

Marie Shantal's story: a very bad day in Haiti

As told by JOE ARBAUGH
to Galen & Gloria Lehman

Eight-year-old Marie Shantal went to school just like the other children in her middle class Haitian neighborhood on that fateful day in January 2010. But, as she walked home from school with her friends, the ground began to shake. Buildings fell around her. Thousands of people ran, screaming, into the streets! She got separated from her friends as she ran home, in fear, to see her mother and baby brother. She arrived to find that her house was only a pile of rubble. She frantically screamed for help. Her desperate cries were drowned out by the deafening after-shocks and the cries of injured people and mourners. So, she dug through the piles of debris searching, hoping. Finally, late in the night, she dropped to the ground in exhaustion, and cried herself to sleep.

The next day, she was awakened by her uncle who confirmed her fears—her mother and brother were dead. His house had crumbled also, leaving him with three young children. He asked Marie Shantal to help him care for them. They walked with the throngs of people carrying a few things they had recovered, toward some open land outside the city, where it was rumored that they could get tents, blankets and food.

Now, almost two years later in the tent city, Marie Shantal spends hours each day going to a contaminated stream to bring water back for her uncle and the children, who she cares for, to the best of her ability. An aid agency said they need to boil the contaminated water if they don't use bottled water, but they cannot afford to buy water. She sends the children to gather twigs, but they are scarce, because there are hundreds of thousands of people



A Haitian tent city, many of which remain nearly two years after the devastating earthquake in January 2010. USG photo.

living in this new slum. So, she only has enough twigs to cook with and is unable to boil the brown water.

Although the day of the earthquake was a very bad day, now every day is a bad day for Marie Shantal and the rest. There are many similar stories like Marie's unfortunate situation. They know that there is more ahead of them like each day they've experienced so far.

The Haiti Project Management Group which works under the umbrella of Virginia Mennonite Missions is organizing well-drilling projects in various places in Haiti. A drilling rig has been purchased and retrofitted and two operators are hired and trained. One of the drillers, Jean Pierre, was killed in a car accident in September. Another person needs to be hired to fill this role. Recently Joe Arbaugh, Sr., Stuarts Draft, and John Schaefer, Linville, visited a well-drilling site and found the work progressing normally.

Penny Power funds collected at the 2011 Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale benefited sand dams in Tanzania and well-drilling in Haiti, both projects dedicated to providing clean water for persons in desperate need. The total funds of \$36,677 surpassed the goal, and now VMM has \$18,000 to use in drilling wells for clean water. Thank you for your strong support of *Penny Power* this year!

Community members enjoy safe drinking water at a well drilled in Haiti by the Haiti Project Management Group. VMM photo



What are you waiting for?

During Advent, we focus on expectant hope for our Messiah's birth. We remember how the Israelites waited for deliverance. We acknowledge our own brokenness and need for a Savior. And throughout these December weeks, we yearn for the joy that comes with Christmas.



Sarah Bixler
Conference Coordinator

As a child, I looked forward to reuniting with distant cousins, Grandma's Christmas dinner, and opening gifts. During college, I anticipated the academic break and chance to return home. As a mother, I understood Mary's uncertainty while being pregnant over the holidays. And most recently, the Christmas season has presented an opportunity to reflect on God's unfolding call on my life.

Advent reminds us that waiting is part of the rhythm of life. The Bible recounts many long periods of waiting: being slaves in Egypt, captives in Babylon, oppressed in one's own land. Throughout these hundreds of years, God's people longed for the promised Messiah. As they waited for deliverance, it was easy to lose sight of God's promise and feel powerless.

Two years ago, I was recovering from a cesarean section and ordered to wait six months until beginning another pregnancy. Because our baby had not

survived, this required wait seemed cruel. It was easy to focus on what I was still waiting for. But when I embraced the life that I was given, I discovered everything God wanted to do in my present circumstances. That summer, our family spent precious time together, growing closer and creating new memories.

Although we are keenly aware of waiting during Advent, we must recognize that our Messiah is already here. Jesus lives today and walks among us through the Holy Spirit. We do not postpone acts of love, justice or mercy just because we are waiting for Christ to return. Anabaptist Christians place strong emphasis on Jesus' Sermon on Mount, claiming these teachings for today and not just a glimpse of future glory. Although the tasks are challenging, Jesus calls us to usher in God's kingdom here, now.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."
Matthew 6: 9b-10

What are you waiting for?

Rhoda Folmar hired as VMC Bookkeeper



Virginia Mennonite Conference recently hired Rhoda W. Folmar as quarter-time bookkeeper. Rhoda brings over 10

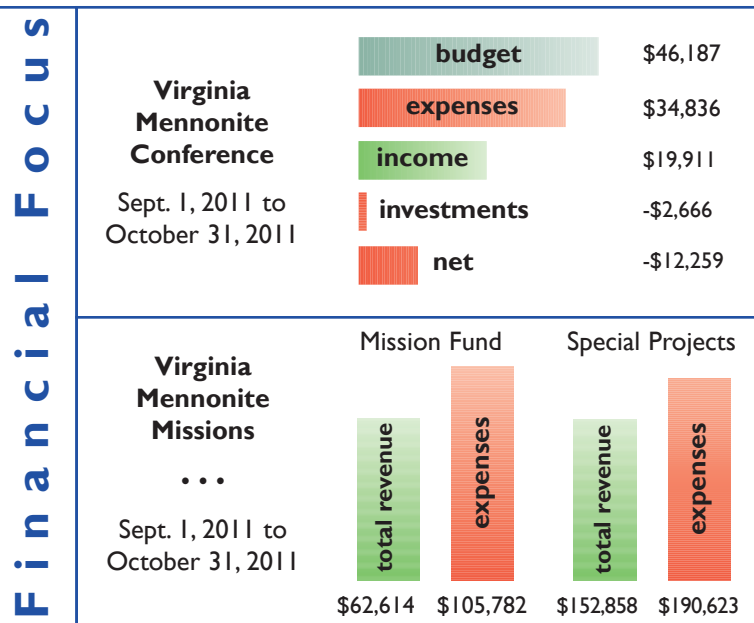
years of bookkeeping experience with non-profit agencies and currently works as office manager for Central Valley Habitat for Humanity. She lives in Harrisonburg, VA and attends Covenant Presbyterian Church. Rhoda and her husband, Bill, have two young adult children.

Janet Blosser now VMM field director for Italy



Janet Blosser began a part-time role as VMM Field Director for Italy on September 1. She also serves on the pastoral staff of Weavers

Mennonite Church. Janet & Floyd and family lived and served in Sicily, 1982-1997. She has also been a VMM Board member. Willard & Eva Eberly are completing their final term as VMM workers in Italy.



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Change of command

By LOGAN MEHL-LAITURI

After the towers fell a decade ago, I reenlisted and was deployed overseas with an infantry platoon to Operation Iraqi Freedom. I saw things nobody should ever have to see. After coming home, war infected my mind. Images and memories from Iraq haunted my dreams and invaded my thoughts. I began experiencing symptoms of post traumatic stress. By trading my humanity for nationalism, I had begun down the descending spiral of violence which threatened to corrode the very fabric of my moral character. I had sacrificed more than I bargained for: a lifetime of mental health and well-being forever crushed by the heavy yolk I bore as a combat soldier. And I was not alone in my despair. Veteran suicides are higher than our nation has ever experienced, ending their own lives at a rate of 17 every day.

But out of the parched soil of my soul sprouted a seed of hope. In the midst of night sweats, hyper-vigilance and invasive



memories, I found Jesus. Or rather, He found me and issued a new set of marching orders. As a Christian soldier, I was called to embrace, not eviscerate, my enemies—to lay down my rifle and pick up my cross.

Infantry units have a name for when an old commander makes way for a new one: “Change of Command.” In the church when our heavenly Commander replaces our earthly ones, we call it baptism—a time of rebirth in which we pledge a new allegiance to obey God rather than men. The Church calls this change of life-direction *metanoia*, or repentance, for which baptism serves as the outward expression.

Following the path of enemy-love in a world of enemy-fear never goes over well. My infantry captain accused me of helping

the enemies of America. My pastor suggested that I was abandoning the women and children I swore to protect as a soldier to militant Muslims. On a mental status evaluation a psychiatrist diagnosed me with “Adjustment disorder,” having failed to adapt to the military (after more than five years on active duty and three combat decorations). Go figure. Jesus didn’t say it’d be easy.

When I was reborn in 2006 on July 4th, I entered a new kind of company, one that fights not with rifle and sword, but with faith, hope and love. My infantry commander was not happy to hear that I could never again pick up a weapon while I bore my cross, but I had to obey my heavenly Commander rather than the officers appointed above me.

Excerpted from Logan’s recent sharing at “Jesus, Bombs and Ice Cream” in Philadelphia. Logan also presented to youth at the MCUSA convention in Pittsburgh.

the exchange: God’s love proclaimed, shared and lived out

By CHRIS SCOTT

the exchange

There is a new church work emerging in the Winchester, Va., area at the northern end of the Conference. With leadership from Chris and Heather Scott among others, a new missional engagement has begun.

A group has begun meeting over coffee and meals, asking questions about the nature and meaning of church. In imagining new ways of incarnating truth and new contexts in which to express Christ, there is growing excitement about the chance to form a new community of Christians, fully engaged in the Biblical world as well as the cultural landscape.

The group gathers each Sunday evening for a shared potluck meal; then chairs are pushed back and all engage in a time of worship, prayer and engagement with the Bible. Communion is celebrated

each evening helping us to remember the story we are a part of—a Servant King who invites us to love, accept and help people see God at work around them.

the exchange is to be a place where God’s love is proclaimed, shared and lived out in community. We are a holistic missional Christian community desiring to worship God by caring for those left out of society and gathering to encourage each other in following God in the way of Jesus.

The group is in the very early stages of discussion of where we sense God leading us. We have had dialogue over the future and the hope of the church. We know we are called to be sent into the world; we do not expect people to come to us. We want to live as the people of God among the people God loves.

Parents of mission workers meet for support and prayer

In September, 12 parents of missionaries gathered in the pavilion of Sparkling Springs outside Harrisonburg, Va., for a potluck supper, fellowship and prayer.

Over supper, parents got acquainted with each other. Later, around a circle, parents shared about their children’s work and ministry. It was awesome to see how a small group of parents has influence in many countries in the world! The group prayed for each worker after the parent described their work and stated prayer requests. There were some deep God-moments during that time!

If you have a child serving in a Christian mission placement, you can receive newsletter updates from Parents of Missionaries, a national network www.pom.net and receive invitations to future gatherings in the local community. Send your contact information to Gloria at gloria.lehman@vmmissions.org or (540) 434-9727 or (880) 707-5535.

The difference between hope and despair: refugees in Ecuador

By **DAVID SHENK**

Serving in Quito, Ecuador with Mission Network/VMM

As I was enjoying the company of a few Ecuadorian friends in late June, my cell phone unexpectedly rang. The anxious Colombian voice on the other end explained the details of a dilemma that has become a common story since I began working with the Colombian refugee population in Ecuador in December of last year: a family of four, internally displaced due to paramilitary death threats, tracked down in their new location, urgently wanting to flee Colombia, frightened and disoriented.

The voice was Raul, desperately seeking advice regarding the border crossing and the inevitable beginnings of a new life in Ecuador. Two days later, our church

door bell rang and I opened the door to greet Raul, his wife Alejandra, their 4-year-old daughter and 8-month-old son. As I helped them carry their few belongings inside, they explained to me that they had gotten my phone number from the pastor of a Colombian Mennonite Church they had attended following their internal displacement in Colombia. After a long discussion about their situation, I accompanied them in a crowded bus to the government offices to process their paperwork and to a shelter where they spent their first seven nights in Quito.

Since their first day in Quito, life hasn't been easy for this family. They continue to live in fear and face persecution, yet they carry with them a glimmer of hope. Last Sunday in our church, we celebrated Raul and Alejandra's son's first birthday,

which also marked the four month anniversary of their arrival in Ecuador. Despite the fact that during this time they had to change apartments three times and Raul is working his third job, they attend Sunday morning worship services and participate in church activities. As Alejandra expressed in church one Sunday with tears in her eyes, their hope lies in the love they have found in the Mennonite church both in Colombia and now in Ecuador.

Let us not underestimate the power of Jesus' example to love and accompany those in need. For those who experience this love, it's the difference between hope and despair, the difference between living alone and living in a community of solidarity.

Service sows passion to see German youth grow in God

By **MARSHA KANAGY**

Serving in Germany with VMM/EMM

In reflecting over this past year on my mission-intern assignment in Kaiserslautern, Germany, I have been astounded in God revealing more of the passions and skills He has placed in me. I have the opportunity and blessing to live with 9 Germans currently between the ages of 16-19 years old. The youth live here for a one-year volunteer discipleship program.

As my German language ability has greatly increased, I can now relate to the youth on a personal and deep level. This current team arrived not even two months ago, and I have been awed by God's work in me to them. Where I once used to be a helpless baby-chick linguistically, I am now a sort of spiritual mother to these youth.

Our weekly Monday seminars, Bible studies, evening conversations around the table, and worshipping together has brought up past struggles and desperations from the youth. I have had the opportunity to listen, walk with, and counsel, to a degree, many of these youth. They have

become dear to my heart and I am very passionate about seeing them grow in God's healing, freedom and love.

I also love to worship and am given weekly opportunities to lead worship with our youth and church body on Sundays. In surrendering all of ourselves through worship, we discover God's freedom, healing and reverent love for us. Being immersed and working in German culture, I know their cultural mindset and need for structure, order and tremendous control. Only in giving it all up, however, can we really be open to His love and freedom. I am passionate about encouraging this freedom in worship.

In discerning my future, I feel God calling me to stay here for a while longer.



Marsha (center) with youth she relates to in Germany. Courtesy of author

I am passionate about seeing discipleship growth in the German youth, building deeper relationships with my classmates who I learned German with, and being a part of God's ministry in this city.

I will be returning to Harrisonburg, Va., in December 2011 for a short while before returning to Kaiserslautern for a longer period.

I thank you and ask for your continued support!

IBA develops theological leadership in Hispanic community

By **BYRON PELLECCER**
Pastor, Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista

The *Instituto Bíblico Anabaptista* (Anabaptist Biblical Institute, IBA) is a theological program with Mennonite Education Agency that seeks to respond to local congregation training needs at both the certificate and diploma level.

At Mennonite Hispanic Initiative (MHI) and Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista (IDA), this theological curriculum from IBA, has become the official leadership development training program for our Hispanic community.

Currently, MHI/IDA is training twenty Hispanic students from three different local congregations in the Harrisonburg

area. We have six students from IDA, seven from a non-Mennonite church and another seven from a congregation seeking affiliation with the Mennonite Church.

We have two official recognized tutors from IBA central office and three MHI/IDA mentees who are seeking a Masters Degree at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. Our mentees, in response to God's call, are pursuing training in Christian Ministry and becoming IBA tutors for the Harrisonburg Center.

Students and tutors meet in EMS classrooms on Mondays from 6-8 p.m. Two courses currently taught are

Anabaptist Theology by Marvin Lorenzana and Anabaptist History and Theology by Byron Pelleccer.

Our vision is to respond to God's call to accompany our Latino community in its pursuit of theological training in the Harrisonburg vicinity. Our growing Latino community is in need of training in its context and in its language. There are not many Spanish theological programs available; consequently, MHI/IDA through the IBA Harrisonburg Center is attempting to respond to this need. Your prayers and support are welcome in order to continue responding to our call.

Extreme Makeover theme sparks renewal at Italian retreat

By **EVA EBERLY**
VMM Mediterranean Regional Assistant

The annual retreat/vacation for Italian Mennonites took place this summer on the "heel" of Italy among the pine groves that shade the Ionic seacoast. Participants convened from extreme ends of Italy, from Turin in the north to Sicily in the south, with most coming from central Italy—representing various church affiliations.

Following prayer time each morning, we enjoyed a free, relaxed schedule until 5 p.m., when we gathered together with great expectancy for the highlight of the day. Celebrative worship and music expressed joyful gratitude stirred up by daily Bible studies around the theme *Extreme Makeover*:

- "From Condemnation to Grace"
- "From Darkness to Light"
- "From Death to Life"
- "From Religion to Relationship"
- "From Bitterness to Forgiveness"
- "From Loneliness to Fellowship"

God used His Word and personal testimonies that vividly illustrated each presentation, to touch and renew us. One participant spoke for everyone when she

commented, "I saw myself in every presentation!" Another person shared her faith story publicly for the first time, although a believer for many years. A teenager openly committed her life to Jesus and requested baptism.

Workshops were a new, much appreciated feature this year: chorale with Maurita Eberly and Jonathan Greco; "Dangers of the Internet" with Nicola Cippone; "Handcraft artistry" with Mara Colonna. Christian films and soccer games added variety to after-dinner, late-night activities. Spending an entire week together encourages unity and creates indelible memories of fun, praying and sharing together, giving and receiving counsel.



Smiling faces mirror the joy of retreat. Courtesy of author

Again this year, persons participated who haven't yet experienced spiritual transformation. May they desire *Extreme Makeover* in their lives and join us in experiencing grace, light, true life, forgiveness, fellowship and relationship found only in Jesus!

NOTE: This annual event not only ministers physical and spiritual refreshment but also offers opportunity for service, discipleship and gift development.

Bike-n-Walk held in October at WCRC

By **MARCIA A. ROBERTSON**

Marketing & Development Director
Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center

Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center's Bike-n-Walk on October 22 was a successful day of fun, fellowship and fundraising. This first-time event replaced WCRC's Pedal the Peninsula which was always held in May.

Fifty-five participants either walked or cycled along the Virginia Capital Trail near the Chickahominy Riverfront Park to raise money for WCRC's Annual Fund. Although pledges are still being received, net proceeds are expected to total approximately \$7,000. Next year's Bike-n-Walk is planned for Saturday, October 20, 2012.

A servant's heart

By **VONDA BRYANT**

WRCS Development Director

Warwick River Christian School's eighth grade students and Spanish teacher Leyda Vazquez were surprised and blessed when they delivered 555 pounds of food to Denbigh United Churches Outreach (DUCO). The eyes of the DUCO volunteers filled with tears as students unloaded the boxes of food on behalf of WRCS, Inc.

A tour of the barren pantry moved students to compassion for the needs of the

As 2011 ends, WCRC is looking ahead to next year. The theme for Kaleidoscope Camp 2012 is "The Way to Grow." Scripture will focus on the parable of the sower and the seed. Campers will be challenged to evaluate the "soil" of their own lives as they seek to grow spiritually.

Kaleidoscope Camp's Night Owl session broke attendance records in 2011 and a strong turnout is expected for 2012. Night Owl camp lets teens stay up until midnight or later and then sleep until noon. The week is filled with exciting nighttime activities.

Kaleidoscope Camp will be housed in Laurel Cottage and the new Cabin Village. Although originally constructed for use by youth, the village has become popular

organization. They asked, "Do you accept young volunteers?" "Do you provide hot meals for clients?" "Do you have a refrigerator to store meat?" They learned that DUCO cannot provide meals and do not have a refrigerator due to the lack of funds.

The bus ride back to school was full of desire to raise money for a refrigerator. Students brainstormed about ways they could help. They wanted to reach out to others in need by cooking for DUCO clients or by volunteering at a soup kitchen. They said, "It will be cool if we can get them two refrigerators."

Part of our spiritual mission at WRCS,



Cyclists enjoy biking the Virginia Capital Trail during WCRC's Bike-n-Walk on October 22. Courtesy of author

with adult groups as well. The flexibility of the central Commons building allows groups of up to 60 people to have both meeting and dining space in the same building.

WCRC is also exploring new program options in 2012 including a historical tour of the area. Details will be available as plans solidify.



Inc. is to serve others. In the words of Miss Vazquez, "I believe that God used this trip to stir up the gifts and talents inside of our students, while also showing them that He is our provider. The experience blessed me to see the students think with a servant's heart."

Congregational Resource Center

Preparing the Way for Advent & Christmas

What are your resource needs for this season?

* A preaching series for Advent?

—Try Leader magazine or "From Humbug to Hallelujah! A biblical series with key illustrations from 'A Christmas Carol'"—pastor's manual

* Christmas dramas and programming for children, youth, family night?

—Try "Joy to the World," a variety collection of six Christmas programs for the church family, or "Christmas on Stage," an anthology of royalty-free

Christmas plays for all ages, or "The Fumbly Bumbly Angels," an instant Christmas pageant

* Banner patterns and worship center ideas?

—Try "Raise the Banners High" or "To Crown the Year: Decorating the Church Through the Seasons" or "Advent & Lent Activities for Children: Camels, Carols, Crosses and Crowns," using symbols and explaining their meaning

* Books to use in Children's Worship or for story moments?

—Try "The ADVENTure of Christmas" or "The Quiltmaker's Gift"

* Movies and books for those who will visit your home during the holidays?

—Try the REST of the 3,000+ items in the Congregational Resource Center!

The room is open from about 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Director Linda Alley is often available from 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. to assist you in searching for just the right materials.

Contact info: crc@emu.edu or 540.432.4219

Location: Eastern Mennonite Seminary Building, 1181 Smith Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA

DECEMBER 2011

Connections

Prayer Calendar

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by

Richard & Wanda Good

in appreciation for the faithful congregation and the dedicated leadership of our pastor at Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church where we have attended for 56 years.

"Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.
Malachi 3:1b (NIV)

4 Remember Janet Blosser, who beginning in September, serves part-time on VMM staff as mission administrator for the Italian field.

5 Please pray for Randy & Lea Ann Coblenz as they continue to invite unchurched people into small structured groups in James City County.

6 In *Perspectives* (H'burg) this evening, Richard Showalter from Pa. concludes the class with *World Christian Partnerships*. Students will learn about mobilization into the world in the way God has called them: a go-er, a send-er, or a pray-er.

7 Tomorrow Galen & Gloria Lehman and Larry & Natalie Beiler go to visit with Rodney & Eve Knepp, VMM *Prayer Senders* in Jamaica, and church leaders. Thank God for the Knepps' service at Maranatha School for the Deaf.

11 The annual Christmas program and celebration is held this afternoon at the Maranatha School for the Deaf, Jamaica. Ask God to bless the students and staff as they perform and then receive gifts from their sponsors.

12 Please join pastor Byron Pellecer in asking our Lord that empowering leadership will be raised up for the Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista youth group in Harrisonburg.

13 Mauricio Chenlo requests that we pray for ability to discern best ways to respond to different needs as MC USA conferences and churches are catching on to the Planting Peace Churches agenda.

14 Will you pray for workers to serve in Kosovo? Many relationships have been established through the fresh milk plant and these can be strengthened with follow-up contact and on-going communication and care.

1 "Pioneer Church Planting" is the topic of the *Perspectives* (H'burg) presentation this evening. K. Michener will discuss the dynamics of 'de-westernizing' the Gospel in various countries. Pray that all will hear the clear direction of the Spirit in this class.

8 VMC's Conference Council officers meet this afternoon. Thank God for the committed and conscientious leadership of Shirley, Mark and Sherwyn, and invite God's continuing guidance.

15 Christmas is a significant season for sharing the meaning of the Gospel. Pray a blessing over missionaries and churches who purposefully plan celebrations that include un-churched friends and family.

2 As the Gifts Discernment Committee seeks candidates for VMC secretary and other positions, pray that the Spirit will prepare hearts of persons whom God is calling to serve.

9 This month Centro Koinonia and other Italian churches, distribute the much appreciated "page-a-day Scripture calendars" in market places and to friends, neighbors, and relatives. Pray for this important project.

16 In Belize, Nancy Marshall is preparing for a meaningful Christmas service with the Jesus' Deaf Church. All ages sign songs, read Scripture, and act out the Bible story, which creates new insights. Thank God for Nancy's ministry!

3 Today Mark & Sarah Schoenhals take the Thai language competency test in Bangkok, Thailand. They ask for us to pray that they will do their best on the test; they have studied and practiced very hard in preparation.

10 Staff members Aaron Kauffman and Ken Horst are visiting VMMissions' workers in Albania, December 10-16. Your prayers for wisdom and direction are invited during this time.

17 Pray that the Lord will give understanding to a couple with Charlotte Anabaptist Fellowship as they seek to befriend and share the Gospel with 1,000 Turkish nationals living in Greater Charlotte, N.C.

18 Pray for Pastor Pino & Rosanna Arena at Shalom Mennonite Church, Palermo, as they disciple a group of new believers coming from difficult past experiences. They also train young leaders to assist them in ministry.

19 In Albania, Norma Teles tells children in the Joshua Center the Christmas story, gives gifts from their sponsors, and welcomes their mothers for fellowship. Ask God to give her energy and for open hearts for those who attend.

20 Valentina, a recently baptized youth from Centro Koinonia, Italy, is living for some months with a German Mennonite Brethren family to learn German. Pray for positive experiences in church and youth group there.

21 Michael & Ruth and 3 children are settled into life in South Asia, greeting neighbors, worshipping with their ministry team and managing the small business which provides jobs in the community. Ask God for His strength on them today.

22 Remember the missionaries who won't be able to spend Christmas with family. Pray that meaningful celebrations with the believers and friends where they serve will fill the void.

23 Pray for safety and relaxation for those who are traveling to Christmas gatherings. May these holidays be occasions where God's grace and love permeate the fellowship.

24 "For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6

25 *Holy Child within the manger, lead us ever in your way, so we see in every stranger how you come to us today. In our lives and in our living give us strength to live as you, that our hearts might be forgiving and our spirits strong and true.*
Sing the Story #28

26 Pray for Grace Schrock-Hurst as she interacts with the urban poor in Indonesia, especially during this time of oppression, including destruction of homes and the upheaval of lives. Ask God to empower her daily.

27 Hosanna in South Asia asks us to praise God that the women in a nearby town have a great spiritual hunger and are persistent in prayer. Pray that God will deliver them from generational anger and bitterness.

28 Invite God to form the hearts and minds of youth who attend the Winter Youth Retreat at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center held December 28-30.

29 Remember persons who have lost loved ones this year. As families and friends gather for the holidays, the absence of these loved ones is often poignant. Let survivors know you recognize their loss.

30 Ganese Gunpath, overseer for MCTT (Trinidad), and his family are visiting in the US for a few weeks and connecting with his mentor, Ben Risser. Pray that they will take many good learning experiences home with them.

31 Today is the 40th wedding anniversary of Conference Minister Owen Burkholder and his wife, Ruth Ann. Praise God for this example of Christ-like mutual submission in a lasting marriage relationship.



Connections (USPS 007-205)
 Virginia Mennonite Missions
 Virginia Mennonite Conference
 901 Parkwood Drive
 Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2498

Announcements

CrossRoads Events: Old-Fashioned Christmas, Dec. 9-10, 7-9 p.m. Experience an old-fashioned Christmas as you stroll down a candlelit pathway at CrossRoads, 1921 Heritage Center Way, Harrisonburg! Step into the nostalgia of the 1800s as costumed villagers get ready for Christmas in rooms decorated with traditional holiday décor. As you visit each building, you will enjoy harmonious music, holiday treats and warm conversation in scenes reenacted from bygone days. Save the date and time and plan to attend on December 9 or 10, 7-9 p.m. Fee: \$25 for a family of 4 or more, \$10 per adult, \$5 for children 6-12. Children under 5 are free.

The fifth **Sarasota Mennonite Male Voice Festival**, with Lloyd Kauffman, director, will be held Sunday, February 12, 2012, Bahia Vista Mennonite Church, at 6:00 p.m. Rehearsals dates: January 26, February 2, and February 9 from 7:00-9:00 p.m. and all-day Saturday, February 11, 8:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with final rehearsal Sunday afternoon, February 12, 2:00-4:00 p.m. All men who enjoy singing to God's glory are invited to participate in this thrilling event. Any questions or requests for music in advance, contact Lynn Miller, (941) 724-4057, almeng1@verizon.net or Lloyd Kauffman, (941) 379-3390.

Don't miss **School for Leadership Training** at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, January 16-18, 2012. Noted author and biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann will be the keynote speaker and 15 workshops will explore the theme "God and Mammon: Reframing Stewardship Amidst Scarcity, Abundance and Conflict." Visit www.emu.edu/slt to find out more and register.

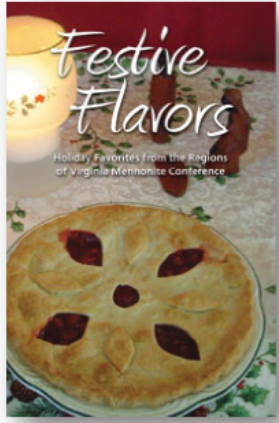
Discover God's great earth and enjoy Christian fellowship by joining "Wonders of Australia and New Zealand," February 20-March 5, 2012. Sites include the Great Barrier Reef, Sydney, Christchurch, Mt. Cook, Queenstown, Auckland, Rotorua, and much more. Contact Ed Bontrager at eebontrager@comcast.net or (540) 438-8304 for more information.

Festive Flavors: Holiday Favorites from the Regions of Virginia Mennonite Conference **Order Form**

56 attractive pages of recipes, photos and stories of VMC's diverse geographical and cultural flavors.

Name _____
 Address _____

 Congregation _____
 Number of cookbooks _____ x \$10 each = _____



Mail this order form, along with your check made payable to "VMC" to:
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Wishing you the Lord's many blessings in celebrating the birth of our Savior and a New Year in which to bring our treasures to His Kingdom.

The staff of

Adoration of the Magi, ancient Roman etching