

Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church has strategies for growth

Hickory (N.C.) Hmong Mennonite Church (HHMC) opened in September 2004. The celebrative service was the culmination of years of planning by the Hickory and Mt. View Mennonite Churches, VMC, the Tennessee/Carolina/Kentucky District and Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions. Many Hmong people came to Hickory for employment; current manufacturing and trading practices have taken jobs outside the US and the Hmong people are now faced with an uncertain economic climate.

Presently, fourteen families attend the HHMC. Pastor Chaiya has clear strategies for church development:

a) Leading people to Christ. Jesus' commandment in Matthew 28:19-20 says "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." We believe that the Lord sends us to lost souls and brings them to Him. We bring people to Christ through our daily lives. We love and care for the lost souls. We believe that God wants our church to grow.

b) Helping people become more like Christ. At Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church, all new believers must attend a class which helps them live the new life as Christ's followers. This class focuses on teaching them to learn how to pray, how to read the Bible, and how to serve God. In the past, I, as pastor, got so much good feedback from the persons who accomplished this class. As an example, Mr. Kao Lee said, "After I took the new believers' class, I found out that my life is completely changed by the blood of Christ. I promised to the Lord and to myself that I want to follow Him as my Savior, no matter what will happen to me in the future—no turning back."



c) Encouraging and developing leadership. I believe that the church cannot grow if the leader leads the congregation without a clear vision or understanding of church growth. Most importantly, leader growth means church growth. I encourage the leadership team to work together as "God's dream team."

I encourage the strong believers to spread the Good News and bring people to Christ, being good models to new believers. Currently, we are developing cell groups or small Bible study groups by using church members' homes. We invite people in the community to attend the cell group instead of inviting them to the church. It is the first step of making relationships. Then the next step is inviting them to the church.

We also reach out to people for Christ through family connections.



(above) Pastor Chaiya, lay leaders and other men of HHMC form a singing group for special music.

(left) This young mother, Kaonou Chang, was baptized on March 25 along with three other adults at HHMC.

• Chaiya Hadtasunsem

Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church

Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly opens with the World Neighbors Festival featuring dancers and musicians from HHMC. Don't miss this festive event! See back cover for Assembly ad.

The transition of two

Just about everyone in Virginia Mennonite Conference knows Paul and Evelyn Kratz, in one way or another. Most recently their roles have been overseer in



(above) Paul and Evelyn showing the location of the Caribbean Way to Life office in the early 1970s.

(below) Paul and Evelyn at a retirement luncheon on March 29 honoring Evelyn after working 27 years at the Conference Center.



Central District (Paul) and Director of Finance for the Mission Board and Conference (Evelyn). They have been missionaries, pastor, radio speaker, and administrators, to add to the roles already mentioned.

Paul and Evelyn's ministry began even before they were married, going as a dating couple to help out at the new Staunton Mennonite Church. Paul became pastor. Then it was on to Guyana where Paul directed and spoke on the Caribbean Way to Life radio broadcast and they both worked with the Bible correspondence program. They were transferred to Trinidad when visas became difficult and their lives and ministry touched literally thousands. Paul and Evelyn helped begin the first Mennonite congregation in Trinidad, now a growing conference that includes six congregations with several others having roots in the Mennonite witness that began over 35 years ago. They returned to Virginia, continuing to work with the Bible correspondence ministry. Then too it was on to Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church to pastor and into the mission



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

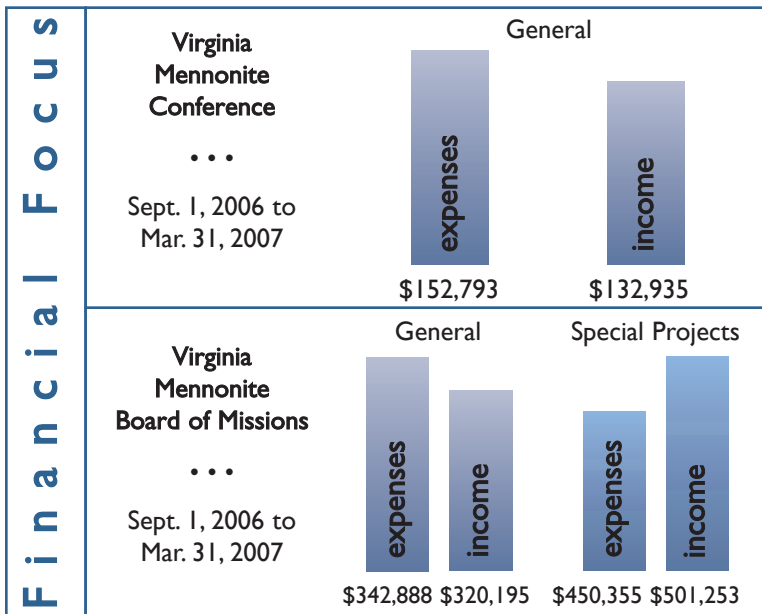
board and conference offices in a variety of roles. Paul would add the role of conference secretary. Both became two of the most respected leaders in Virginia conference, combining the hard work of diligence with years of wisdom.

Now, at "retirement," they have accepted a two-year assignment back to Trinidad, to the churches they helped birth. The transition of these two will bring valuable encouragement and support to the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago as they continue an energetic church planting vision.

We live in a time when few stay with anything very long. First pastorates average two years. People change jobs on average every five. Three years is now considered "long-term" missionary service. At the most, we contribute in some modest way to either planting the seeds or reaping the harvest, rarely both.

Paul and Evelyn return to a land and a church which they helped to seed and will now enjoy witnessing some of the harvest. At the same time they will continue to plant seeds for others to harvest at a later time. Virginia Mennonite churches continue to gather around and celebrate, encourage, and support the ongoing ministry during this transition of two.

Loren Horst



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Editor

Gloria Lehman

Assistant Editor

Jon Trotter

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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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20 years of worship celebrated at Raleigh

What we believe should affect what we do

Some 30 years ago, I began the Ph.D program in nuclear chemistry at Iowa State University, in Ames, Iowa. I joined a Bible study and became good friends with a Mennonite student. I was raised a Catholic and involved with the local Catholic church, but began attending the Ames Mennonite Church. Eventually I was re-baptized and joined the Mennonite Church. I was drawn to the church's teaching and practice of community, simple living, and peacemaking.

Nearing graduation from ISU, I interviewed for a job at the Savannah River Plant near Augusta, Georgia. This site was one of the nation's largest nuclear weapons development plants. I had mixed feelings about the interview. Jobs were somewhat scarce at that time, and this would be a good place to work. But on the other hand, how would developing the U. S. government's nuclear weapons program stand up against the gospel message of nonresistance?

I had heard the arguments pro and con on the arms race. I wrestled with the merits of each side's arguments and developed a personal moral tension about the right thing to do. With these thoughts in mind, I went to the interview. At the end of the day, the superintendent of research was prepared to offer me a job. I was impressed with the people and the work they do. Then I said, "But I can't do this type of research. Based on moral grounds and my beliefs, it just isn't right for me." The superintendent's smile quickly turned to a frown. The interview was over. He politely called in my host and I was escorted off the plant. In that moment I "threw away" all that I had worked for - four years of college, five years of graduate school and a job opportunity at one of the world's leading nuclear plants. A foolish move, by the world's standards--especially during a time of weakness in the job market. What did I just do, I thought to myself...

What I did that day was become a pacifist. I allowed my beliefs to affect what I do and say. To this day, I have not regretted that decision. A short time after the interview, this same company offered me another position in the textile fibers department. I have now worked there for more than 22 years.

I praise the Lord that I did not choose to use my God-given gifts to support the nuclear weapons industry. Those who believe in the power of the military and the use of military weapons trust in a

They came by car and by plane from the U.S. and Canada. They sent messages—and fruit—from as far away as Palestine, Thailand and New Zealand. On March 17-19, God's followers who've attended Raleigh Mennonite Church over the years returned to celebrate the congregation's 20th anniversary, and the Raleigh Service Adventure Unit's first 10 years.

The weekend opened with a brunch, followed by a day of activities and great conversation. It was topped off with a coffee-house fundraiser for the youth group Saturday night and a worship service on Sunday led by all of the church's prior pastors and many worship leaders from over the years. Old friends reunited and shared stories and photos of new houses, new babies, and new ways in which God is working, both at RMC and in other churches where those who've moved away from RMC now serve.

We discussed new and continuing ministries of the church like the young adult ministry, revamped small groups, Economic Community Development, Building Together Ministries, and the long-lived Service Adventure Unit. And we remembered the way that God has worked in our church and community in the past through ministries like the Jobs Partnership program, Racial Reconciliation Supper Clubs, the International Student Ministry, the Jubilee Peace Center, and the Growing Together Preschool.

We were reminded that though neighborhood around the church—once an urban ghetto and now a renovated, high-income development—has changed, our vision for God's community in Raleigh remains the same. We thank God for the opportunity to celebrate 20 years of serving the Lord in our urban neighborhood, in our work-places, our homes, and around the world. And we look forward with hope and enthusiasm to the next twenty years.

• Janelle Bitikofer
Raleigh Mennonite Church

human doctrine of "might makes right" and "only the strong shall survive." The goal of the believer is not to promote a strong nation, but to extend Christ's peace, and through His love transform the world.

• Steve Pardini
Congregational Peace Advocate for Springdale Mennonite Church



20 years of pastoral couples stand in front of RMC (l-r): Gloria Bontrager, Lois and Duane Beck, John and Marilyn Bender, and Joe Bontrager.

Umble revisits Albania after six-year term

(at right) Steve and Betsy Dintaman at Lithuania Christian College graduation with a graduating student.

It was midnight, November 24, 2006, at the Mother Teresa Airport in Albania when Paul Kropf and three young men from the church in Lezhe greeted me as I exited. The following days I settled into Paul and June's house as they prepared to leave for two and a half months.

It was a bit overwhelming the first few days when walking the streets full of people, but I soon fit back into life in Lezhe and enjoyed meeting many friends.



Boys from the church and friends over at Allen's place in Albania in December.

Soon after my arrival, the boys from church wanted to come for an evening meal, bringing their friends with them. One of my goals during my three months in Lezhe was to connect with persons in our church through visits in their homes

and by having one-on-one time with individuals over coffee. My desire was to be an encouragement to the Cornerstone Church including co-workers Norma Teles and the Leon Zimmerman family. Responsibilities included preaching, leading the boys' Bible studies, and helping to give direction to the church.

I was grateful to look on as God touched lives through prayer, whether it was together with Leon Zimmerman and two young Albanian believers outside a coffee bar in Tirana, or together with Robert Cook and a mentoring friend greatly concerned over the illness of his elderly father.

On the dark rainy night before I left Albania, two brothers rang my bell for a visit and presented me with a beautiful framed ink drawing done by the younger high school age boy. My time to leave had come all too fast, and the next morning I was on my way to Italy for a visit with Willard and Eva Eberly before my return to Pennsylvania.

Do continue to pray for the youth of the church in Lezhe as they face the secular teachings in the universities and the peer pressures of their friends. Praise God for those continuing to go forward with Jesus.

• Allen Umble
VMBM worker in Lezhe, Albania 1999-2005
Maple Grove Mennonite Church, Atglen, Pa.



Dintamans serve at LCC in Lithuania

We serve at Lithuania Christian College located near the Baltic Sea in Klaipeda, Lithuania. LCC is a Christian liberal arts university that is in some ways similar to Christian universities in the States, and in some ways very different. Our students come from a variety of Christian traditions. Many are Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, and some are Baptist and Pentecostal, but many students have little or no faith background. Students come from many countries throughout eastern Europe and beyond. As an international university all courses are taught in English.

Steve teaches theology and is Chair of the Theology Department. All students are required to take a two semester Bible survey, Intro to Theology and Moral Philosophy. Steve teaches the last two courses so gets a great opportunity to introduce our students to the Christian faith and life. It is a challenge to present the faith in ways that are sensitive to all the traditions represented in the classroom, and in a way that is compelling to students who are not believers. It is rewarding to help students who have never seriously considered faith take a fresh look at what it means to be a believer in the modern world.

Betsy works in LCC's library. We also see ourselves as having a ministry of hospitality and enjoy having faculty and students into our home for meals. We are involved in a local English-speaking congregation that many of our American faculty and some of our students attend. Our lives have been expanded and enriched by seeing the changes that happen in many of our students' lives as they experience Christian community and education at LCC. We have also made many new friends as faculty and staff come to serve here from all over the U.S. and Canada. We have been empowered by the many people who financially and spiritually support us in our work.

• Steve and Betsy Dintaman
VMBM/MMN workers in Lithuania



Outlet 10.27 launches

Easter Sunday evening was the launch date for Outlet 10.27 in Graham, North Carolina. With help from other churches in the district, we posted 5,000 door hangers announcing the start, gave out free hotdogs and soda at the local soccer field, and invited our contacts from past events.

We would appreciate your prayers as we aim to show Christ's love to persons disenfranchised or apathetic toward church. The name "Outlet" connects us to the area known for its outlet malls. It also is a visual of us being plugged into Jesus and connected to others. Luke 10.27 is what we desire to exemplify: loving God and loving our neighbors.

Through the launch we hope to connect and build on what has already been happening for the past four years. Keith and Tami Nice are the original couple who had a vision for a Mennonite



church in Graham. They, along with a small core group, continue to pour themselves into this work. We were invited to join as pastor/church planters one and a half

years ago. We work half-time with Graham and half-time as pastor at Greensboro Mennonite Fellowship. It's been a learning experience of joy and challenge to discover how to connect with the community and address the needs. The Nices have hosted home Bible studies, backyard summer Bible schools, and numerous series on various topics.

For our more recent series and four pre-launch services, we've been renting the fellowship hall of a Spanish church in Graham. The series directly prior to our launch dealt with finances and how to manage money in a God-honoring way. We had several new contacts through this.

We welcome your prayers and support in any way God leads you. To learn more about the work, visit the church website: www.outlet1027.com.

Update: On Easter Sunday evening, five visitors from the community representing four families joined us. They seemed very interested in our new church. They all seemed to enjoy the service and participated well. Jim began a series of six sermons and everyone went home with cards to bring a friend next week.

• Jim Mellinger

Greensboro Mennonite Fellowship/Outlet 10.27

(left) Keith and Tami Nice and Jim and Ruth Mellinger have worked to launch Outlet 10.27 in the Graham, NC, community.

You are invited to "Couples Night Out" for engaged and married couples at Harrisonburg's Simple Pleasures Restaurant at 6:30 pm on

May 19, an inaugural event for the Family Life Resource Center's 20th Anniversary Celebration. Gerald and



Marlene Kaufman, marriage counselors and authors of the book, Monday Marriage: Celebrating the Ordinary, will be the featured speakers, and Pittsburgh saxophonist Brad Yoder will provide special music at the dinner. Door prizes and a silent auction will add to the fun, and a freewill offering (\$40 per person suggested) will be received. The entire event is being sponsored by interested area businesses. Contact (540) 434-8450 or services@flrc.org to register.

called and sent!

Is God calling you to short-term or long-term service in another country?

Listen carefully for His voice and respond with "yes" if He is calling you!

Offer yourself for service and change your life.

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Storm warnings for future care assistance


“Storm warning.” Those words send many of us to scan our supply of non-perishable food, consider safer shelter, and equip flashlights with fresh batteries. We consider the possibility of a tornado and want to be prepared for a day or more without safe access to stores, electricity and shelter. We assess our findings and determine what steps if any need to be taken next for our health, safety, and peace of mind.


Consider this your “storm warning” preparation guide for a possible future where you need brief or long-term assistance for your care. We'll include a checklist and a number of resources you can look to for more in-depth information.

- Start with a review of your finances. Remember, most health insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid will not cover this care. (Medicaid is intended to aid only the poorest among us and is already slated to triple in cost by 2045.) Prepare a financial plan that's right for you - it may include long-term care insurance, savings, and the assistance of family and friends.
- Educate yourself about long-term care insurance and the variables involved. It's recommended that you consider policies from a minimum of three providers. See box on right for a website where you can access a free questionnaire to help you in the review with the insurance providers.
- Prepare your legal papers now—hopefully while you are not in crisis. You may want to find a trusted attorney to help you prepare a living will, durable-power-of-attorney for health care and a health care proxy.

- Research community resources. Many communities have programs to help you stay fit and healthy, provide low-cost meals, assistance with shopping and senior daycare services. Consider area faith communities and ask if they help with transportation and some costs of care.
- Prepare to stay in your home. Your current home may need a bit of modification to provide this option. See box below for a website to access a free checklist in order to determine what changes you may want to make in your home now to be best prepared to live in it for the rest of your life.

• Ron Yoder
VMRC President/CEO

 Checklist for long-term care insurance policy review as well as a free planning toolkit: <http://www.aoa.gov/LTC/index.asp> (US Dept. of Health & Human Services/Dept. of Aging)

 Checklist of home modifications: http://www.aarp.org/families/home_design/ (American Association of Retired Persons)

VMRC is preparing too:

We've embarked on an Endowment Campaign to help cover the costs of care for residents who have exhausted their resources. Though we can't cover everyone's future need, we are working to raise funds to support as many residents as financially possible.

Congregational Resource Center

NEW MATERIALS FOR VBS AND SPECIAL PROGRAMS!

The Center is now changing its face from Lent/Easter materials to summer VBS and special programming. In addition, a small book sale is currently in progress (through early May) in the adjacent hallway.

Choir music, Christian Education kits, and book sets for adult study are among the offerings.

CRC hours: M-F 7:30-5:00
Linda Alley, Director
540.432.4219
crc@emu.edu

www.emu.edu/seminary/crc

Thank you

On behalf of the Board of Directors for The Valley Responds, I want to thank those who participated in "Pray While You Bake." Through your efforts we collected and distributed 380 dozen cookies and other goodies to victims of Hurricane Katrina in Long Beach, Miss. The cookies, the Gospel of John, and an invitation to Beachfest were graciously received, and many came forward to accept Jesus in response to evangelist Steve Wingfield's preaching.

• Angie Williams
Prayer Coordinator for The Valley Responds



Connections Prayer Calendar May 2007

Sunday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by

Elizabeth Hostetter

A verse to heed: "Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints." Ephesians 6:18

6 The Jamaica Menn. Church is holding the first national SS convention at the Good Tidings MC in Kingston today from 10:30-3:30. The theme is "We are the Children of God." Pray a blessing on this event.

7 Praise God for the opening celebration service of Outlet 10.27 Church in Graham, NC on Easter Sunday evening. The audience included first-timers along with other support people.

13 Thank God for mothers today and remember to: "Honor your father and mother...so that you may live long and it may go well with you..." Deut 5:16a

14 Leaders from seven eastern area MC USA conferences, including VMC, will meet tomorrow in Chambersburg, PA to share stories of new faith initiatives. Pray for inspiration to creatively share the gospel.

20 This evening at 6:00, Outlet 10:27 will meet in Graham, N.C. Ask God to give creativity and energy to Jim & Ruth Mellinger and Keith & Tami Nice for leading this new church group.

21 Remember Emanuela, nanny for the Riddle boys, who continues to be a huge blessing for their family. She is a great caregiver and the boys love her! Thank God for this special relationship.

27 Pray for the West Liberty (Ky.) Mennonite Church who gathers today for worship. Ask God to bless this group of believers and to lead them into areas of service.

28 Memorial Day Read Hebrews 11 today and reflect on the spiritual legacy of those who have suffered for the sake of the Gospel. Also thank God for the freedom to worship that we enjoy in this country.

Tuesday

1 Thank God for the many years of service that Paul and Evelyn Kratz have given to VMC and VMBM; also ask God to bless their active retirement years and their opportunities for service in the worldwide church.

8 Pray for the teams serving in Donegal, Ireland, this summer and for Alan & Rosemary Armstrong and Tim & Tama Shoemaker to have wisdom to guide them in their work.

15 Phil and Marcia Lehman, Bari, Italy, ask us to pray for the plans for "Settimana Felice" (VBS) in July. A goal is to use "The Chronicles of Narnia" to present a message of the need of a Savior.

22 At *Colegio Americano Memo*, Aaron & Laura Kauffman have organized an English Club; conversational English and creative activities provide additional ways of relating to youth in Colombia. May God bless this effort.

29 Sara Ulrich, *TransSend* participant, impacts the lives of many youth by her life and example. Pray for her as she reaches out in friendship and encouragement to youth searching for answers.

Wednesday

2 The Waltman family says "good-bye" to the students and staff at Maranatha School for the Deaf and return to Pa. tomorrow. Thank God for their assistance to the school and for the bonds they formed there.

9 Pray for Sherah-Leigh Gerber and for VMC staff as they say "goodbye." Sher is VMC's Staff Assistant but is taking an interim full-time position on the pastoral team at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

16 Invite God's Spirit to guide our youth's academic pursuits and peer interactions as they finish the school year. May they truly set an example in speech, life, love, faith and purity.

23 A team from Palermo, Sicily, and Jason & Donna Martin and family will help with Settimana Felice in Bari. May this team work well together. May others who have been invited to join the effort decide to come.

30 Thank God for the work team from Jamaica that went to Trinidad in April to help build Hope Menn. Church. The shared connection and goal was very strong. Pray that God will continue to join the two together.

Thursday

3 Mennonite Women of Virginia meet today at Waynesboro MC for inspiring worship, including messages by Edith Shenk. Also offerings for missionaries and mission needs are received. May God multiply this generosity!

10 Chris and Melody Riddle's Italian language teacher asks questions about the Bible and is open to learning more. Pray that God will move in her heart.

17 Pray for Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter, who begins a seminary course, *Managing Conflict in the Congregation*, that he might be better equipped to help congregations in difficulty.

24 The work of Bridge Builders continues to grow and expand. Sharon Kniss, *TransSend* participant, is part of the Bridge Builders team and visits many congregations in England. Pray for her in her work.

31 Nancy Marshall in Orange Walk Town, Belize, prays with her students and finds that God's presence is powerful in the classroom. Thank God that she connects the students with Him daily.

Friday

4 The VMC Conference Council meets tonight and Saturday morning to consider the recommendations of a reorganization Task Force among other things. Pray for wisdom and discernment.

11 Dan Hoopert, *TransSend* participant in Kiev, Ukraine, is grateful for Loren & Earlene Horst's visit last month. Pray for Dan's students who have learned many theological concepts this semester.

18 Eastern Carolina District meets tomorrow at Durham Mennonite Church. Pray for Ed Bontrager as he travels to meet with them, as they continue to envision the work of God through church planting.

25 Today the group of students led by Randy Keeler leaves Trinidad. They have spent three weeks learning and relating to the Mennonite churches there. May they carry the desire for witness home.

Saturday

5 Allen Umble asks us to pray for the youth in the church at Lezhe, Albania, as they face secular teachings in the universities and peer pressure from their friends. Praise God for the youth who are committed to Christ.

12 Today the Board of VMBM is meeting to process various issues and to give direction to the work of this regional mission agency. May God give them good insight for this task.

19 Today at the Alpine Mennonite Church in Red Hills, Kingston, the women of Jamaica Mennonite Conference meet for "Women's Day." Pray that all who attend will be inspired for Christ-like daily living.

26 Eva Eberly, Bari, Italy, has many opportunities to share her faith in Christ with the people she meets daily. Ask God to give her the words to speak at the right time and place. Thank God for her strong witness for Him.

"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."
1 Peter 2:24 (NIV)

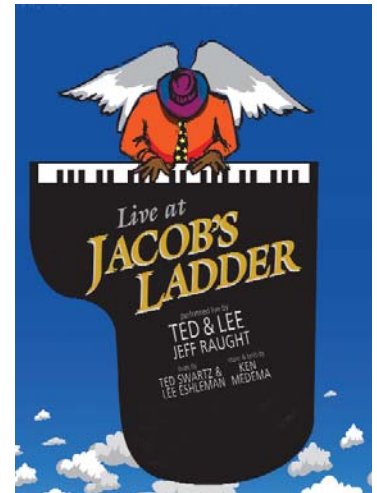
Announcements

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.

Will there be a draft? Whether or not it happens, the Conference Peace Committee is calling all of our youth, adults, and congregations to voluntarily pre-register - That's right! We are asking you to register with MCC by completing the Peace Registration Packets. Document your beliefs well in advance of a draft as proof of your allegiance to the Prince of Peace! Download the peace packets at www.mcc.org/us/co/form/ or call (540) 941-3798 for information.

CrossRoads invites you to participate in work days May 11-12 between 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. at the Heritage Center off Garbers Church Road. Bring gloves, a shovel and a rake to help prepare for summer activities. Call (540) 438-1275 for details.

Comedy/theater duo **Ted & Lee** along with **Jeff Raught** will present a musical, **Live at Jacob's Ladder**, at the Eastern Mennonite School auditorium, May 18-19 at 7:30 p.m. Music, comedy and drama combine in this



moving story of forgiveness between brothers Jacob and Esau. Two years since the show premiered, it has been reworked with new songs, new scenes, and a new actor: singer/actor/improv artist Jeff Raught as the blind, blues-singing angel. A must-see, soul-touching event for all ages. Advance tickets are \$12, \$10 student/seniors, \$40 family of 4+. At the door: \$15/\$12/\$45. The shows are a benefit for Mennonite Media. Order advance tickets online at <http://store.mennomedia.org>; call (540) 434-6701; or stop by Mennonite Media (Mon.-Thurs.) at 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg.

Our Christ-centered Faith

Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly

July 26-28, 2007
Lenoir-Rhyne College
Hickory, N.C.

Register at www.vmconf.org/assembly

Connections (USPS 007-205)
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Virginia Mennonite Conference
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