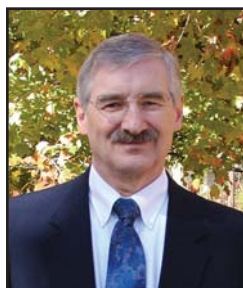




Connections

Vol. 19, No. 2 December 2008

Coping with All Saints' Eve Morning 2008



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

I awoke a bit earlier than usual. Multiple things on my mind the end of October 2008 - what a month! I lit a fire in the fireplace, started the coffee, picked up the newspapers, and scanned one of them. With coffee in hand I headed for my chair next to the crackling fireplace and reached for my Bible. I decided to read in the gospels - my marker is currently in Mark.

Mark 4:35-41: Jesus asleep during a monster storm; 5:1-20: Jesus ministers to the Gerasene demoniac; 5:21-43: Jesus ministers to a woman with a chronic condition and raises Jairus' daughter from death; 6:1-13: Jesus is questioned by his own townspeople and sends his disciples to do what he does; 6:14-32: the story of the beheading of John the Baptist and Jesus inviting his disciples to take a break.

Enough! The writer has gathered here a powerful collection of strategic

encounters that touch on grand themes which we live with even now.

Jesus and the power of nature—He rests while veteran boat dwellers are afraid for their lives. What does he know that they don't? We have seen the power of tsunami, hurricane, and fire. Who is this who is unafraid and calls us to faith? Here I pray for those who are victims of natural disasters and those who minister healing and hope through acts of love.

Jesus and the power of evil—a worst case of possession—He heals and enlists the healed as witness. Here I pray for counselors and pastors engaged with deeply troubled people.

Jesus encounters chronic illness and death. Prayer here reaches to those in our extended family system and others with chronic challenges and those who grieve deaths—timely and untimely.

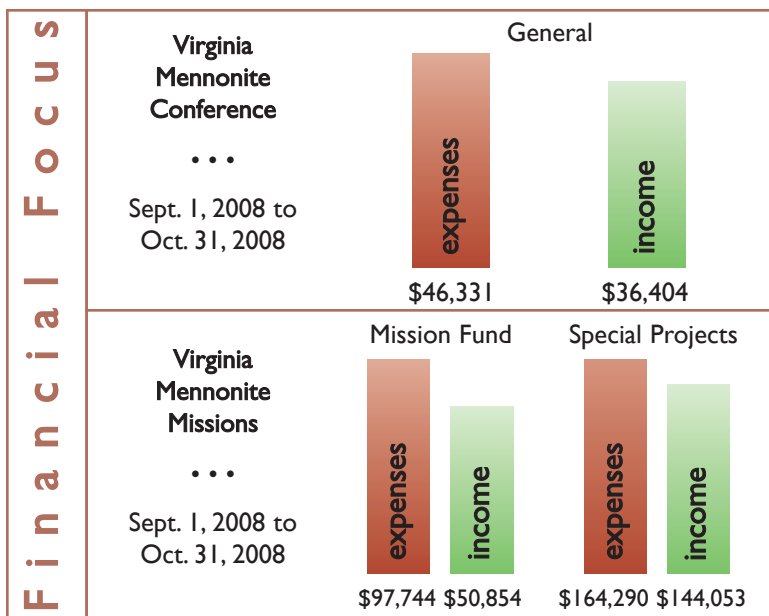
Jesus faces rejection and has the audacity to invite his disciples on a similar journey. I pray here for bishops/overseers, pastors, church planters, and seminary leaders who attempt to form other disciples in a minority tradition.

Jesus copes with the murder of His baptizer, John, and takes a break with His disciples to make sure He is on task.

Here is the interaction of the powers exposed. I am reminded to pray for the election processes in our country, for the mysterious economic powers of this world and for the agonizing military struggles that hold multitudes in distress, homelessness and hunger. And I thank God for the opportunity to worship and refresh perspectives on whose is the real power.

This week, or however long, in the life of Jesus as reflected by Mark, makes the month of October 2008 in North America seem bearable. There is no power that confounds him. There is no human agony that goes unnoticed. And he calls us to experience it all with him—chastened, but unafraid.

Correction: In the November issue, the financial graphs did not match the dollar amounts. The dollar amounts were correct.



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The example of a parent

By **DAVE POWELL**

VMC Peace Committee, writing about his father, Sam Powell, Jr.

“Give me all of the money in your pocket.” My father halted abruptly in front of the man who had just spoken those words. In the pre-dawn darkness, Dad could see the man pointing something at him through his coat, but could not tell if it was really a pistol or just his finger. The man must have known that Dad was getting paid in cash for his deliveries that morning, and decided to stop him on his return to the truck. Dad stood there thinking for a few short seconds, then calmly looked into the man’s eyes and said, “You know what, Sir? If you take all of my money now, my troubles will be over but yours will just be starting.”

The man took his turn thinking for a longer few seconds, and then swiftly slipped away into the night without another word. Did he take Dad’s words as a threat or the intended philosophical advice, or was he just disarmed by such an unexpected response? We’ll never know.

Later in his life, Dad brought home a story of another early-morning caper. He had stopped at a rest stop along Interstate 64 before dawn. Going into the men’s room, he appeared to be the only one there. But as he went to the sink to wash his hands, one of the stall doors opened and out stepped a large ominous-looking man. At the same moment, the restroom door opened with another man standing in the doorway and looking straight at Dad. It was obvious to Dad that they were working together and

were cornering him, but my Dad didn’t miss a beat. As he was washing and drying his hands, he immediately began talking and joking unceasingly about the traffic, the weather, and whatever else; in his jolly matter-of-fact way. He was still talking as he slipped past the man at the door. He apparently took a quick peek back, as he mentioned seeing both men just shrugging at each other as if to say, “What do you do with a man like that?”

I don’t know if I’ll ever be as innovative at a moment’s notice as my father, but I cherish his stories. His practical examples taught me that real men don’t have to fight or take flight, but that there are so many creative options for responding in these circumstances. As people of peace, let us be living examples and share our stories with our families.

Hope or hopelessness?

By **NANCY MARSHALL**

VMM/EMM worker in Orange Walk, Belize

The jail here in Orange Walk has three cells, each about the size of a horse stall. The cramped quarters hold eight to ten men.

I was summoned to court to “interpret” for a deaf man that I know. I am the only person in Orange Walk who can voice what the deaf mans says. During the course of the judge’s questions we learned that he was charged with wandering the streets begging. He has no family, lives alone in a house without electricity, food or water, and has no source of income. When the judge read his conviction, the deaf man responded, “Yes, but what else can I do?”

They sent him back to jail where he will remain for up to three months. During that time someone from Human Services is supposed to get him in a rehab/job referral program. But he is

deaf, and there are no interpreters in Orange Walk, so how will he benefit from the rehab counseling?

My first reaction was this is incredibly unfair. The man has always been poor. He never had an education or a nurturing family. Throwing him in jail merely takes this man—a nuisance, someone we are embarrassed by—off the street. Mayan people believe strongly about sharing with each other and taking care of each other. It’s fundamental. How can it be against the law for a poor person to beg when they are hungry?

And then I thought, I wonder what Jesus would do if he encountered this man. There certainly were a lot of disabled beggars in Jesus’ day. He gave them something more than money; he gave them the power to change. He said to the man at the pool at Bethesda, “Do you want to get well?” I imagined asking the deaf man the same question: Are you ready to give up your addictions? Do you

want to stop begging and work? I think he might say, “But what can I do?” He’s given up.

Maybe the man at the well, who had lain there for 38 years, had given up, too. He responded to Jesus with hopelessness, “Everyone gets into the pool before me. It’s no use. I will always be like this.” Jesus sensed his hopelessness. Jesus wanted to enable him. Did he walk over and lift him up? Jesus knew the crippled man needed to make an effort. When the man made the move to stand, Jesus healed him.

Many times when I encounter the deaf man begging in town, I talk to him about Jesus. I pray with him. He says he prays and he will change. In fact most times when he sees me, staggering toward me with his hand out, he says “I pray.” Others, too, have talked to him, but he hasn’t changed. I still wonder how to be Jesus to this man. I wonder how to help him pick up his mat and walk.

Wheels that squeal on wax

By **PHIL LEHMAN**

Mission worker in Capurso, Italy

Edited by Eva Eberly, Mediterranean Regional Assistant

One morning we awoke to a strange sound outside our window—a sound we hear every September since moving into this house. It's like the loud squealing of tires when cars break suddenly; but strangely, these cars were simply turning corners and breaking normally as they

drove through Capurso. What made these tires squeal so loudly and disturb our sleep? That first year I couldn't solve the mystery

Photo courtesy of Phil Lehman



so inquired and was informed that it was caused by wax on the street. But how does the wax get there?

A big festival is held each year in Capurso, in some ways similar to a county fair. But sadly this festival is dedicated to honoring the “Madonna.” It is a time to pray to the “Madonna” with the hope of receiving a blessing, a healing, or some good fortune. It's amazing how many participants are in wheelchairs, have crutches or other obvious physical needs. The major events of this festival are the processions, one in which people walk behind a statue of the Madonna and another in which people follow a large painting of the Madonna and child. Most carry a lighted candle. The size of the blessing you receive depends on the amount of effort exerted in carrying the

Photo courtesy web



candle, so the bigger it is, the bigger the blessing! Some of the candles are probably five feet tall and as large in diameter as a leg. This is where the wax comes from! Cars driving over it, people walking over it, and the street cleaning machine spread the wax throughout the city.

This reminds us of Italy's great need to hear the Truth preached on every street and in every household—the truth that Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Two Mennonite young adults 'on the way' to World Conference assembly in Paraguay—by bicycle

Group to raise funds for Global Youth Network



By **LARS ÅKERSON**

As a part of BikeMovement Americas 2009, Lars Åkerson and Jonathan Spicher will bike from Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA to the Global Youth Summit and Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay, from January to July 2009. Throughout the two-wheeled pilgrimage they will seek to learn from and serve those they encounter and to connect with Anabaptist congregations and service workers along their approximately 7,000 mile route through the American continents.

“We hope that our journey will encourage and add to an intercultural conversation about discerning and living Christ's call with integrity,” says Åkerson, of Harrisonburg, Va.

As they travel, the pair will update an interactive, dynamic website to creatively document conversations, stories, and photos of their experiences as an invita-

tion for broader conversation and dialogue. Persons are welcomed to join the self-supported touring group for sections of the ride—whether for a several miles or several days. “Biking together is a great way to build relationships, and it's exciting to have the opportunity,” comments Spicher, a Lancaster, Pennsylvania native and a student at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. A map of the route, which passes through the southeastern United States, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay, is available on their website: <http://americas.bikemovement.org>

Beginning in January 2009, the riders hope to arrive in Asunción six months later in time for the fifteenth Mennonite World Conference Assembly and second Global Youth Summit, July 10-19, 2009. The youth summit's focus is “Service: Live the Difference,” while the

Anabaptist assembly at large will “Come together in the way of Jesus Christ” with Philippians 2:1-11 as the theme text. More than 220 young adults from 28 countries gathered for the first Global Youth Summit along with nearly 7,000 who attended the general assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003.

Working with AMIGOS (the world conference youth committee), BikeMovement Americas hopes to raise \$30,000 to help emerging young leaders from around the world attend the summit in Paraguay. Over the past three years, AMIGOS has raised over \$75,000 toward this goal, but \$30,000 remains to meet its goal for providing grants.

Details about how contributions can be made toward either AMIGOS or the BikeMovement Americas riders are available on the website at <http://americas.bikemovement.org/give>

Message for donors to Virginia Mennonite Missions

If you own an IRA and are at least 70½ years old, you have a significant opportunity to avoid paying taxes on your IRA and make a charitable donation to Virginia Mennonite Missions.

The U.S. Congress recently extended through 2009 a provision that allows you to donate to charity up to \$100,000 per calendar year from a regular or Roth IRA without paying taxes on the earnings. You may donate all or a portion of your IRA, or even a Required Minimum Distribution.

How to make a gift to VMissions:

- Contact your IRA custodian and request that a gift be sent to VMissions. Many custodians have a form that needs to be filled out and signed by you to process your gift.
- Inform VMissions so that we can give you the proper receipt letter to make certain that your gift qualifies.

You will find a draft letter to IRA custodians and a sample letter to VMissions on our website at vmmissions.org. If you would like to know more about how to donate from your IRA, give us a call. We will be glad to provide a full explanation and can help you handle the paperwork.

Please allow enough time at the end of the year for your IRA custodian to process your request. It may take up to two weeks. Also, please note that to avoid paying income taxes on your IRA rollover, the check must be issued by the IRA custodian to Virginia Mennonite Missions.



Janet Stutzman
Director of Development
Phone: (540) 434-9727
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janet.stutzman@vmmissions.org

Preparation helps to make holiday visits memorable

By MAUREEN PEARSON

Director of Communications, VMRC
Photos courtesy of Deb King

Christmas and New Year's holidays are among the busiest long-distance travel periods of the year. The primary reason: people visiting family and friends. And if visiting an aging parent or family member with memory loss is part of your travel plans, learn to have an enjoyable and meaningful visit. Valda Garber-Weider, resident care manager at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, offers these suggestions for creating a memorable visit with a loved one with dementia or memory loss.

"Before you even get there, plan some conversation topics and activities," said Valda. "Relating to this person will be a new experience because they are not the person you once knew."

When you arrive, always introduce yourself.

Simple reminders will allow you to ease into a good visit. If the person is asleep, let them fully awaken before beginning your conversation. Sit facing the person; your facial expressions will help with their understanding.



- Avoid asking questions that require recall of an entire event. ("Remember last Thanksgiving?")
- Provide some details within the question that may trigger memories: "Did you have a good time visiting with your friends at Sunday dinner?"
- Provide clues and cues by supplying one or two words that keep the dialogue going.
- Ask for an opinion to be expressed about something simple, "Do you think this blouse matches these slacks?"
- Actively engage in an easy task: "I'm trying to plan dinner. What vegetables do you think I should serve with roast beef?"

This information is made available through Memory Care at VMRC—a comprehensive program of care, training and educational programs for persons with Alzheimer's Diseases and related disorders and their caregivers.

VMRC's first quarter calendar for Memory Care at VMRC:

- "Aging and Memory: what's normal and what's not"
10-11 a.m., January 15, 2009
- "Everything you want to know about Alzheimer's Diseases"
7-9 p.m., February 12, 2009
- "Caregiver Stress"
10-11 a.m., March 12, 2009

All sessions are free and will be in Strite Auditorium of Crestwood Assisted Living.



Congregational Resource Center

The Congregational Resource Center has ADVENT and CHRISTMAS resources! You'll find...

...26 copies of "The Christmas Promise", a Christmas program in 3 Suites for S.A.T.B. voices, 2 Narrators, Congregation and optional Children's Choir

...a kit for a family Christmas event called "A Night in Bethlehem: A Hands-on Holy Land Experience"

..."From Humbug to Hallelujah" Pastor's Manual for a biblical series with key illustrations from "A Christmas Carol"

...music CDs including "Christmas Around the World"

...14 drama resources, including "Christmas On Stage: An Anthology of Royalty-Free Christmas Plays for All Ages"

...17 programming resources, including "Simply Wonderful: Five Children's Sermons and Activity Pages for Advent & Christmas"

...20 worship resource books & collections, including "Celebration Services for Christmas" by William Null

...Christmas movies including "The Legend of the Three Trees"

...Children's books such as "The ADVENTure of Christmas," a guide to holiday traditions

...Sermon & worship service preparation magazines including "Leader" and "Homiletics"

...and a helpful resource center director to make suggestions for your specific focus.

Make the Congregational Resource Center at Eastern Mennonite Seminary your first stop in planning for Advent and Christmas 2008!

Open 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. Call 540.432.4219 or go to the online catalog at www.emu.edu/seminary/crc to browse.

Your contributions through Virginia Mennonite Conference enable this center to operate. Take advantage of it!

DECEMBER 2008

Connections

Prayer Calendar

Sunday

If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, please contact Gloria Lehman at (540) 434-9727 or (800) 505-7735

Monday

1 Willard and Eva Eberly are on "home assignment" from Bari, Italy. Pray for them as they minister among the churches on behalf of missions and renew relationships with family and friends.

Tuesday

2 Karen Michener, from US Center for World Mission, teaches "Pioneer Church Planting" in the *Perspectives* class in Harrisonburg tonight. Ask God to empower the students to boldly say "yes" to His voice.

Wednesday

3 Jennifer Davis Sensenig began as lead pastor of Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg on Nov 1. Pray for her and the congregation as they grow in worship and outreach.

Thursday

4 Pray for a new ministry among the mothers led by Norma Teles at the Joshua Centre, Albania, an early learning center for Gypsy children. They come with interest and listen eagerly.

Friday

5 Pray for Gordon Zook, interim pastor of Weavers Mennonite Church and Laban Peachey, interim pastor at Trissels Mennonite Church as they shepherd these congregations into spiritual health and growth.

Saturday

6 Allen Umble is serving in a different place than when he had served in Albania earlier. Pray the Spirit leads him in forming friendships and finding his place of ministry among the Albanians of Lushnje, southern Albania.

Sunday

7 Pray for members of Immanuel Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, who meet tonight to process the call of a potential pastor.

Monday

8 Paul Kratz asks us to thank God for the believers in Trinidad who are serious about praying for their families, churches and nation. Join in praying that God will move in a mighty way in this small country.

Tuesday

9 Tonight David Shenk, mission educator, teaches "World Christian Partnership" in the Harrisonburg *Perspectives* class. As the class concludes, pray for the students to clearly hear God's call on their lives and respond to it.

Wednesday

10 Pray for the believers at Centro Koinonia as they seek connection with the people of Bari in many ways—English classes, literature stand in marketplace, women's fellowship, friendships, etc.

Thursday

11 Pray for VMC's four elected officers, along with Owen Burkholder and Steve Carpenter, who will meet tomorrow in executive session to prepare for January's Conference Council meeting and February's Winter Delegate Session.

Friday

12 Today the Maranatha School for the Deaf, Jamaica, is holding its annual Christmas celebration, which include gifts from US sponsors. Thank you for praying for the students and staff during the holiday period as school is closed.

Saturday

13 Shawn & Laura Green, *TeamSend* participants in Italy, assist with "Pomeriggio Felice" for children on Saturdays. May the fun activities create a lasting impact on the children who attend, and on their families.

Sunday

14 The newly-formed youth/young adult group at Centro Koinonia, Bari, Italy, struggles to become cohesive and committed. Pray for Chris and Melody Riddle who lead and disciple them.

Monday

15 Steve & Betsy Dintaman, Lithuania International University, ask us to join them in prayer for the believers in Ukraine and Russia who are seeking to live faithfully in trying times.

Tuesday

16 VMC's Finance Committee meets tomorrow to discuss the state of the Conference's finances and make investment decisions. Pray for wisdom in their deliberations.

Wednesday

17 Richard Keeler, Sangre Chiquito, Trinidad, is holding classes with a lay leader of the Gospel Lighthouse MC on "how to preach." Thank God for this opportunity to enhance the church's nurture in the Lord.

Thursday

18 Nancy Marshall, Orange Walk, Belize, is closing the school term and is preparing for the Sunday worship service at the Jesus' Deaf Church. Acting out the nativity and sharing lunch will celebrate Jesus' birth.

Friday

19 Steve & Laura Campbell, *TeamSend* participants in Podgorica, Montenegro, celebrate Christmas in a different country this year. Thank God for their commitment to Christ and the group of believers in this town.

Saturday

20 Jared & Traci Stoltzfus, *TeamSend* participants in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, are hosting family members in their place of service. Thank God for the encouragement this brings to them.

Sunday

21 Worship services around the world, and in our Conference, are celebrating the birth of our Savior, Jesus, this week. May He be born anew in our hearts this season.

Monday

22 The Lehman family in Bari, Italy, are enjoying the holiday season together with Crystal and Christopher home from Black Forest Academy. Thank God for this blessing.

Tuesday

23 Christmas season is a prime occasion for believers in Albania, Montenegro and Italy to share the Gospel message with those around them. Pray that God anoints their activities and touches many persons with His love.

Wednesday

24 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward all! May we be agents of God's peace in every aspect of our lives.

Thursday

25 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given - Emmanuel - God with us!

Friday

26 Today is a good day for sharing our bounty with those who are in need. The economic situation in our country makes it more difficult for those who are struggling to provide life's necessities. How can you help?

Saturday

27 Washington Community Fellowship in Washington, D.C. is discerning a pastoral call. Be in prayer with them as they process this decision.

Sunday

28 Evelyn Kratz, Couva, Trinidad, has a ministry of hospitality to church members, visitors and new believers in their home. Thank God for Evelyn's willingness to exercise this gift which blesses others.

Monday

29 A Christian Albanian helper is needed to assist Norma Teles at the Joshua Centre, Albania. Join her in asking God to provide a compassionate, teachable person.

Tuesday

30 Pray for Liston Aiken, pastor of Good Tidings MC and president of Jamaica Mennonite Church as he nurtures his congregation and gives visionary leadership to the broader church. Also pray for his family, Julime and Avia.

Wednesday

31 Pray for safety for all who travel tonight, the most dangerous day of the year to drive because of widespread alcohol abuse. May God bless you with a safe and prosperous New Year!

This prayer calendar is sponsored by:

Marvin Slabaugh

in loving memory of his wife, Carolyn,
who worked alongside him for years
as they promoted missions in various places.

"My salvation
and my honor
depend on God;
he is my mighty
rock, my refuge."
Psalm 62:7 (NIV)

Christmas

Announcements

Watch for details about VM Missions **Celebration of Missions events** in 2009! These will be held at various places around Virginia Mennonite Conference. Mark your calendar for:

- Celebration of Missions at Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, Chesapeake, Saturday, January 17
- Celebration of Missions at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Harrisonburg, Thursday, January 29
- Celebration of Missions at First Mennonite Church of Richmond Thursday, February 5

More information will be coming soon.

Would you like to gain leadership skills to effectively manage conflict as well as strategies to navigate your organization through a turbulent environment?

EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, MBA, and ADCP programs have once again joined with the Harrisonburg community to offer **Seminars in Organizational Leadership**. There will be six half-day seminars, January-April 2009. \$79/seminar or \$399/series (10% discount for Chamber members.) Register at www.emu.edu/ctp/seminarseries or call (540) 432-4651.

Middle East Travel Opportunity! Registration is now open for "Places, People, & Prayers: 2009," a Middle East study tour to be offered in conjunction with Eastern Mennonite Seminary (with or without seminary credit) from April 30-May 23, 2009. Tour co-leaders are Dr. Dorothy Jean Weaver, Professor of New

Testament, EMS, and Rev. Kevin A. Clark, Seminary Campus Pastor, EMS. If interested, please contact Dorothy Jean Weaver at (540) 432-4276 or at weaverdj@emu.edu at the very earliest for further information and to reserve your spot.

Photo: Steve Carpenter



New Beginnings Pastor Ed Heatwole, second from right, gives VMC Moderator

Beryl Jantzi, Conference Minister Owen Burkholder and VMM representative Ken Horst a tour of their new worship center under construction on the southern end of Harrisonburg. The 14,000 square foot facility will contain a sanctuary with seating capacity for 435 people.



Jennifer Davis Sensenig assumed responsibilities as lead pastor at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg on November 1. She

comes to VMC from Pasadena, California, where she served as Associate Pastor of Pasadena Mennonite Church.

Knoxville Mennonite Church needs assistance in making electrical and plumbing repairs to their facility. This is an ideal project for a retired person or couple. If you can volunteer time advising us and heading up repairs, please contact Ray Snader at raysnader@yahoo.com or call (423) 623-0611.



Image: www.thenativitystory.com

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Called. Sent. Transformed.



Virginia Mennonite Conference

A conference of Mennonite Church USA