

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

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Zion ministers to the community

Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va., is taking seriously the challenge of developing innovative ways to engage in local ministry. An annual picnic was started in 1999 as a ministry to bring the members of Zion into a relationship with the surrounding community. It is called the Daphna Picnic because Zion is in the Daphna locality. One of the not-so-serious moments of the picnic has been re-electing Steve Nyce as the honorary mayor of Daphna.

Families in the community receive an invitation to attend. Good food in large quantities is not the only ingredient to a successful picnic. Door prizes provided by members are distributed to attendees. Cultural music is a significant draw for the area. Instruments like a bass fiddle, a banjo, a mandolin, a fiddle, and an acoustic guitar represent the cultural musical flavors of bluegrass music. The bluegrass genre of music relies heavily on human and Christian narratives that pull deeply on the emotional experiences that span the life cycle. These rich rural musical pieces often focus on some human sorrow or catastrophe that can be transformed into spiritual bliss through a closer walk with Jesus.

Zion Mennonite Church took another step in their pursuit of “across the street ministry.” The Outreach and Service Commission developed a vision for strengthening ties with the surrounding community. The community is seen as “a parish;” the congregation provides ministry to families within the local region. A sign advertising our availability would not work. Employing a person who knows the community will become the link into the community. The staff position was defined in such a way that the community won’t view the person as a missionary sent to save them.

On September 16, 2006, during the seventh annual Daphna Picnic, Larry and Marilyn Yoder, members of Zion, were commissioned as “ministers to the community.” They have accepted an initial two-year term in a quarter-time staff role nurturing relationships in our community. Their min-

istry activities include visiting in area homes within a 2-3 mile radius of the congregation, following up with visits to the annual picnic, and responding to needs within the local community. As they learn of families experiencing a hospitalization, a death, or some other crisis, they seek to contact them in order to see how the congregation can provide emotional, spiritual, or relational assistance to them.

During the Christmas season, we engaged in our traditional Christmas caroling to our senior citizens, and added 18 new stops representing families living in proximity to our congregation. Ministry in the community is already beginning to reshape what we do and who we are becoming.

• Clyde Kratz
Pastor, Zion Mennonite Church
Broadway, Va.



Ministers to the community around Zion Mennonite Church, Marilyn and Larry Yoder.

Experiencing God in a messy world

My home congregation recently completed an eight-week study of Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*. The series fit well with the church's mission statement, "to experience God and equip each other for a life of love, centered in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit."



Steve Carpenter
Conference Coordinator

One of those weeks found us at Highland Retreat in the Red Oak Lodge for our annual church retreat. We continued with the theme by focusing on "experiencing God in nature."

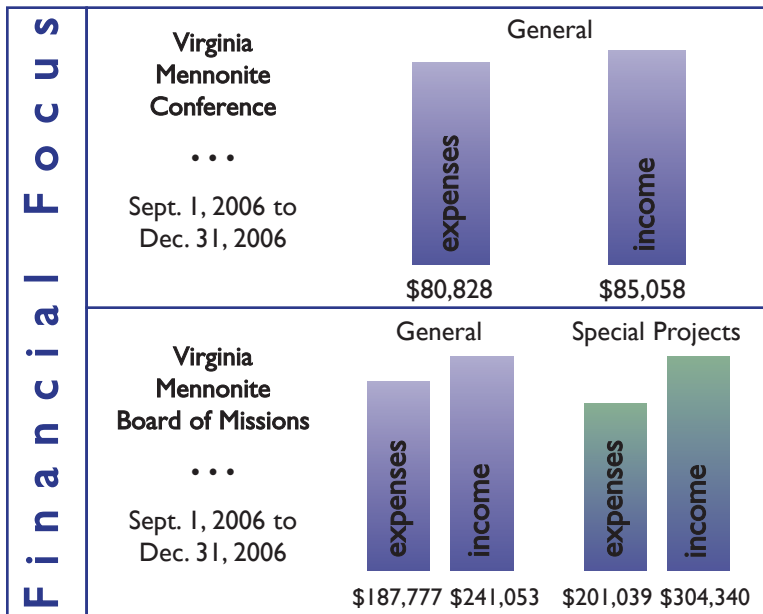
In the midst of the weekend a child became sick which led to an early morning mess in the bathroom. At 8 a.m., I saw it. However, the child's parents were unavailable and I had neither the stomach, the necessary cleaning equipment, or the motivation to deal with it.

During mid-morning many of us saw Mercury, projected on a piece of paper from a telescope, as the planet traveled across the face of sun. The object lesson aided our discussion of the wonders of God's creation. But I was distracted, thinking about the mess. Later, as a friend and I walked through the woods, he

shared his heart with me, but my mind was still dwelling on the mess. Finally, four hours later I found the needed supplies and cleaned it up. Still, I was unable to focus during the afternoon because of continual thoughts of the mess.

My mood, and experience of God, improved on Sunday morning, aided by a pre-worship group prayer walk. As we proceeded under a gentle drizzling rain, I sensed God's Spirit moving around us in and through the wind.

On Monday, as I reflected on these happenings, I understood the challenge of choosing to be present to God. It is only as we shift our focus from our circumstances to the Creator, that we experience His presence, guiding and grace. It is a choice we make, in spite of, and sometimes because of, the messes in our lives.



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We need to talk about peace

I grew up in the Mennonite Church. I heard peace taught as a kid, but just thought that was one of those Mennonite things. I went into the Marine Corps at age 21, mostly because I was looking for adventure and something meaningful to do. I knew the church wouldn't like it. They put me on the inactive members list. I don't know if it was because I went into the military or because I wasn't there anymore, but I understood.

After I got out of the Marines, I came straight back to Virginia. After some time, I became more active in the church again. I read the *Confession of Faith* and the referenced Bible verses. At the same time, I was observing what was going on around me—the fervor for war. I saw it on TV, and I saw it among everyday people I met. And I reflected on what I had experienced in the Marine Corps. I talked with my grandmother and others. I came to finally realize that this belief is not just a Mennonite idea. The more I read, the more I became convicted.

I am now fully convinced that a Christian cannot go to war. Peace is a theme all through the Bible. We are called to be Christ-like, and to follow Christ's teachings. But we avoid talking about it and agree to disagree. We need to discuss it very openly, and do it peacefully. Our beliefs can't be determined by personalities like Rush Limbaugh, or politicians. Some Christians think I'm crazy. I've actually found that veterans who are Christian are usually easier to talk to, because they have seen what war is like.

I'm proud that our country has been gracious enough in providing the opportunity for conscientious objection in recent times. I'd like to talk to anyone who is now considering going into the military, whether or not they are a Christian. If they are a Christian, we can study the biblical teachings. I encourage them to not sign up until they have had time to give it some thought and prayer. Even if someone is not Christian, I'd like to talk to them before they go. Even if I don't talk them out of it, I can at least give them some warning about what it is really like.

I think that our Mennonite churches need to stop being so quiet about peace. If we all are God's children, then we need to stop following what politics and TV tell us. We need to concentrate within our congregations and communities to be a witness like Jesus Christ asks us to be.

• Scott Via
Lyndside Mennonite Church, Lyndhurst, Va.

An everlasting thirst for God



I once heard a pastor speaking to a young man during a church service while holding up a can of Sprite. "Obey your thirst," he said to the young man.

The pastor was referring to the thirst that God puts in us for Him. He explained that we can get

into a lot of trouble if we try to quench that thirst with things that aren't helpful and don't satisfy. The admonition I heard that day has come back to me a number of times over the years. As I look back, my life has largely been guided by efforts to quench my thirst for God.

Although I was raised in the church, it wasn't until I was a young teen that I truly found God for myself while at a Christian camp. Though I decided to make Christ the center of my life after that time, I found myself always searching for more.

Someone looking at my life might think I have a spiritual version of attention deficit disorder. I was born into a liberal Protestant family, later identified with evangelical Christianity and have been a committed social activist as well as a contemplative charismatic. Some of the most profound influences in my faith came from 12 years I spent in a predominantly African-American congregation [Christian Conquest Fellowship, a VMC congregation, which meets in SE Washington, D.C.]

The common thread in these experiences has been my thirst for God and for worshiping and serving with others who love Him. From the liberal Protestants, I learned the importance of relating my faith to social issues; from the evangelicals, I learned about surrendering myself to Christ; from the contemplative Christians, I grew in appreciating the simple presence of God in silence; and from the charismatics the power of worship and life in the Spirit. I have had an incredibly rich life, having been exposed to the various revelations of Christ that I've experienced in each of these faith traditions, and each is a part of who I have become.

I hope I will never be completely successful in quenching my thirst for God. It keeps me open to His presence in unexpected ways and continually reaching for more of Him.

• Sue Eby
Reprinted from *The Washington Post*, December 3, 2006



Montenegro— through the eyes of a missionary

(At left) The Montenegro Lines ferry approaches the port of Bar, Montenegro. (Above) A view of Lake Plav and the city in the Gusinje region of Montenegro.



Jovica Backvanski, a Serbian citizen and pastor in Montenegro.

Montenegro became an independent country in June, 2006. This means that my family and I are now foreigners here because we are Serbian citizens.

Montenegro is still the least evangelized country in

Europe, with only three evangelical churches and less than 100 believers in this entire country of 650,000. In the capital city of Podgorica where we live, there are two churches—a Pentecostal and a Brethren church. In Niksic, the second largest town in Montenegro, there is a Baptist church.

Everything we begin here is completely new and has never happened before. So we are doing pioneer work in the 21st century. While other countries have already made their own church history, we are doing it now. But I strongly believe the situation will change in the near future.

Recently a lady troubled by demons came to our church and was completely freed after we ministered to her. The church was very excited. Since then our church is full of new persons. After that event a new family came with a 5-year-old boy who was born with a cancer in his mouth. We prayed for him and I believe the Lord will heal him. Yesterday I awakened with a strong impression from the Lord that our church should fast, pray, and do spiritual battle for this child because the Lord wants to glorify His name.

Montenegrans are very proud and religious, but when they see a real miracle it helps them believe.

Montenegro is like a crossroad to other countries—Kosovo, Albania, Croatia, Macedonia—where a lot of Christian organizations and missions

are working. But unfortunately it seems that nobody wants to come here. We are in great need of workers in order to accomplish more quickly and effectively the things the Lord leads us to do.

Presently our church is distributing food to the hungry of our town. [There's a high rate of unemployment.] Our vision is to provide food for 50 families regularly. Euroevangelism, an English charitable organization, is helping us. This ministry has completely changed the image of our church. The people in our area no longer call us a sect, but “the church that helps.”

A conference for the whole Body of Christ in Montenegro was held on December 9 in Niksic. Many believers came to worship together with the theme, “Unity in the Body of Christ.” I also want to organize the “Evangelical Alliance” in Montenegro.

Our church is making plans to begin weekly evangelistic activities in Niksic. Eventually someone will move there from Podgorica to work seriously at establishing a church. We also have the opportunity to visit a home for the elderly each week near Podgorica.

An important event for Montenegro is the coming of the ship Logos II for three weeks during Spring 2007. The 200 missionaries on board will be sent out in teams to work alongside our churches to share the Gospel.

Another vision our church has, is to build a missionary training center to prepare people for the task of reaching Montenegro for Christ through evangelism and church planting.

• by Jovica Backvanski
compiled by Willard and Eva Eberly
Mediterranean Regional Directors, VMBM

Overflow crowd for Christmas program



The Christmas program at Carlsen Field on December 16, which drew a remarkable crowd, including 35-40 children. Margaret Keeler told a children's story and the youth from Charlieville Mennonite Church re-enacted the Christmas drama.

On Sunday, December 16, Charlieville Mennonite Church, Diego Martin Mennonite Church and Gospel Lighthouse Mennonite Church jointly provided a Christmas program and treats for the community of Carlsen Field, a predominately Hindu village south of Chaguanas, Trinidad. On the Sunday prior to the Christmas program, it was announced that a children's Bible would be given to any child who came for the program.

We were overwhelmed by the attendance—44 children and about a dozen others from Carlsen Field and a total of 80 with all the church representatives. All the chairs were taken, two benches were filled, and people were standing inside and outside, looking in the windows. Each of the three congregations had some part in the hour-long program.

Brother Rampersad, who built the extension onto his house for the place of worship, gave his testimony, for the first time publicly. About 20 years ago, his wife told him soon after she became a Christian that she now had a friend at church. He thought she meant a boyfriend. He was surprised and sad that he would lose his wife to another man. One day he decided to go to church to find out who this man was. He was pleasantly surprised to find that everyone at the church seemed friendly to both him and his wife, but saw no evidence of any man giving her special attention. So after they got home he outright asked her who her new friend was. She replied, "Jesus." That both shocked and relieved him. It still took two decades for him to come to faith in Christ.

The glow on Brother Rampersad's face that day as the "church" he envisioned and largely built on his own, expressed his joy for an overflowing

crowd. He found real life in Jesus at 78 (now 80) and not only talked about sharing Jesus in his community, but provided a place where people can meet without the sun beating down on them or rain pouring on their heads. Finally, members of his community are hearing the gospel.

We believe that in 2007 many people will come to faith in Christ, providing the nucleus for a congregation.

• Richard Keeler

VMBM worker in Trinidad, as told to Gloria Lehman

Hope in spite of diminishing Christianity

"We don't transform ourselves, but when we finally hear, the Spirit has access to our hearts, and that is what changes us." -Anne Lamott

Christendom is a falling empire in the United Kingdom. Once a flourishing essential nutrient of English life, now old church buildings are turned into pubs, money is maintained through tourism and not collection by members, and many churches have closed due to low attendance. Some of the culture remains as evidenced at Christmas time in nativity plays presented in public schools and Christmas carols sung by secular choirs. The culture remains, but the joy and vibrancy of faith have unfortunately dwindled.

Faced with growing capitalism and individualism sucking the nourishment of community from church life, God is still at work in the driest environments, where only a few people return love to the One who first loved. Even in an environment where it appears Christianity is diminishing, the Holy Spirit is still moving and is moving in fantastic and exciting new ways. Small groups of individuals and churches are growing in England—seeking a Christianity without the cathedrals, without the hierarchy, without the state's influence, and with authenticity to witness in the world surrounding them.

I spend most of my time with church leaders who still practice a vibrant faith and have regular worshippers in their churches. With these leaders, who come to Bridge Builders for training and guidance, I find a different kind of hope. A hope that is birthed from a rediscovery of the reconciling power of Christ that transforms what could be destructive conflict into conflict that acts as a catalyst for better living with each other in community. I continue to have my doubts if this Hope will triumph in the near future, but I consciously make myself aware of its presence and its potential power.

• Sharon Kniss

transSend participant in England



Sharon Kniss

Being assertive

I teach a six-week course in assertiveness training and have found the reactions to this word to be numerous and often negative: “getting your own way,” “being aggressive,” “confronting,” “conflict.” However, assertiveness and aggressiveness are not the same thing. The truth is that many times the word assertive is used but the behavior is aggressive. People often have difficulty with distinguishing between non-assertive, assertive, aggressive, manipulative, and passive-aggressive behaviors. When non-assertive people try to have a voice, they feel aggressive. Often aggressive people don't believe they need more “assertion” when in fact being assertive means managing their aggression.

Assertiveness for me is being able to make responsible choices and manage my behavior responsibly. Assertiveness in one setting may mean choosing not to speak, (i.e. Christ before Pilate) or choosing to confront (i.e. Christ with the money changers.) Many times our responses to others are more reactions than chosen behaviors. With reactions, fear is more in control than we are. Assertiveness is defined in the class as respecting the other person as well as myself, focusing on solving problems, learning how to understand boundaries in relationships and incorporating my faith beliefs to consciously choose how I respond. Assertiveness involves relationship enhancement skills such as giving and receiving love and showing appreciation. It also involves being able to say no without feeling guilty.

For more information about assertiveness training, please call Family Life Resource Center at (540) 434-8450.

• Jim Glanzer, LPC
counselor with Family Life Resource Center
Harrisonburg, Va.

FLRC author to release book in spring



Lasting Marriage: The Owners' Manual, by FLRC counselor Harvey Yoder, is to be available from Herald Press May 2007, just in time for Family Month reading and as

a gift for June weddings. Conveniently, the release date also coincides with the celebration of the Resource Center's 20th anniversary.

Yoder's new book builds on over forty years of pastoral and counseling experience in helping couples prepare for marriage and to repair stressed relationships, and is designed to be a kind of maintenance manual for couples. It is made up of three sections, “Marriage Preparation,” “Basic Marriage Maintenance,” and “Maintenance Through the Minivan Years,” each containing six chapters. The book's appendix, called “Spare Parts,” contains inventories and other useful information on a variety of marital topics. These can be downloaded and printed off from the Center's website at www.flrc.org/lastingmarriage.htm, and will remain available for individual or pastoral use without requiring special permission.

Lee Eshleman has done a series of cartoon-style illustrations for the book, taking Yoder's ideas and developing them in his own unique and humorous way. The foreword is written by author John Drescher, once a member (and later a pastor) of the Zion Mennonite Church, where Harvey served as pastor for twenty years.

Congregational Resource Center

Think “Congregational Resource Center” for Lenten/Easter materials! The CRC not only has excellent worship and sermon resources, but many children's books and activities, dramas, and Sunday School study materials for Lent. One new book on order is a study for women entitled *Preparing my Heart for Easter*.

Coming in soon will be several new Summer VBS sets, including: “Be Bold! God is with you!” by Faith & Life Resources
“Avalanche Ranch” and “Galilee by the Sea” by Group Publishing.

In addition, we have twenty previous Bible school sets worth browsing.

Come in and visit the Congregational Resource Office at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg.

Hours M-F 7:30-5:00 and by arrangement evenings and weekends. Linda Alley, Director 540.432.4698.

You may browse the online catalog at www.emu.edu/seminary/slt/ and then “Search Catalog.”



Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>4 Bishop Leslie Francisco III, Hampton, and Mauricio Chenlo, Raleigh, both work at Urban Ministry Directors. Pray for them as they minister to new church groups, and envision new areas in which churches can be started.</p> | <p>5 Pray for Conference Minister Owen Burkholder as he gives time and attention to helping several regions find spiritual overseers/bishops including: Central, Potomac, Southern and Tenn./Carolina/Ky. districts.</p> | <p>6 This evening a VMBM Celebration of Missions event is being held at Williamsburg Mennonite Church. Hearing how God has worked both locally and globally gives us reason to thank God.</p> | <p>7 Thank God for Jerry Sebastian's commissioning last month, as co-pastor of Riverside Mennonite Church, Harmon, W.Va. Pray for him as he assumes pastoral responsibilities in the leadership of the congregation.</p> | <p>1 Thank God for Riverside MC co-pastor Joe Minger, who has exemplified a Christ-like spirit in his service to the Riverside congregation in whatever capacity he has been asked to fill. Pray for his physical health.</p> | <p>2 Tomorrow VMC delegates from six states and DC will gather at First Mennonite Church in Richmond for a semi-annual meeting. One area of discussion will be reshaping youth ministry in VMC. Pray for discernment.</p> | <p>3 Pray for an end to the horrific violence in Sudan's Darfur region. During the past three years over 200,000 Darfurians have been killed, and over 2 million displaced. Ask the Lord to reach down and heal this land.</p> |
| <p>11 Thank God for Nancy Marshall's ministry in Belize. She recently led the deaf church members in a footwashing service. This act of love for each other helped them learn more about following Jesus, not just "doing" church.</p> | <p>12 Praise God for our pastors in Virginia Mennonite Conference who work hard to lead their congregations in discipleship and mission as they preach, counsel, teach, and walk with their people.</p> | <p>13 Hold VMC Staff Assistant Sherah-Leigh Gerber up in prayer as she assumes additional responsibilities. In addition to her VMC work and seminary studies, she is the interim Youth Pastor at H'burg Mennonite Church.</p> | <p>14 A "kitz blitz" is underway on the EMU campus where Mennonite mission representatives are conversing with students and others about service opportunities. Pray for the success of this project, and bring a kit to add to the goal of 1000 kits.</p> | <p>15 Remember the Chris Riddle family in your prayers. They recently arrived in Italy and are now getting settled in Lecce where they will concentrate on studying the Italian language.</p> | <p>9 Pray for the Central District Overseer Search Committee in its effort to find an overseer to replace Paul Kratz, who is stepping down March 31, in response to a call to serve with the Mennonite Church of Trinidad & Tobago.</p> | <p>10 Beginning tomorrow, and continuing for five consecutive Sunday nights, many will gather in Eastern Mennonite School's auditorium to hear Myron Augsburg's Biblical teaching from Romans. Pray for a good time of learning for all.</p> |
| <p>18 Pray for a young man, Francesco, a new believer in Bari, Italy who needs a job. The store closed where he had worked. Good employment is difficult to find.</p> | <p>19 Pray for Ron and Blanche Nyce who encourage economic development in Montenegro through business efforts. They especially desire to demonstrate God's love and truth in all they do.</p> | <p>20 Tomorrow the Jamaica Mennonite Church is holding a National Prayer and Fasting Day, praying mightily for healing of the nation and churches. Violence is rampant in some areas. Join in prayer for Jamaica.</p> | <p>21 Harrisonburg area youthworkers meet monthly with Conference Youth Minister Sarah Bixler to share ideas and reflect on their youth ministry experiences over lunch. Ask God to inspire and affirm their efforts.</p> | <p>22 Pray for insight as business leaders from Franconia, Atlantic Coast and other Conferences gather in New Holland, Pa., this weekend to consider "Faith, Values and Leadership from an Anabaptist Perspective" with J. Nelson Kraybill.</p> | <p>23 Pray for Maurice Graham, the resource person for the Minister's Retreat in Williamsburg, Va., this weekend. His topic is "Spiritually and Emotionally Healthy Ministry." Pray that our pastors will be refreshed and renewed.</p> | <p>17 Intercede today for the three small believers' churches in Montenegro that their vision to reach their new nation for Christ would remain strong in the face of many obstacles.</p> |
| <p>25 Today is Missions Sunday at Lindale Menn. Church, engaging all ages in learning about the ways that others around the world are learning to know and love Jesus. Pray that this congregation will be missionally empowered.</p> | <p>26 The Jamaica Menn. Church is preparing for the annual conference held in Kingston March 2-4. Members from the 12 congregations will focus on the theme "So build we, for the people have a mind to work." (Neh. 4:6)</p> | <p>27 Several churches in VMC are involved in pastoral searches. Pray for the search committees in each church as they seek the right person to give leadership to their congregation.</p> | <p>28 Pray that the leaders and pastors of the Mennonite churches in Sicily will be empowered to effectively lead their churches while also working "secular" jobs.</p> | <p>24 The Italian version of "Good Sense Budgeting Course" is now at the publishers. Pray it will be an effective tool for teaching stewardship principles among Italian believers.</p> | <p>24 The Italian version of "Good Sense Budgeting Course" is now at the publishers. Pray it will be an effective tool for teaching stewardship principles among Italian believers.</p> | |

If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, contact Gloria Lehman gloria.lehman@vmbm.org or (800) 707-5535.

Announcements

Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center's Pedal the Peninsula fundraiser will be held May 12. Cyclists can enjoy a morning of biking followed by a picnic lunch. Routes range from 10 to 65 miles. Registration is \$35/person with a family cap of \$70. For more information call toll free: 866-566-9272.

Help EMU students and staff reach the goal of filling **1,000 health kits** during Mission and Service Days on the EMU campus, February 14 & 15. Bring cloth bags, health care items (see www.mcc.org for a list) or cash donations. MCC will distribute kits to disaster sites, refugee camps and war zones. This is a good opportunity for family, small groups or Sunday school classes to reach out to those in need. For more information, contact Helen Nafziger at 540-432-4131.



Virginia residents: order the new "Peace Plate." The cost of the plate will be \$25 in addition to normal registration fees and \$15 of those dollars will go to the Virginia Association for Community Conflict Resolution (VACCR) to benefit community peacebuilding efforts across Virginia. Each year that you renew this plate, \$15 of your \$25 fee will go to help support community peacebuilding efforts in Virginia through VACCR. For more information, www.vaccr.org/peaceplate.htm



Rehearsals for the **Shenandoah Valley Men's Chorus** are taking place each Sunday from 3-4:30 p.m. in the Eastern Mennonite School now until March 18. The fourth annual concerts will be March 31, at 7 p.m., and April 1, at 2 p.m. Jay Hartzler is the director. Contact Jacob Heatwole with any questions at (540) 421-7780.



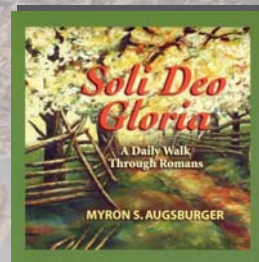
At the 25th anniversary celebration of the **Waynesboro Mennonite Church**, a chorus sang praises as part of the worship service. Glendon Blosser, a peer of founding pastor, Roy Kiser, preached during the service. A history in pictures showed participants the growth of this energetic congregation. They are looking forward to the future with vigor!

A Walk Through Romans

with Myron S. Augsburger, based on his book:
Soli Deo Gloria: A Daily Walk Through Romans

Adult Winter Bible School

Eastern Mennonite School Auditorium, 6:30 p.m. Sundays
February 11 - March 11, 2007 • Jay Hartzler will lead music



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