

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

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Vol. 17, No. 3

Greenmonte ministers to young adults with LaFa



high school grads, college students, post-grads, professionals and everyone in between.

In addition to corporate gatherings and small group Bible study, the LaFa family participates in local work projects, holds 24-hour community prayer gatherings, encourages local church participation, and has sent out more than 10 people on short- and long-term mission trips. Other activities include ultimate Frisbee, Contra dancing, hiking, camping, movies and eating together.

Ultimately, LaFa is about living life together; it's about growing in relationship with God and with each other.

If there's coffee, they will come. Or at least so it seems. On any given Tuesday evening you'll find a gathering of post-high school and 20 something singles hanging out, sipping coffee, worshipping, praying and sharing together. This is LaFa.

This ministry of Greenmonte Mennonite Church began in a basement in the Fall of 2004. LaFa (Spanish for *la familia* or "the family") was birthed out of Greenmonte's desire to care for and minister to young adults. This is a demographic that is often overlooked by the Church, but one that is in the throes of a quarterlife crisis. Many young adults are out on their own for the first time, making major decisions about vocation, education and marriage. In the midst of these transitions arise major questions about God, relationships, purpose and values.

Speaking to these specific needs, LaFa continues to grow and attract a range of young adults from as many as seven local colleges and universities and from more than 14 local churches of various denominations. The diversity extends to

There's nothing flashy about it. Aside from a little coffee and some chips and salsa, it's just people loving people and being part of a family. This is living in "LaFa land."

If you'd like more info about LaFa, please check out our Website at: www.la-fa.com

• Seth Hankee
Greenmonte Mennonite Church



Derived life for a new year

The day was difficult for Jesus and full of wonder for the disciples. Matthew 14 describes the arrest and death of John the Baptist. “Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself.” (14:13)

Solitude was not yet to be—the crowd followed and needed to be fed. Some 5000+ meals later, Jesus sent the disciples away in the boat and dismissed the crowd. “He went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone...” (14:23)

Meanwhile, the disciples were having a challenging time, “for the wind was against them.” (14:24) So, Jesus goes walking on the water toward them and they think he’s a ghost. When that fear is dispelled, Peter is ready to test Jesus and tries his feet on the water. It works for a bit until Peter is overwhelmed by the surroundings and needs the hand of Jesus to restore him.

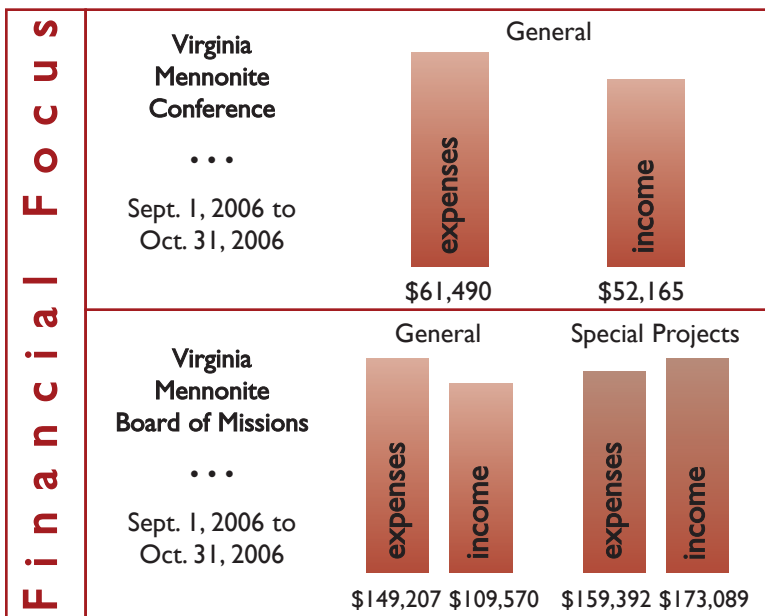
What a day! Jesus felt the need for some time alone in prayer. His power was derived from the One who sent him. The disciples were challenged at the core of their beings—their wisdom and their faith were shown to be inadequate. For a few moments, Peter had it right: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” (14:28) He somehow knew that his own power was derived from Jesus.



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

And so it is, ever and always. For reasons that God alone knows, I have been thrust into life and ministry situations that have been persistently beyond my dreams and, it appears sometimes to me, beyond my capabilities. To change the image, I have felt like the challenges of life have had me in water up to my chin with my feet barely touching bottom. On some occasions, I’ve felt submerged completely. I wonder now, if the times that have felt overwhelming have been times when I have not worked out of derived power—when I’ve lost sight of the intention and love of Jesus.

I invite us to consider the year ahead of us as ‘the year of derived power.’ Let us offer the mysteries of life and death to God. Let us draw the strength to face our callings, the thanksgiving for our joys, indeed, our very breath, from Jesus who joins us in the journey.



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Recruited by the Prince of Peace

When I was in college, I was concerned about the loans I was taking out and grew fearful of how to repay them. My aunt, a high-ranking officer in the US Army, recommended I go to the local military recruitment office and ask for their best offer since she was confident I would be much sought after as a college-educated, capable person.

I went to the recruiting office on Broad Street in Philadelphia. I told the officer I was considering enlisting. He seemed very cool towards me; he showed me what tests I needed to take and what occupations might be available. He told me about basic training. His demeanor surprised me. After talking with my aunt, I expected him to be excited about me, but the sense I got was that I was wasting his time. I felt like I was keeping him from more important matters and he couldn't wait for me to go. So I did.

When I told my aunt about my experience, she responded with shock and disbelief. "Go back there and talk to someone else! He must be an incompetent!"

As time went on, I thought about my feelings at the office, and about basic training. I grew more and more uncomfortable. I thought about being required to pledge my allegiance to the American government, even above and beyond my allegiance to God; I could not stomach it. Why push my body and emotions to their limit for anyone besides God? I knew I could never kill anyone. How could I promise the military to follow their commands knowing I first must follow God's commands—especially "you shall not kill"?

I never went back. Knowing what I know today about military recruiting, I believe God intervened that day. Recruiting officers work terribly hard to get recruits, and for me to walk in was a rare opportunity for the military. Had the officer showed interest in me and made the promises normally made, I may not have thought through my decision thoroughly.

This experience confirmed for me that I am a pacifist, and I believe God calls us to live in peace. Not long after this, I felt called to theological study and needed to select a seminary. Eastern Mennonite Seminary teaches peace, and that ended up being the only seminary I applied to. That was where I belonged. For me, the peace issue is not a side issue of spirituality; it is central to being a follower of Christ.

• Kimberlee Greenawalt
Lindale Mennonite Church

Extreme Makeover renovates church



On November 30, Raleigh Mennonite Church attendees shocked their co-workers by cheering when they checked their morning e-mail. The news had come! ABC's television show Extreme Home Makeover would build RMC's neighbors Linda and William Riggins a brand new home. Since Linda's office at Building Together Ministries is in the same building as our church, the church would be remodeled too!

For a week we spent our days-off at the build site, grabbing hard hats, paint brushes and our cameras as well. Hundreds of volunteers worked on the Riggins' home and the church building, while thousands of on-lookers watched. RMC members praised God with the Riggins' for the gift of this "Extreme Blessover." As the new house went up, the building that houses RMC, Building Together Ministries and Hope



Elementary School received new indoor and outdoor paint, a new roof, remodeled kitchen, basketball court and more. We were excited about the new buildings, but more-so about the community and life make-overs that brought ABC to the Riggins Family in the first place.

Building Together Ministries, started by RMC members Helen and Freddy Johnson, began work in this neighborhood in 1989. RMC members were some of the first volunteers, and the church services soon moved here as well. We hoped to positively impact our neighbors in Halifax Court, one of the city's most dangerous low-income areas. Linda Riggins was already here, working in a daycare at Halifax court. She started volunteering at Building Together. Later Linda followed God's leading into college, earning a degree in social work. She chose to keep working in the Halifax community, lifting others up in Jesus' name. Though Halifax Court was recently torn down, Linda and Building Together, supported by RMC and other churches, continue to provide programs that help Raleigh's low-income citizens: an after school program, racial reconciliation groups; services for senior citizens and kids.

Raleigh Mennonites are thrilled with our ABC-renovated building, and even more thankful for the opportunity to be part of God's work creating "Extreme Life Makeovers" in this neighborhood!

Extreme Makeover volunteers paint the outside of the Raleigh Mennonite Church building, where Linda Riggins has her office at Building Together Ministries.
Photo: Janelle Bitikofer

The show featuring the Riggins' house and the Raleigh Mennonite Church makeover will air on January 21, 2007 at 8 p.m. on ABC.

• Janelle Bitikofer
Raleigh Mennonite Church

Festival highlights success of micro-credit project

Although known as the “bread basket” of Albania, a spirit of hopelessness hovered over the farming villages near Lushnje, Albania, when missionaries Glen and Martha Zimmerly arrived in 1995. Following the fall of communism, the government divided out the land that had previously been confiscated and exclusively controlled by the state. Without resources or initiative to develop those small plots of land, many farmers were forced to seek employment outside of Albania in order to support their families.

Glen’s expertise as a farmer, agriculture teacher and MCC development worker immediately set into action. He visualized a viable program to utilize the plots of potentially productive land for greenhouses and established a micro-credit loan program to finance them. An impressive flow of lovely tomatoes and cucumbers began feeding into developing markets throughout Albania. Approximately 60 families benefited from this program, 45 of which repaid their loans into a revolving fund.

A festival to celebrate the success of this program and to publicly honor those 45 families was held on September 30, 2006, in the village of Kemishtaj. This special occasion planned by Albanian believers and EMM/VMBM personnel who served on the “Albanian Mennonite Mission Foundation,” brought together former missionaries and more than 100 people from surrounding farming communities, plus a village government official. Andon Rrapokushi, who along

with missionaries had faithfully administered the loan program, presided over the meeting with wonderful style, expressing gratitude to the mission agencies, personnel and local officials.

Special recognition was given to Glen Zimmerly’s role and his recent passing. Each farmer who had paid off his loan received a financial award. Balloons, clowns, and face painting entertained the children. Snacks and drinks were enjoyed by everyone. Local TV reporters were present to interview and film the event and gave

an excellent, accurate report on the evening news.

With the closure of the micro-credit loan program, the funds will now become available to the Farmers Federation (composed of village associations) for agricultural develop-

ment in the region. The federation is helping create a spirit of cooperation and hope in the farming communities.

• Willard and Eva Eberly
Mediterranean Regional Directors, VMBM



Andon Rrapokushi (left), with his colleagues at the Agricultural Fair in Albania.



Andon Rrapokushi (left), leads the festival. Mennonite missionaries Dan Hess, Willie Keener, and Sonya Harnish took part in the festival.

Italians serve on team in Albanian camp



Ivana DiGirolamo (left), Mara Giuliani (right) with Albanian staff at the camp in Albania. The team was made up of people from four nations: Albania, Brazil, Italy, and the US.

Two young adults from the Italian Mennonite Church, Mara Giuliani and Ivana DiGirolamo, got a taste of short-term missions this past summer. At the invitation of Norma Teles, they accepted the challenge of serving in her week-long camp for Albanian adolescents. The camp staff worked together amazingly well considering that they represented four different languages and nationalities: Italy, Brazil, USA, and Albania. They report that although they didn't have one language in common, they were able to communicate without difficulty!

Mara says, "What touched me the most about this experience was observing how Norma lovingly related to the kids like a mother. They love and respect her deeply." Norma speaks with great appreciation and affirmation regarding Ivana and Mara's service. "They are excellent workers and were loved by the kids and youth. They were willing to do everything. Wherever there was need, they were there helping—Mara with the arts and Ivana with lots of love." Norma feels that the "Italian connection" is very important for the church in Albania.

Mara and Ivana were sent and supported financially by their respective congregations: Centro Koinonia (Bari) and Centro Agape (Palermo), facilitated by VMBM-Europe.

• Eva Eberly
Mediterranean Regional Assistant

Chris and Melody Riddle family to serve in Italy



On November 19, Chris and Melody Riddle were commissioned for service in Bari, Italy, during a worship service in Praise Fellowship at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Here, Ken Horst affirms the Riddles' call to serve, and leads a commissioning prayer with Luke Weaver and Myron Augsburg. Myron asked Chris and Melody the commissioning questions. Chris, Melody, Micah, Adam and Isaiah are scheduled to leave for this missionary assignment in January.



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Gain a clearer picture of your place in God's plan...take the course "Perspectives on the World Christian Movement"

Perspectives is a radical 16-week discipleship course taught by ministry experts, which has challenged more than 50,000 Christians. (details at www.perspectives.org)

Perspectives is offered at the New Life Christian Church, Chantilly, VA on Tuesday evenings, January 9 - May 8, 2007. From VMBM offices, carpooling (without charge) will be available, leaving at 4:45 p.m. and returning at midnight each day of class.

Costs: \$250 for "enrichment," not for credit. This course is recommended for everyone, and especially for those who are hearing God's call to witness to others, whether in the US or in other countries.

Contact Gloria Lehman:
gloria.lehman@vmbm.org
(540) 434-9727
(800) 707-5535 (toll-free)

Man of many lives finds inner peace



Jean Ndayizigiye

Photo courtesy of Jim Bishop

While at work on the Eastern Mennonite University campus, he might be pushing a broom or emptying a trash can, yet he will be wearing pressed office-style clothes and polished shoes. And his erect bearing exudes dignity.

Jean Ndayizigiye's path to EMU is an unusual one—from high government official in his native country of Burundi and monthly commentator for a Voice of America broadcast to student-in-exile at the Conflict Transformation Program.

Ndayizigiye has lived many lives: A teenage boy nearly beaten to death by Tutsis classmates for being Hutu. A fugitive in hiding for three months by the grace of a Muslim woman. A prisoner starving in a filthy dark cell for six months. One year as a farm peasant. A resurrected student in a Jesuit school. One of 10 in Belgium on college scholarship. A returnee to Burundi as a civil engineer, a senior official—director of Public Works, adjudicator in the Ministry of Finance—excelling at nation building.

New military rulers. Hunted again. A refugee, this time seeking and receiving political asylum in the United States. A man without hope of returning to his home or using his talents, skills, experience. Yet out of this last role, he finds victory. Coming face-to-face with himself, his religion, his present and maybe-not-so-temporary “social situation,” he found inner peace.

It wasn't easy: Four young daughters and a wife, but no jobs befitting his master's degree in conflict transformation completed at EMU in 2000. “I struggled to be at peace, to survive the frustration of not getting a nice job, of having a big family here,” he said. “To deal with the guilt of being alive while others' relatives, friends and innocent people are being killed in my home country.

“Some friends advised me to move to a big city where there might job opportunities,” Ndayizigiye added. “But that would mean uprooting my family from a place where they are content and safe. I decided to start where I am, with what I have, and make the most of it.”

He took a job that would enable his family to have health insurance and his wife to attend college at a discount: a custodian in EMU's Campus Center. “I became convinced that I would never be able to make peace for other people if I cannot make it for myself. . . I could not give out what I don't have inside. I decided to transform my own internal conflicts, to accept myself as I am,” he said.

“I have stopped blaming and judging circumstances and people including myself. I have discovered that I am not my achievements, my diploma or certificates. I am not what others think I am. I am simply serving God whatever I do.” So, he provides service as an EMU custodian and driver. He's a volunteer tutor of French, works at the local Gift and Thrift shop and raises funds for an orphanage in Burundi.

Not only that, but Ndayizigiye tithes a portion of his monthly salary to CJP to aid students coming behind him. It's not a big sum—40 cents a day—but over time it will provide a chunk of tuition for somebody else, for another seeker and builder of peace.

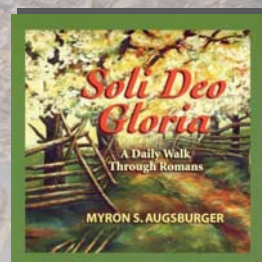
• Sue Gier,
friend of the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding program
Eastern Mennonite University

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*





Connections Prayer Calendar January 2007

Sunday

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

7 Pray for the pastoral search committee at Northern Virginia Mennonite Church as they seek the right person to give leadership to the congregation.

14 Eastern Mennonite Seminary hosts its annual School for Leadership Training this week. Pray for keynote speaker Dorothy Bass as she addresses “Practicing Abundant Life in the Congregation and in Daily Life.”

21 A PIM team from Ridgeway Mennonite Church arrived in Trinidad to work on the building of Hope Mennonite Church in Esperanza. Pray for safety and good camaraderie for the group and for the work they do.

28 Thank God for the group meeting at Carlsen Field, Trinidad, whose increased numbers of interested people in this small community have led to a good problem...additional chairs needing to be purchased.

Monday

1 All of the Mennonite congregations in Trinidad had an Old Year’s Night service last night, praying and singing to welcome the New Year. Ask God to bless these congregations in 2007.

8 Praise God for providing an Albanian to assist Norma Teles. Pray that Elda will be empowered with compassion for this new role among the Gypsy children.

15 Pray that the religious veil that darkens the heart of many of Willard and Eva Eberly’s Italian friends will be removed and that a revelation of Jesus will illuminate their lives.

22 Aaron and Laura Kauffman, La Mesa, Colombia, are adjusting to several personnel changes in the school and church communities to which they relate. Ask God to give them the grace and wisdom in this time of transitions.

29 Skip & Carol Tobin ask us to pray for J & L who are the only Western Christian workers in their small city and are very stretched by new challenges. Pray for them to have physical and emotional stamina for all God wants to do there.

Tuesday

2 This month the ship Logos II will visit Montenegro for 3 weeks. Pray for effective ministry of the teams that will go out to work alongside the three local churches.

9 Pray for several believers at Centro Koinonia (Italy) who are struggling about publicly declaring their faith through adult baptism.

16 Pray that God will give clear insight to the annual Council of International Ministries that meets this week near Pittsburgh, Pa., for discussion of missions from an Anabaptist perspective.

23 Pray for Ken Weaver as he chairs VMC’s gifts discernment committee. They are responsible for finding the persons God is raising up among us for leadership in Virginia Mennonite Conference.

30 This evening a VMBM Celebration of Missions event is being held at Waynesboro Mennonite Church. Sharing what God has done in the past year and sketching a future vision makes us thankful to be part of God’s work in the world.

Wednesday

3 Tim and Tama Shoemaker, *ἡραῖος* participants, have moved to Belfast, Ireland, to serve in ministry there for two months. Pray that God will open doors for them as they share Good News with people they meet.

10 Remember Paul and June Kropf, Albanian missionaries on home assignment, as they visit churches and seek medical care for Paul’s persistent back pain.

17 Pray for Allen Umble, serving in Albania for 3 months while Paul and June Kropf are on home leave; he asks us to pray for the young men who experience ups and downs in their spiritual lives.

24 Sharon Kniss, *ἡραῖος* participant, welcomes your prayers for her daily activities, relationships, and spiritual vibrancy at London Mennonite Centre in England.

31 Nancy Marshall, in Orange Walk Town, Belize, has a vision to make improvements on the small building next to her house, and to use it as a meeting place for the Jesus’ Deaf Church. Pray that this goal may be realized soon.

Thursday

4 Pray for Treasurer Jeff Souder and the VMC Finance Committee as they meet tomorrow morning to set policy and look at income and expense figures from the first four months of their fiscal year.

11 Margaret Keeler’s ministry of counseling women is effective and changes lives in Trinidad. Pray for her continued strength and insight.

18 Many youth pastors and sponsors gather this weekend in Williamsburg, Va., for an annual retreat. Pray for Conference Youth Minister Sarah Bixler as she gives leadership to the weekend.

25 Tomorrow a dinner and program will be held at Park View Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, which will inform people about the programs and vision of Nazareth Village. Shirley Roth’s ministry will be highlighted.

“A voice of one calling in the desert, Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”

Matthew 3:2-3

Friday

5 Pray for Carol Tobin, EMM and VMBM worker in Thailand. She builds relationships in Buntarik as she teaches English to hospital staff twice a week.

12 The VMC Conference Council meets tonight and tomorrow at Eastern Mennonite School. Pray that they may sense God’s presence in their deliberations as they direct Conference affairs.

19 Luke Hartman will actively engage all youth at the annual Youthworkers Retreat in Williamsburg. Invite God’s presence with the youthworkers through rest, renewal and relationships.

26 Pastor Rawl and Linda Gunpath, Trinidad, welcomed Sydni Emma into their home in November. Thank God for the safe arrival of this precious daughter, and ask God to bless this family.

This month’s prayer calendar is sponsored by Bettie Wilson in loving memory of her husband, Hal, whose birthday was January 17.

If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, please contact Gloria Lehman at (540) 434-9727 • Toll free (800) 505-7735 • gloria.lehman@vmbm.org

Saturday

6 Pray that God will touch people’s lives through the Service Adventure participants in Raleigh, N.C. – Emily Mishler, Elizabeth Nussbaum and Caitlin Yoder. They work at Ten Thousand Villages and in other ministry settings.

13 Pray for the church in the agricultural villages near Lushnjë, Albania. A council of Albanian believers lead them since the missionaries returned to the US.

20 At Centro Koinonia (Italy) a newly appointed church council serves with the missionaries in giving direction to this emerging congregation. Pray this will be valuable leadership training for them.

27 This weekend a Missions Festival is being held at Mt. Pleasant in Chesapeake, Va. Activities for all ages, an inspiring program and a Celebrations of Missions meal are included. Pray that the call to serve Christ will be heard clearly.

Announcements

Basil Marin, pastor of Immanuel Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., is also serving our Conference and the wider church as an evangelist, renewal, or retreat speaker. Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions is helping to promote his availability and assisting in scheduling such events. Contact Ed Bontrager, USA Ministries Director, at 540-434-9727 or 800-707-5535 for details.



You are invited to the **Nazareth Village Festival**, Jan. 26, at 6 p.m., in the Park View Mennonite Fellowship Hall. Shirley Roth, Executive Director for Nazareth Village, will share on the theme "Nazareth Village: An Oasis of Peace in the Midst of Turmoil" about the current activities there and how you can be involved. Become a partner in this important ministry of sharing the stories of Jesus with people from around the world. The DVD "A Light to All Nations: Jesus of Nazareth" will also be shown.

The **CrossRoads annual dinner meeting** will be held on Friday, February 2, at 6 p.m., at First Church of the Brethren in Harrisonburg. Tickets are \$15, with registration required (540-438-1275). The program will include inspiring music, highlights of 2006, plans for 2007 and an address by Steve Watson, a religion and philosophy professor at Bridgewater College.

Pastoral Transitions

Janet Blosser was ordained as associate pastor of children and families at Weavers Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, on November 19.

Aaron Boggs was installed as a licensed pastor at Crossroads Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va., on September 19.

Rodney LeBron was ordained as pastor at Woodland Mennonite Church, Basye, Va., on November 19.

Correction: Kevin Gasser was *licensed towards ordination* on October 22, at Staunton Mennonite Church, Staunton, Va, not *ordained* as listed in December.

The Hunt Family Fiddlers will perform on Saturday, February 3, at 6 p.m. in the Eastern Mennonite School auditorium, Harrisonburg. Offering will benefit Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions' ministries. **Please note corrected date and time.**

Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center's Pedal the Peninsula fundraiser will be held May 12, 2007. 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.



Order the new Virginia "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. We hope you will encourage others to order the plate and we thank you for being a part of this effort. See www.vaccr.org/peaceplate.htm for more information.



Virginia Mennonite Conference has a new banner, based on the new logo! It will be displayed at Conference Assembly at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, N.C., July 26-28, 2007.

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