily taking care of the flock to living prophetically, lovingly, and redemptively in the world.

Can we do it? Probably not perfectly. The day-to-day tasks of simply living and getting along as congregations seem to take tremendous energy, not unlike the energy required just to feed, shelter, and clothe one’s own family. It’s hard to find time to reach out to my family’s neighbors, let alone the world. “Missional” language pushes us in an outward direction, to join God’s business of taking care of the world- and starting more congregations with intentions to do just that.

Loren Horst

Correction: The February prayer calendar sponsorship should have read “Jason and Marie Weaver.”



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Stories of Peace

sponsored by the Peace Coordinators
of the Virginia Mennonite Conference

Prince of Peace Revival

In November, about 140 people attended a “Prince of Peace Revival” held at Springdale Mennonite Church in Waynesboro, Va. After some rousing hymn singing from the amassed group, Myron Augsburger provided a spiritual and informative message concerning the Anabaptist view of Peacemaking. He began and finished with a focus on the centrality of Christ in our beliefs about peace. The hour passed quickly as he covered some of the differences in biblical interpretation that causes varying views of peace, church/state issues, and multiple Bible verses and human stories that modeled the way of peace.

Steve Pardini, a member of Springdale Mennonite, then provided his personal testimony of his pilgrimage to Christian pacifism, a journey that started during a PhD program in nuclear chemistry. His degree led to a potential career opportunity at a nuclear weapons research facility, when jobs in the chemistry field were scarce. However, he decided and explained at the end of this job interview that he could not accept the job, due to his beliefs. “It was at that moment,” he stated, “that I became a pacifist.”

At the end of the service, Myron Augsburger fielded questions from those who attended. Afterwards, 15 persons stayed for a discussion period that lasted well over another hour. “I have been waiting all of my life for what I heard this evening,” stated a new Mennonite. He had his own moving story of fleeing to Canada as a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War and of still being rejected by his family. “This is so exciting to meet people who think like this,” said a visitor from the broader community. A decision was made during this discussion to form an Augusta County Anabaptist Peace Fellowship that will meet regularly to support each other and discuss further ways to promote this Christ-like view of peace.

The Virginia Mennonite Conference Peace Coordinators, Dave and Krista Powell, encourage other churches and/or districts throughout the Conference to consider sponsoring similar events. This is one way of reaching out to our communities to teach the ways of the Prince of Peace, as well as encouraging our own membership toward a deeper commitment to a life of discipleship. If you would like further information on planning such an event, contact Dave and Krista Powell at (540) 941-3798, or at ecopow@ecollc.net.

• Dave & Krista Powell

Virginia Mennonite Conference Peace Coordinators

Youth workers retreat instills sense of purpose

“Put your hands up! Put your hands up! And move it to the right...” was blaring through the basement of the Holiday Inn, in Williamsburg as Minister Glen Guyton, youth pastor at Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Va., attempted to teach Mennonite youth workers the gospel slide. And that was only the beginning of the fun and fellowship shared at the annual youthworkers retreat that Conference Youth Minister Kimberlee Greenawalt organizes.

Speaking on the topic of the basics of youth ministry, Minister Glen shared his seven success points. He encouraged youth pastors and sponsors to “do what you are” and delegate the rest. Throughout the four sessions, Glen outlined his philosophy for youth ministry developed through years of experience. He also shared about the ministry at Calvary that he oversees, giving ideas and guidelines for programming. A main emphasis of Glen’s message was the need for youth workers to instill a sense of purpose within youth.

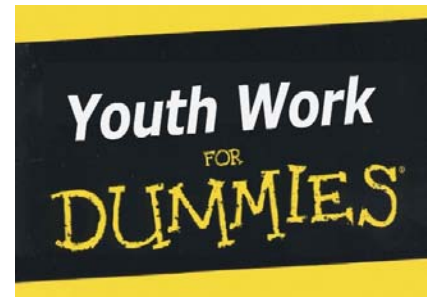
Amidst the fun and workshop sessions, the highlight for most youth workers was the time to connect with other youth workers from around the Conference. Idea sharing, encouragement and story-telling were all important pieces of this annual renewal weekend.

Nate Barker, youth pastor at Weavers Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, led music for the weekend worship sessions. He even shared his own original composition entitled “The Fire Truck Song” about God’s saving power. Nate’s gift of worship leading was a highlight of the weekend.

Perhaps the most meaningful experience of the weekend was during the closing worship time. After a wrap up message from Glen, Kimberlee shared her own reflections on grace, drawing from Philip Yancey’s book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* Retreat participants were then invited to write their fears and shortcomings on a piece of paper. After offering it to God, Kimberlee invited each person to come forward and rip up the paper, exchanging the shreds for a ribbon that represented the celebration that God has planned for each of us. God is pleased when we are willing to step out in faith and use our gifts to work in God’s kingdom.

• Sherah-Leigh Gerber

Virginia Mennonite Conference Staff Assistant



Delegates experience mixed emotions at Springdale



Bob Zehr, Moderator of Gulf States Mennonite Conference, shares about the effects of Hurricane Katrina in his conference. Virginia Mennonite Conference Moderator Beryl Jantzi (L), presented Bob with two checks totaling over \$50,000 for rebuilding.

One hundred and forty five delegates and church leaders from throughout Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) gathered at Springdale Mennonite Church on Saturday, February 4, for the 12th annual Winter Delegate Session. It was a time of mixed emotions.

We were saddened to release two congregations. Landstown Community Church was formed in 1980 and will continue under the leadership of pastor Merlin Miller. However, they are seeking affiliation with another denomination or group. The second congregation, Calvary Community West, was accepted into membership in VMC in July 2004, the same week that founding pastor Steven Francisco died unexpectedly. Since then, Steven's widow, Karla, has sought independence from both Calvary District and VMC. The church will continue under her leadership using the name Harvest of Judah Fellowship. They are undecided about a broader affiliation.

George Dupuy, pastor of Big Springs Mennonite Church, led a discussion of the possibility of MC USA joining a new interdenominational group called Christian Churches Together. Many saw the value of such an affiliation while others expressed concerns. Some hope for a closer relationship with other Anabaptist groups, perhaps through something like "Mennonite Churches Together." Feedback received from the delegates will be compiled and reported to the Executive Leadership team of MC USA.

One of the meeting highlights occurred between Bob Zehr, Moderator of Gulf States Mennonite Conference (GSMC), and Beryl Jantzi, Moderator of VMC. Bob shared a slide show

recounting the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Beryl presented him with two checks, one for GSMC in the amount of \$25,000, the other for \$25, 723.46 for Pine Lake Fellowship Camp. The first gift came from funds remaining after the transition of the Virginia Mennonite Property Aid Plan to MAX. The second check represents money collected by VMC from member churches to help the camp replace lost fundraising opportunities when their fall auction was cancelled. It is above and beyond the \$52,000 VMC forwarded to Mennonite Disaster Service in 2005, of which \$24,000 was designated for Katrina relief.

When asked, last fall, about a unique niche VMC could fill, former moderator Duane Maust invited VMC to aid in the camp's recovery. Many in GSMC feel that a restored Pine Lake Fellowship Camp is essential to their spiritual and emotional health. According to camp Executive Directors Jeff and Cheryl Landis, "Pine Lake Fellowship Camp has become the heart of the (GSM) conference, a unifying presence of which all have ownership." During the check presentation, Beryl expressed the hope that GSMC will "...receive (these funds) as an expression of our partnership with you in the rebuilding." Bob replied, "You can't imagine the emotions this all brings...Simply, thank you from GSMC." Zehr's visit, and financial support from VMC, further strengthens our informal sister conference relationship.

Next year's Winter Delegate Session will take place at First Mennonite Church of Richmond on Saturday Feb 3, 2007.

• Steve Carpenter
Conference Coordinator



Pine Lake Fellowship Camp, in Meridian, Miss., received one of the checks from Virginia Conference. It was not heavily damaged, but the cancelled fall annual auction resulted in a substantial loss of operational funding.

Working and “liming” in Trinidad

Blooming Glen (Pa.) Mennonite Church and Christopher Dock Mennonite High School took a team of 10 on a service and relational trip to Trinidad, January 5-13. For some it was a second time exploration and for a few, a first time adventure out of the country. In any case we felt our time was well spent.

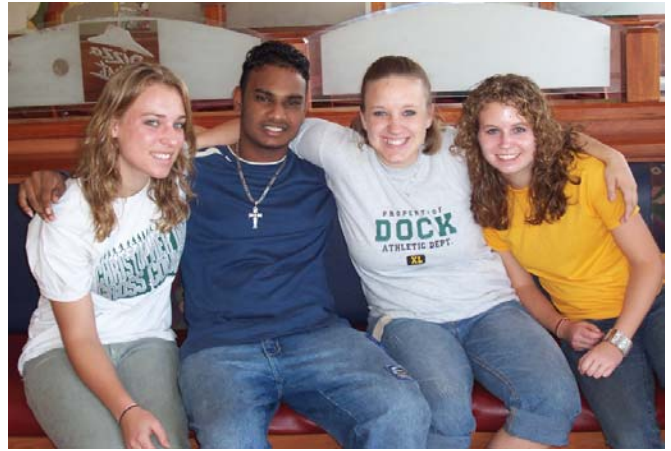
We spent two days at Charlieville Mennonite Church painting outdoor walls with stubby paint brushes, steel brushing rusted poles, then painting and priming those poles, removing brush next to the building in preparation for termite spraying, general trash and brush clean up, pulling weeds, and cleaning out muck from a sewage ditch so that it would run freely to the road side ditch.

We also spent two days at Diego Martin Mennonite Church doing work on a courtyard at the rear of the church for volleyball and basketball, which a kids’ program uses. It was a lot of laborious work but resources are slim and manpower is all they have. We moved ground and stone with limited tools, built a stone wall and leveled the entire courtyard all by

hand. We also moved and leveled more ground so that cars wouldn’t get flooded after a hard tropical rain. We had the privilege of naming the courtyard Ebenezer Court. Raul, the pastor of Diego Martin, was very excited to move forward in this ministry.

We felt good about the work we got done, but Ramesh Jaimani, pastor of the Charlieville church, said, “The physical work you do this week will not be what people will remember. That work most likely will not bring someone to Christ. Down here it’s the relationships that are built when you ‘lime.’”

To “lime” has nothing to do with fruit. To “lime” is to visit, to compare cultures, and most importantly to share faith stories. Most in Trinidad are coming from a secular background or a Hindu background. Following Christ is a very deliberate decision often banning them from fam-



Arvin Jaimani and Christopher Dock students enjoy a good “lime.”

ily, culture and community. Our “lime” time included nightly visits with youth, neighbors, and friends, Sunday service at Chaguanas Mennonite Church, meals, a trip with youth and adults to Las Cuevas beach on the northern shore, and countless conversations with fellow brothers and sisters, and new friendships with people like our driver Narish.

In our time spent serving and “liming” we have been given a great gift from the Trinidadian people, greater perhaps than anything we have done for them.

• Suzanne Kratz
Blooming Glen Mennonite Church

Woodland Mennonite focuses on the few

Woodland Mennonite Church in Basye, Va., is small. Super small.

Three years ago, when Rodney and Mary Ann Lebron were called to pastor there, the congregation had dwindled to three people. “The church was producing no fruit,” says Rodney. He and his wife were given a one-year assignment to grow the church. If that wasn’t possible, then to close it.

Rodney was direct with the faithful few in spelling out what was needed:

“Prove that you want to worship here by being involved in the church’s ministry.”

So, Rodney suggested the formation of a youth and children’s ministry for the community. They started a basic youth night once a month, with financial assistance from an MMA outreach grant.

“At first, it was just a place to play and get something to eat,” Rodney says. “Then we added singing and Scripture reading. The main thing was, it was safe [from negative influences].” The youth night is small like the church. It has drawn

six to eight at most. It’s like the children’s church they also began, which reaches only a few children.

People question why put so much effort into such a few. “But I don’t see it that way,” Mary Ann explains. “You never know how your life can impact others.”

These modest efforts have inspired the congregation. They decided to expand their children and youth ministries, including the purchase of a \$2,000 mobile classroom.

“We can’t expect to grow if we’re not prepared,” Rodney says. Three months after they began fundraising, they already had collected \$13,000. Woodland Mennonite has also purchased a small wheelchair accessible church bus to pick up the children and youth.

Involved children and youth have brought some parents back to God. The congregation has grown to 20-25 people.

An understanding of how valuable everyone’s time and efforts are to God is growing. “Because this is a poor area,



Mary Ann and Rodney Lebron

people tend to think what they have to offer is not of much use,” Rodney says. Then they meet him and notice his speech impediment. “They realize that if I can preach every Sunday, there’s something they can do, too,” says Rodney. “If God called me – there’s hope for you, too.”

• Melanie Zuercher
reprinted by permission from MMA’s
pastor publication *Teleious*



Making new friends, cooking meals over a fire, and playing in the stream are just a few of the activities campers enjoy at Highland Retreat. While these activities are fun, they also help to foster an environment where spiritual memories are made.

The camp setting provides wonderful opportunities to get away from the distractions of daily life including computers, Internet, cell phones or running to scheduled practices. While recognizing the significance of these activities, sometimes we allow them to occupy large portions of our time, including the time God desires we spend with Him. Church camp provides the forum to put a "pause" to our daily grind and permits us to focus on God and His creation. As we do this, spiritual memories are made while we connect with God, seeking to discover His purpose and direction. Dan Bolin writes, "...the cause for which Christian camps exist is critical. Helping campers establish and develop their relationship with Christ is the ultimate purpose for the ministry. Sharing biblical truth, and encouraging faith growth and strengthened relationships also give Christian camping

eternal significance."¹

Special relationships are developed and strengthened as campers and staff interact. Because campers usually stay one week, staff have six short days to make an impact on each camper. The words, actions, and lifestyle of staff have a tremendous impact upon watchful campers. As staff demonstrate what it means to be a follower of Christ, they influence the young lives entrusted to

their care. This type of intentional interaction fosters opportunities for spiritual discussions and the making of spiritual memories.

In the camp setting, spiritual memories are made as campers explore God's outdoor laboratory. The outdoor setting provides an opportunity to experience first hand, God's creation and to learn more about our Creator and the world entrusted to us. While it is impossible to duplicate the beauty of a flowing stream or to view the night sky in a church building, we are reminded that the God we worship in our sanctuaries is also the God who created the streams and the stars and who we sing our praises to around the campfire. Experiencing God's creativity draws us closer to Him.

As you plan your child's summer schedule, consider the spiritual impact and value a week at church camp can make on your child's life.

• Dean Williams
Program Director, Highland Retreat

¹ Bolin, Dan. "Hollowed Ground." In Site Jan - Feb. 2006: 42

Congregational Resource Center

New Vacation Bible School Curriculum in the CRC!

Jesus Friends, the newest VBS kit from Mennonite Publishing Network. This 5-day study invites children to get to know Jesus and follow him as he heals the sick, shares God's love, practice hospitality and spend time with God. <http://www.mph.org/vbs/>

Trading Places- Where Jesus Makes a World of Difference! from Standard Publishing. "In Trading Places, kids will imagine what it would be like to trade places with kids from Mexico, China, Kenya, Poland and Brazil while they explore stories of biblical heroes who traded one place in life for another." <http://www.standardpub.com/VBS/>

Lent & Easter - LEADER magazine has once again produced worship materials for LENT. This year the theme is "Write on our

hearts," based on Jeremiah 31:33. Supplemental material is available on the web, (<http://www.leaderonline.org/supplement.htm>). Contact LEADER magazine to order a copy of the worship material, or peruse the copy available at the CRC.

Resources from Wild Goose Publications and Iona

Community: Eggs & Ashes: Practical & liturgical resources for Lent and Holy Week (NEW!), Lent & Easter Readings from Iona, Stages On the Way: Worship Resources for Lent, Holy Week and Easter

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



Connections Prayer Calendar March 2006

Sunday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by

Park View Federal Credit Union, which provides full financial services to the Mennonite and Brethren community with commitment to our shared values of mutual aid, integrity, efficiency, service, and innovation.

(540) 434-6444, Toll-free (888) 900-6444, pvfcu@pvfcu.org, www.pvfcu.org

If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar,

email [Gloria Lehman at \[Gloria.Lehman@vmbm.org\]\(mailto:Gloria.Lehman@vmbm.org\)](mailto:Gloria.Lehman@vmbm.org) or call (800) 707-5535.

Monday

5 Dan Hoopert teaches in Kiev (Ukraine) Theo. Seminary and asks us to pray for the students taking the classes he teaches, that they may become prepared for the work that God has called them to do. Dan is from Mt. View MC, N.C.

6 In Trinidad, two new Friendship Bible Coffee groups have been started, one in the Keelers' home with young adult men and women, and the other one with ten women. Thank God for Margaret Keeler's vision for this.

7 Pray for the members at Centro Koinonia who are excited about Jesus and want to see others come to know Him. Pray that they will reach out to serve the needy people around them with the love of Jesus.

12 Pray for Nancy Marshall, *TranSend* participant in Orange Walk Town, Belize, as she seeks a solution to the complicated transportation problems bringing deaf youth to the Jesus Deaf Church that meets in her home Sundays.

13 Noelle, Melody and Jessa Tobin are in the spring term at Hebron School, India. May God guard them, keep them and give them hearts toward Him.

14 Pray that God will guide parents and teachers as girls and boys are taught that they are created in God's image and therefore deserve honor and respect, a message that contradicts pornography.

Tuesday

1 MMN and VMBM workers, Steve and Betsy Dintaman, ask us to pray for guidance for International Christian Fellowship as decisions are made by this diverse group of English speakers in Klaipeda, Lithuania.

8 Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter is on the road tomorrow traveling to Goshen, Ind., for board meetings on Friday and Saturday at MMA's headquarters. Pray for traveling mercies.

15 At the Maranatha School for the Deaf, Jamaica, Robert and Lois Wenger are nurturing students and staff with Christ's love and with their creativity. Thank God for their availability, and ask for His special portion of strength for each day.

22 Recently the pastors of the Warwick and Norfolk districts met to lay strategy for church planting in the Tidewater area. Pray that those involved will continue to hear the Holy Spirit's promptings as to what should happen with this 20/20 vision.

Wednesday

2 Skip and Carol Tobin ask us to pray that God will use them to spark fresh vision and new possibilities for the work in Southeast Asia; they also ask for God's wisdom as they relate to a variety of people and stamina for travel.

9 Ask God to give wisdom and grace to Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter as he deliberates with the board of MC USA's Congregational Employee Health Plan (COMB - Covenanted Mutual Benefits).

16 Loren Swartzendruber, President of EMU, will be the resource person for the Mennonite Men's annual retreat at the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center this weekend. Ask for a special anointing on Loren.

23 Norma Teles has returned to Lezhe, Albania after a 7-month sabbatical leave from her intense work with children and youth. Pray for her during this transition time that she may be energized for God's Kingdom work.

Thursday

3 The Jamaica Mennonite Church is holding its 48th annual conference with the theme "*Revive Thy Work, O Lord.*" Richard and Margaret Keeler are the delegates from Trinidad to this meeting. May the church be revived through the Holy Spirit's power!

10 Pray for Pastor Ramesh Jaimani who majored in Pastoral Ministry and Reena Mohammed who majored in Christian Education as they begin their final semester at the West Indies Theological College in Trinidad.

17 Melissa Wenger, *TranSend* participant in Atmore, Ala., is working along with the Poarch Community Church in planning for the Native Assembly 2006. May God direct each detail.

24 Pray for the Shenandoah Valley Men's Chorus, a group composed of about 70-90 men who will be singing at the E.M.School tomorrow and Sunday to provide a time of worship and to raise funds for the mission of VMBM.

Friday

4 Pray for Bible teacher Duane Yoder as he concludes a 6-week series on Revelation. Ask that the 200 or so people who heard him each Sunday night might be blessed with a new understanding of God's Word.

11 Pray for Pastor Rawl Gunpath and his wife Linda as they represent the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago at the midterm Mennonite World Conference in Pasadena, Calif., this weekend.

18 Willard and Eva Eberly, Bari, Italy, ask us to pray for their neighbors in their apartment building. Many welcomed them back warmly when they returned from Va.

25 Pray for people of faith all around the world. Let us recommit ourselves to peace and justice in all areas of life, from interpersonal relations to global policy decisions.

Saturday

31 Tomorrow, like every Saturday night, *the exchange* of Winchester, Va. will have live music by a Christian musician presented in a coffee house atmosphere. Pray that those who come may be drawn to Him.

"Be still, and know that I am God."
Psalm 46:10

30 Phil and Marcia Lehman ask us to pray for several persons who are struggling with marriage difficulties. They seek God's guidance for knowing how God wants them to be involved.

29 All pastors new to VMC were invited to an orientation tomorrow in Harrisonburg. Pray for those who come, that they might be blessed and encouraged by the support the Conference provides.

28 Give thanks to God for His many blessings and name them aloud as you worship Him.

27 Pray for Eva Eberly as she takes up leadership of the women's ministry again in Bari. Especially pray that the new participants will return and be drawn to the Lord.

20 Samuel Hernandez, *TranSend* participant in Nazareth Village, Israel, coordinates a school for soccer. He finds practical ways to teach peace through soccer games.

26 Many congregations are observing Lent with special services during worship. May this be a time of contemplation and reflection on Jesus' life on earth, and the teachings that He gave His disciples, and to us through His Word.

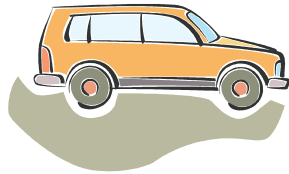
19 Since returning to Italy, Willard and Eva Eberly discovered that their book *Exploring Worship*, that came out last year was given the "bestseller" title for 2005 as most read and appreciated evangelical book of the year! They were astounded and praise God.

Announcements

Mark your calendars now! The Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly “**Sent! Around the World**” will be **July 6-9, 2006** at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg. Speakers are: **Ramesh Jaimani**, Pastor of Charlieville Mennonite Church, Trinidad; **Willard Eberly**, VMBM Mediterranean Regional Director, Bari, Italy; **Nancy Heisey**, President, Mennonite World Conference; **Art McPhee**, Associate Professor of Mission, AMBS.

Yoder Barn presents “**We Had It Good**” **Stories from the Mennonite community’s rich history.** The performances are March 24-April 9 on weekend afternoons and evenings. Call for directions, times and ticket prices at (757) 249-4187, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. M-F.

Do you want to get rid of a used car? Steve Carpenter can sell your vehicle for you and the proceeds will benefit Virginia Mennonite Conference! Why go through the hassle of selling? You will receive a tax deductible receipt for the full selling price. It’s a great way to support the ministries of the Conference. Contact Steve Carpenter at (800) 707-5535 or (540) 434-9727 or email steve.carpenter@vmconf.org.



Overseer Transition

Ernie Godshall was installed as Interim Overseer of the Warwick District.

Service Transition



Dan Hoopert began serving at Kiev Theological Seminary [Grace and Truth] in Ukraine. He will serve there for six months. He is sent by Mountain View Mennonite Church, Hickory, N.C., in partnership with VMBM.

called and sent!

Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions

Will you serve in one of these places?

The West Indies Theological College, Santa Cruz, Trinidad, welcomes Anabaptist persons to teach classes to their international student body. Classes are at the level of a junior college, and there are opportunities to teach in a variety of subject areas.

One-semester or one-year assignments may be taken beginning in August 2006 or January 2007.

Contact Galen Lehman at (800) 707-5535 or email galen.lehman@vmbm.org

Are you called to serve as an **office assistant** for an organization serving evangelical Christian organizations in Prishtina, Kosovo? Experience in administrative work, computer skills, and willing to work with a team will be valuable assets in this assignment. The term of service is one year beginning as soon as possible.

Contact Ken Horst at (800) 707-5535 or email ken.horst@vmbm.org

New Opportunity!

Teach English at a youth center in Nazareth, Israel, at the 8th English Summer Camp, July 3-16, 2006. Lodging will be with local families.

Contact Ken Horst at (800) 707-5535 or email ken.horst@vmbm.org

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