

A New Year's Celebration with a Mediterranean Flavor

By **GLORIA L. LEHMAN**
 VMM Director of Public Relations

The fellowship hall of Dayton Mennonite Church hummed with conversation on January 11 as 283 people gathered to celebrate the New Year with a Mediterranean Flavor. Willard and Eva Eberly, long-time missionaries in Italy, and missions director for the Mediterranean region, welcomed family, friends, and supporters to this festive event.

Italian pasta, salad, Eva's Italian bread, fresh fruit, and an array of desserts: baklava, crème puffs, and panettone filled the guests with delectable flavors. Warm fellowship around the tables filled hearts with goodwill and enthusiasm.

A music team composed of missionary kids (MKs) and former missionaries opened the program with Italian-style worship. The Eberlys described how God moved in the Mediterranean region in 2008 through stories of new commitments to Christ and renewed dedication

A worship band composed of missionary kids and former missionaries performed Italian worship songs.



Eva and Willard Eberly introduce the Italian meal and those who helped make the evening a success.
 Photos: Galen Lehman

among His people in Italy, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo.

A video gave an overview of the work in each of these countries, showing potential church leaders and the setting where they live. A dramatic skit depicted the story of Dario whose life was saved three times—at birth, by missing a plane flight that crashed, and again when he accepted Christ. He and his wife now serve Christ and the church with unusual dedication.

In an interview with Willard, *tranSender* Ardi Shahini described the life-changing impact first missionaries to Albania had on his family and how he and his fiancée sense God's call to serve Him in missions.

Time for sharing in financial and prayer support concluded the evening. In

speaking to the Eberlys, one pastor expressed his enthusiasm for this event which drew together people from a wide variety of different congregations and church backgrounds. Willard and Eva's ministry is bearing fruit for Christ's Kingdom and persons present at this gathering partner with them, along with many others.

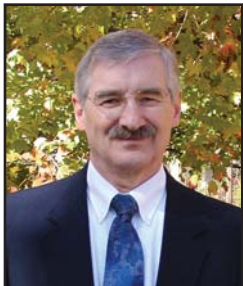


If you want a copy of the Mediterranean DVD for your congregation, contact VMM at info@vmmissions.org

To receive the Eberlys' newsletter or to contribute to their on-going financial support, please contact VMM at ken.horst@vmmissions.org or call (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535 for more information.



Here's to lay leaders



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

Ruth Ann and I experienced two celebrations on December 21. We went to Hebron Mennonite Church for their first worship service in their new

building. I had been hearing about the incredible effort being made by volunteers from the congregation over the past eight months. Sometimes two, many times four nights a week folks gathered to do what needed to be done. It was a labor of love on the part of so many.

And, to have it done for the Christmas program on the Saturday night before with the first Sunday worship service the Sunday before Christmas! It



Hebron Mennonite Church

is a year the Hebron folks won't soon forget. Here's to lay leaders like those at Hebron.

We left immediately after the worship service to travel to First Mennonite in Richmond where family and many friends celebrated the 50th anniversary of the wedding of Joe & Constance Brenneman Longacher.



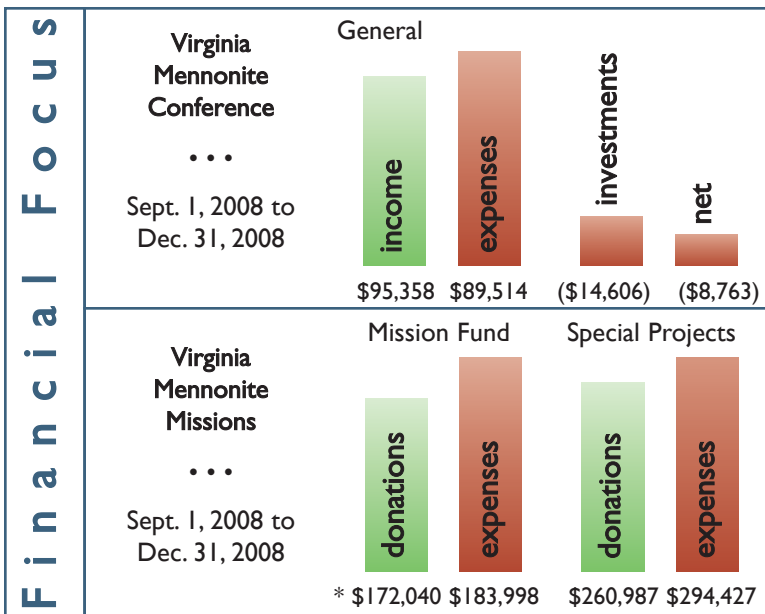
Joe and Constance Longacher

Bishop Truman Brunk ordained many, many church leaders in the Warwick River community. Dr. Joe says that it was Bishop Truman who also told him to establish his medical practice in Richmond and help the fledgling church there. The Longachers have indeed served First Mennonite well. They have also served the broader church and community. A cancer survivor, Constance has traveled each week for over 10 years to the UVA Medical Center to encourage others who are facing a similar

diagnosis. Joe has served as the first lay Moderator of Virginia Mennonite Conference and is currently the chair of the Faith & Life Commission where he tries to keep order when the bishops/overseers gather! The Longachers have served on many other church and community boards and committees. Here's to lay leaders like the Longachers.

One more. On Friday, December 19, the funeral was held for Harold King at Springdale in Waynesboro. His wife, Genevieve, is Ruth Ann's aunt. It was an unusually large funeral for an almost 97 year-old. Why? Because Uncle Harold was an evangelist mechanic! He served many, many people by tuning their cars and while he was working, he was a-witnessing. The Lord had touched him and he reached out in grateful love to others! Here's to faithful lay servers like Uncle Harold.

So, faithful lay leaders and servers, here's to you!



Connections (USPS 007-205) is published monthly by Virginia Mennonite Missions and Virginia Mennonite Conference to connect congregations with each other and conference agencies.

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Connections is distributed free to each household of supporting congregations. Subscription rates: \$5 per year, 2 years for \$9.

Send subscriptions to **Connections** Circulation Manager, 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802

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(800) 707-5535

E-mail info@vmmissions.org
info@vmconf.org

Web www.vmmissions.org
www.vmconf.org

POSTMASTER Send address changes to 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg, VA 22801.

*Figures do not reflect investment income/losses nor building rental income.

A bridge of friendship

By **AUDREY ALDERFER METZ**
Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

One Sunday morning at Park View Mennonite, I saw a sign-up sheet for interested persons to correspond with citizens of Iran. I was thrilled! Over the years I had corresponded with people in various countries but, having moved 8 times in the last 10 years, I lost touch with them. Today, they are far away friends, out of touch, but I still carry them in my heart and mind.

Because there was no notice of interested females, I was given the name and email address of an Iranian male. After a couple of attempts, I received no answer to my letters. Perhaps it was considered inappropriate for Iranian males to correspond with females. Finally, I was sent the name and address of a female. I wrote her, still hoping to establish a bridge of

friendship. I was elated to get a reply from a young university student, Arezoo. Even though Arezoo was then studying for her master's and now is studying for her doctorate, she finds time to write chatty, warm letters that tell me much of her life in Hassam, Iran. She is teaching English as do her father and brother. A younger sister is studying law. They are a close family, much involved in each other's lives. I have received a warm welcome to visit them!

Early on, Arezoo commented (in response to a question from me) about our government. She said that she and her university friends are concerned about our support of Israel. She stated that it won't make much of a difference who our president is because the United States courts friendship with Israel rather than Palestine. She has not been aggressive with her political views,

simply exchanges honest ideas and feelings with me. I am open to her opinions, but am careful about expressing views regarding her government. It is enough, for now, that we have established a meaningful relationship and that we are comfortable in expressing our views with respect.

It's challenging to me to realize how interested Arezoo is in my life, how much she already knows of American culture. I want to return that compliment by learning as much as possible about hers. And I pray that my new president will reach out to her president in ways that will foster friendship and peace, rather than mindless propaganda and fear-mongering.

The Iranians are a warm, delightful people. I am honored that this young woman and her family count me as a friend.

Biking humbly to Paraguay

By **GLORIA L. LEHMAN**
VMM Director of Public Relations

On January 6, Lars Akerson and Jonathan Spicher said farewell to their gathered friends and family members at Virginia Mennonite Conference Center, Harrisonburg, and began the 8,500 mile biking journey to Paraguay. Nancy Heisy, president of Mennonite World Conference, spoke of the community that is created by Lars and Jon connecting with people all along the way. Ken Horst, Director of VMMissions' *Partners in Mission* program, talked about the goals of young people doing missions in an unusual way. Jason Gerlach, Virginia Mennonite Conference youth minister, gave good advice—"go south!" Following prayer and hugs, Lars and Jon headed out, accompanied by six riders going a short distance.

They will bike through the southern

US, and into Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. Another form of transportation will take them to Ecuador and then they will continue biking through Peru and Bolivia, including stretches in the Andes Mountains more than 10,000 feet above sea level to Paraguay. There they will participate in the Global Youth Summit, July 10-12. They hope to raise up to \$30,000 for youth to attend from countries that do not have resources to cover the expenses of traveling.

As they progress along their route, they will visit Anabaptists in various places, and some places others will ride with them for a time. "Bike touring is a very humble way of transporting yourself...Being vulnerable invites danger, but it also invites protection and help from others," Jonathan said. "[We] will see more of that face of hospitality that we've seen in Latin America and the US



Lars Akerson (left) and Jonathan Spicher

as well. It will take a lot of prayer and reliance on God to be safe."

The pair has set up an interactive web site at <http://americas.bikemovement.org> where they will provide regular updates of their journey with personal reflections, stories and photos. Anyone who wants to contribute to the fund-raising effort can do so at the same site.



At the Good Tidings Mennonite Church, Kingston, church members prepare the gifts for the children who attend the Christmas Children's Treat. Photo courtesy of Gloria Lehman.

Christmas in Jamaica

By **GLORIA L. LEHMAN**
VMM Director of Public Relations

Hedges of poinsettias line the roadside and fill gardens. The breeze from the Caribbean Sea feels slightly cool, but the sun is bright and warm. It's Christmas in Jamaica!

In Kingston, the Good Tidings Mennonite Church prepares for the huge Christmas Children's Treat held on December 13. Flyers announcing this yearly event invite the community to come to the church for a full Jamaican meal. Five hundred men, women and children will come! The Christmas story is told, carols are sung, a gift is given to each child, and the meal is served. The love of Christ is shared by the Good Tidings church members.

At the Maranatha School for the Deaf, a fun day is held on December 12, and the students along with the community children thoroughly enjoy an inflatable bouncy ride! A "jumble" sale (yard sale) is held, and delicious food is sold to make money for the school. At 5:00, the school students and staff, family and community members gather to see and hear the students sign Christmas carols. Then the students receive a gift bag from their sponsor, and eyes shine! A large metal star, covered with tiny white lights is placed on the end of the classroom building, so that all in the valley can see it, and know that this is the place where Jesus resides.

Thank you to the sponsors who make this gift-giving experience a blessed time for the students!

Who is Jesus?

By **NORMA TELES**
VMM mission worker in Lezhe, Albania

"Why are we decorating our classroom?" asked Emanuel. "To celebrate the birth of Jesus," I answered him. "And who is Jesus?" was his next question. I answered, "You will learn about Jesus today, but you must wait for the answer."

I always organize a special day to prepare the Joshua Center for Christmas. We have special food for the children's breakfast. Then we bake cookies together, hear the story of Jesus' birth and decorate the center. We try to make it a very special day, knowing that they will be talking about it for days and will talk at home too. After telling the advent story I asked Emanuel, "Who is Jesus?" "The baby of Mary and the Son of God," he replied.

Throughout those 4 weeks before Christmas we heard the children's many expressions of joy and affection for Baby Jesus in the Albanian way.

We used Emanuel's question as the theme of our Christmas program and during the preceding weeks we asked different children and mothers, "Who is Jesus?" Many different responses were given.



The families were invited to come to our Christmas program on December 22. All the mothers were present and the children presented a special program for them, dramatizing the story of Jesus' birth and singing Christmas songs. It was a very joyful celebration!

A missionary family in a faraway land

By **CHRIS RIDDLE**
VMM Mission worker in Bari, Italy

During the Christmas season, these two words take on a whole new meaning for those of us on the mission field. We are away from relatives back "home," and we find a whole new family from different parts of the world.

The Riddle family from Bari, the Lehman family from Capurso, the Greens from Palermo and the Campbells from Montenegro--thirteen "family members"--came together for three days of fun, relaxation, food, games, worship, singing, movies and English!

Christmas Eve we gathered at the Lehmans' house with some Italian families. We played games and Marcia made a traditional seafood dish from Bari--potatoes, rice and cozze—that everyone enjoyed.



The Mediterranean region "missionary family" anticipates a delicious lasagna meal together during the holiday season. Photo courtesy of Phil Lehman.

On Christmas Day, we missionaries gathered for a meal together, exchanged small gifts and enjoyed some quiet time to talk about memories of Christmases past.

On December 26 (another holiday in Italy), we worshiped together and spent time catching up on how things are going in our respective ministry areas. Then we prayed for each other, blessing us all.

Though far from home this Christmas, we all realized that we have "family" right here with us.

Skills used to serve God

Second in a series of *transSend* articles

By SHAWN AND LAURA GREEN

VMM *transSenders* in Termini Imeresi, Italy

Much has happened over the past year to bring us to this point in our lives. It started in the summer of 2007 with an opportunity to join a Partners in Mission team to Italy. I (Laura) was a little hesitant, because I knew deep down that we would be coming back. We knew of a need for a couple with our skills, but I was not ready to even consider service for more than a couple weeks. I was not ready to leave my family, friends, church, and the familiarity of home. God worked on my heart. We submitted our application for the *transSend* program in January 2008 and were accepted in February. The program is designed to allow participants to be involved in mission work for a year to see if that is God's path for their lives or to simply fulfill a need for a specific time period.

We were excited and scared; there was a lot of work ahead. We needed to raise half of our living expenses for a year, find renters for our house, sell our car, find homes for our animals, and pack and clean our house, which was a monumental task. Many people helped make this possible. We arrived in September to our new place of service.

Here in Termini, we are trying to follow I Corinthians 16:15 and be "addicted to the

ministry of the saints." Our job is to support the pastor in his role, and encourage the believers at our church in Termini. We are involved in outreach: we have a bi-monthly kid's program on Saturday afternoons, assist the local youth leaders at Termini's sister church in Palermo. Laura volunteers with a local program for people with disabilities. At our local market, fruit vendor, and bakery people know us as "that American couple" who lives in Termini.

We are excited to see what God has in store for us in the coming year. We truly desire that God uses us and our skills to glorify Him, whether we are in Italy or at home in Harrisonburg. Many of you support us with prayer and finances, and we are honored to serve here in Sicily on your behalf. This journey has been a long one and not without tears, but we know God has placed us here. We ask for your continued prayers as we fulfill our roles and perform the tasks that God has given us.



Trinidad church shares the joy of Christmas

By GLORIA L. LEHMAN

VMM Director of Public Relations
Photo by Evelyn Kratz

The members of the Mennonite Church of Chaguanas took Christmas to the streets of the area around the church. Bags of gifts and New Testaments were given to families who live in New Settlement. There was an air of excitement as the decorated pick-

up truck moved through New Settlement, bearing the sign "The Mennonite Church of Chaguanas—Merry Christmas to the New Settlement—God's gift to our community." Pastor Ganesh Kalloo, Risha Kalloo, Sunita Benny, Sheriza Sookharry, Loren & Earlene Horst, and others shared the joy of Christmas with everyone they met.



Photo by Steve Dintaman

A memorable Christmas Eve

By STEVE AND BETSY DINTAMAN

VMM/VMM Mission workers

We celebrated a memorable Christmas Eve in the home of an LCC student in Klaipeda (in photo). The traditional Lithuanian Kucios meal consists of 12 dishes, no meat, but lots of fish dishes as well as poppy seed milk and a drink made of thickened cranberries. We

were honored to be included in this special evening. We joined others from our church, International Christian Fellowship, in a program and Christmas meal for the homeless at the Salvation Army. On Christmas Day we and other expatriots and international students gathered for (the less traditional) groundnut stew and an evening of games and fellowship.



I have an amazing amount of power

By SARA HALTEMAN

Manager of Artisans' Hope, one of the shops at Harrisonburg Gift & Thrift

I have an amazing amount of power. I am in the top 5% of the wealthiest people in the world, and I am a young woman who loves to shop! This means the world will cater to my demands. Basic economics has taught me that companies have to supply what I demand in order for those companies to make money. So what am I demanding? Do I want clothes, food, and furniture at the lowest price possible? Well sure I do. Who wouldn't? BUT would I still want those items at the lowest price possible if it meant they were made in a way that compromises things I believe are important and in a way that negatively impacts people and the environment around the world? That's a tough question. I always thought that being a good steward of my money meant buying more for less, or buying the least expensive items. I'm not sure that's true anymore. If the least expensive item is made by a man working in dangerous conditions who doesn't even get paid enough to support himself much less his family, am I still being a good



steward by purchasing that item? I don't think I am.

Instead, I've decided to purchase items that I know are positively impacting people in my world and that don't hurt the environment. And that is POWERFUL. If everyone decided to do the same as I am doing, then farmers in Ghana, factory workers in Guatemala, and employees at Wal-Mart will be treated with respect by receiving the pay and benefits they deserve. And the environment will benefit too—all because I demanded it.

So, what do you buy that has a positive impact on your world, and what negative things are you supporting? Think about it. What will you do with your power?

A revival for Recovery of Hope program

By KATHRYN REXRODE MOATS, Ph.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Recovery of Hope, an intensive marital therapy program, has a long history of working with individuals experiencing significant marital distress. Typically, this kind of treatment lasts four consecutive days. During this time, the individuals reside with a host family so they can be away from their usual environment. The first two days involve assessing the couple informally and formally through the use of psychological assessments. Time is taken to develop a genogram to explore family-of-origin dynamics that may be impacting the couple. In addition, the individuals may be taught necessary skills such as active listening, assertiveness, and problem solving. The final day is spent developing a contract describing the specific changes the individuals need to make to improve the functioning of the relationship.

In the past, Family Life Resource Center was one of the organizations in the U.S. providing such treatment. With a new Director (Mark Sensabaugh, L.P.C. & L.M.F.T.) and psychologist (Kathryn Rexrode Moats, Ph.D.) who both have an interest in marital therapy, the two plan to revive the program so such services can be provided locally. For more information, call (540) 434-8450.

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FEBRUARY 2009

Connections

Prayer Calendar

Sunday

1 In Trinidad, Pastor Ramesh and Sis. Babes Jaimani and sons give leadership to Carlsen Field Mennonite Church meeting on Sunday morning. The Maraj family assists. Pray for this fledgling church.

8 Shalom Mennonite Church in Termini Imeresi, Italy, needs to find a new worship location which provides more space. Pray for Pastor Pino Arena and his wife, Rosana, as the congregation envisions the future.

15 Nancy Marshall, Orange Walk, Belize, is sorting out some details about the meeting place of the Jesus' Deaf Church and the structure of the gathering. Pray mightily for God to give her wisdom in making these decisions.

22 An Albanian couple and Paul & June Kropf are beginning a new church in Tirana, Albania. Pray that many people will be attracted to the love of Christ and gather to worship in this new place.

Monday

2 Pray for good points of contact and safety as bikers Jon Spicher and Lars Akerson (Bike Movement Americas) journey toward Mennonite World Conference, Paraguay. Thank God for many great contacts in Virginia.

9 In Southeast Asia, Skip & Carol Tobin connect with people who are forming small businesses that employ local workers. Pray that God will give clear vision for achieving the goals before them.

16 This month, Mike and Lori Beinlich and three daughters from Pa. are serving at the Maranatha School for the Deaf, Jamaica. Pray that God will bless their connections with the students and staff.

23 Pray for perseverance for the Heatwole Moore family and their partners in Deaf ministries in Staunton, Va. Some significant obstacles in their work with Deaf youth in recent months have been challenging.

Tuesday

3 In South Asia, Michael & Ruthy and daughter are living with a local family, learning the culture and language and seeking God's direction for further ministry. Pray that God will guide each step.

10 Traci Stoltzfus, *tram*Send participant, invites prayers for her new work in a children's library in Santiago, Guatemala. She teaches English to children who come.

17 Today Willard & Eva Eberly are flying to Bari, Italy, after a 2 1/2 month home leave. They shared in numerous churches and met many of their supporters. Thank God for their continued zeal for spreading the Good News.

24 This evening, a VMM Celebration of Missions event is held at Stuarts Draft Mennonite Church. If you have registered, come and see how God is calling and sending people throughout the world.

Wednesday

4 This evening, a VMM Celebration of Missions event is held at First Mennonite Church, Richmond. If you have registered, come and see what God is doing in the world through VMM personnel.

11 Steve & Betsy Dintaman interact with students and faculty members at LCC International University daily. Ask for the mind of Christ as they converse in class and casual settings.

18 Pray for the Inter-Cultural Organic Fellowship, the name now being used for the church planting in Charlotte, NC, as they continue to build a strong core group under the leadership of Pastor Pablo Fernando Amoretti.

25 Chris & Melody Riddle, Bari, Italy reach out to their neighbors and to their sons' school teachers. Pray for them that their daily contacts will show the difference Christ makes.

Thursday

5 Allen Umble is the source of encouragement and good counsel to many young people near and around Lushnje, Albania. Pray with Allen for wisdom to say the "right words at the right time" to his friends.

12 One morning each week, Richard Keeler and a church brother distribute tracts in Sangre Grande, Trinidad. Pray that the Holy Spirit uses the messages to interest people in learning more of the Gospel.

19 Pray for Steve Campbell, *tram*Send participant in Montenegro as he takes the EMS Course "The Church in Missions" on-line as a part of his *tram*Send activities.

26 Preparations for the annual Women's Day banquet in Italy are underway. This significant event in the evangelical church brings unbelievers to this welcoming group. Pray for every part of this.

Friday

6 Michael & Marcia Hall and children from Pa. are living and serving in Trinidad for 3 months for music and worship training. Thank God for their availability and ask for Him to bless their contacts with church members.

13 The VMC retreat for pastors and youth workers opens today. Pray for all who attend and for Michele Hershberger, resource person, that all will be enriched by this gathering.

20 Remember Laura Green, *tram*Send participant, in prayer as she works in Termini Imeresi as a volunteer with a program for people with disabilities.

27 In Trinidad, Paul & Evelyn Kratz respond to events and questions that come their way each day. Pray that God will guide their interactions with the people they meet.

Saturday

7 Thank God for the ministry of Ron Copeland in northern Harrisonburg. Today at mid-winter VA Conference delegate assembly The Early Church is being received as a congregation within Virginia Conference.

14 Today the board of VMMissions gathers for a quarterly meeting. Pray for the vision and decisions made by the board to further the work of VMM and the Kingdom.

21 The VMC senior high retreat is in full swing at Highland Retreat. Pray for Seth Hanke, resource person, musicians, and all attending, that the "Pause" will yield time for reflection and growth.

28 Send up a special prayer for Crystal and Christopher Lehman studying at Black Forest Academy. Thank God for this opportunity, and ask Him to pour blessings on them.

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by

Rawley & Esther Shank

who know the power of prayer,
and urge us to pray without ceasing.

(I Thessalonians 5:17)

"And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 (NIV)

Announcements

A women's community Bible study is being offered at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church using Beth Moore's recently released study *Esther: It's Tough Being a Woman*. The study will be held Tuesdays for 10 weeks, March 3 - May 5, 2009. Morning sessions are from 9-11 a.m. Evening sessions are 6:30-8:15 p.m. Registration and a \$20 member book fee are due by February 8 to Jeannie Smith, (540) 564-0332. Come join your sisters (and bring a friend) as we seek God's plan for each of our lives "for such a time as this!"

Men's Retreat Please join us at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center for Men's Retreat, March 6-8, 2009. Our speaker will be Dr. Myron Augsburger.



Myron will be speaking on the topic of Christ-like Masculinity, looking at how men interact in

community and family relationships, exploring the true meaning of love within the context of family life, and discussing Christian discipleship. This weekend will include inspired teaching, meaningful worship, and fellowship designed to recharge your spiritual batteries. For more information check our website www.wcrc.info or call (866) 566-WCRC (9272).

The story of **Pax, a Mennonite Central Committee service program** which ran from 1951 to 1975, will be shown at Court Square Theater in Harrisonburg on Sunday, February 8, at 3 p.m. The documentary premiered on Hallmark Channel November 23, 2008. The event is being coordinated by CrossRoads and is sponsored by various local Brethren and Mennonite churches, individuals and organizations. The cost for the event is \$5 for adults; students and children are free. (See www.vbmhc.org for more details.)

CrossRoads (Valley Brethren-Mennonite Heritage Center) **will hold its annual dinner and meeting** on Friday, Feb. 6, at 6 p.m., at Bridgewater Church of the Brethren, 420 College View Dr., Bridgewater, Va. Tickets are \$20 per person. To register, call (540) 438-1275 by Monday, February 2, and mail in your deposit. The speakers will be Larry Glick as Alexander Mack and Gerald Brunk as Menno Simons. A picture show will highlight activities for 2008 and CrossRoads President Robert Alley will share a vision for the remainder of 2009. Snow date is February 13. (info@vbmhc.org, www.vbmhc.org)

Highland Retreat will be holding it's Annual Auction at at Shady Oaks next to Weavers Mennonite Church, Saturday, February 28, 2009. The auction benefits the youth camp summer program at Highland Retreat. New merchandise, artwork, comforters, ethnic meals, baked goods, theme baskets, coins and a vehicle are items typically for sale. For information or to make a contribution to the sale call 540-852-3226 or e-mail info@highlandretreat.org. An up-to-date list can be seen on Highland's web site. www.highlandretreat.org

Thank You!

Our celebrations of the coming of Jesus into our world may have ended at year's end but the difference His coming makes continues on in 2009. Your generous giving continues to make it possible for us to share the message of Jesus in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, in Asia, Northern Europe, Central America and here at home!

In the midst of a global recession, we thank God and all of you—individuals and congregations—for your commitment to support the work of the Kingdom. Your giving has been faithful and steady for which we are profoundly grateful!

Janet Stutzman
Director for Development
Virginia Mennonite Missions

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