

Lezha Academic Center opens for first school year

By **DON STEINER**
Chair, LAC Board of Directors

The sounds of school ring loud and clear this September at Albanian Christian School's Lezha Academic Center (LAC) in Lezhe, Albania. The city is located along the Adriatic Sea in the northwest corner of the country at the foothills of the Albanian Alps. Virginia Mennonite Missions has had a presence in this city of approximately 35,000 since the early 1990's when Sam Scaggs first proclaimed the gospel message there. Klementina Shahini, executive director and visionary for Lezha Academic Center and an appointee of VMM, provides major leadership in shaping this new high school, an affiliate member of the Mennonite Schools Council.

Picture this reality: a refurbished hotel of three floors with four neatly-arranged classrooms furnished by German Mennonite Schools of northern Germany, a spacious library, and a first-class computer center. Also picture 35 highly motivated Albanian students actively studying mathematics, science, history, English and the fine arts all taught with a biblical worldview by a well-equipped staff of six



A greeting line at the entrance of the Lezha Academic Center included Dini Shahini, Don Steiner, and teachers Jessica Hedrick, Kristina Reinhardt, Kaitlyn Bontrager and Caleb Benner, who serve through *transSend*. Photos by Ken Horst

and soon to be seven VMM teachers, five of whom are VMM *transSenders*. Rigorous academics within the context of Christian education is the hallmark of the school.

Lezha Academic Center was launched on September 2 with an inaugural ribbon cutting ceremony attended by approximately 150 persons. The audience included students and their parents, Lezhe city dignitaries, and a delegation of twelve from the US representing VMM, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Mennonite Education Agency, the school's board of directors and friends of the school.

One of the major challenges of Lezha Academic Center was to secure the official license from the Albanian Ministry of Education. Just a few days before the ribbon cutting

ceremony and much to the relief of the Board of Directors, the license arrived signed by none other than Sali Bersiha, the Prime Minister of Albania. Marvin Slabaugh, a LAC board member, noticed that the official license is numbered 606. How fitting, since this is the page number of the well-known hymnal anthem *Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow*.

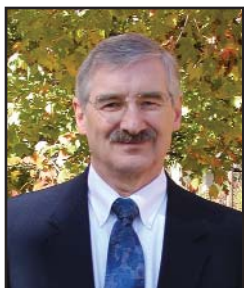
Why start a Mennonite-affiliated high school in an international setting? Education is not just next to ministry—it is ministry itself! We do well as we enter this second decade of the 21st century to consider the potential of education as a way to raise up leaders steeped in Christian values to serve in their communities, the church and beyond.



Those involved with making LAC happen: visionaries, prayer teams, board members, teachers, and staff members.

The way of wisdom

A leader does what needs to be done. Is that a wise saying? Would it make it into the 'Leaders Book of Proverbs?' It summarizes what I have learned about leadership. It assumes there is a vision toward which a group should be going. It presumes that the leader knows the current context well enough to take the next appropriate step.



Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

So, what is the next appropriate step for Virginia Mennonite Conference? Another way to ask it is *what is the way of wisdom for VMC?*

I would like your help. Below you will find two streams of things that can shape the future of VMC. Please reflect on them and send a sense of what you are hearing about the next steps to me at owen.burkholder@vmconf.org.

Stream one: hopeful signs in VMC. At Assembly, we hosted a session guided by Ervin Stutzman on *Investing in Hope*. One of the questions was: *What is the most hopeful sign of God at work that you have seen in Virginia Mennonite Conference in the past year or so?* Diane Bowman has helpfully collated the responses. Most often mentioned was church planting. Also affirmed was the involvement of younger people in the conference; work

with Hispanic and other immigrants; broadly based leadership within the conference; cooperation among church organizations—particularly between VMC & VMM. The testimonies, teaching, and worship of this assembly were additional sources of hope.

Stream two: Purposeful Plan from MC USA. At the Pittsburgh Convention, we were introduced to seven priorities for the denomination. Without numbering them (no attempt just yet to prioritize the priorities!) they were listed as: *Christian Formation; Christian Community; Holistic Christian Witness; Stewardship; Leadership Development; Intercultural Transformation; Church-to-Church Relationships*. (The entire *Purposeful Plan* can be accessed by going to mennoniteusa.org; clicking on the Convention tab; then clicking on the Delegate Info tab).

How shall VMC combine these streams? Which of the signs of hope shall we deliberately develop? Which of the priorities shall we give our attention to in the next several years?

Thanks for helping discern the way of wisdom for VMC.

Thank you!



Virginia Mennonite Missions

Called. Sent. Transformed.

We at VMissions thank God for you and your congregations who share so generously in sharing the Good News here at home and in our broader world. Our fiscal year has just ended. Many have experienced the transforming power of Jesus because of your gifts and prayers. Thank YOU!

Janet Stutzman, *Director of Development*



Virginia Mennonite Conference
A conference of Mennonite Church USA

Thank you to each supporter for your prayers and gifts throughout our last fiscal year!

Your generosity helps make God's kingdom a reality among Christ's followers who are united as Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Sarah A. Bixler, *Conference Coordinator*

* Preliminary figures, at time of publication data was incomplete for closing the fiscal year.

Financial Focus	<p>Virginia Mennonite Conference</p> <p>Sept. 1, 2010 to Aug. 31, 2011*</p>	<p>budget \$293,022</p> <p>expenses \$286,501</p> <p>income \$268,794</p> <p>investments \$17,003</p> <p>net -\$704</p>											
	<p>Virginia Mennonite Missions</p> <p>...</p> <p>Sept. 1, 2010 to Aug. 31, 2011*</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <th colspan="2">Mission Fund</th> <th colspan="2">Special Projects</th> </tr> <tr> <td>total revenue</td> <td>expenses</td> <td>total revenue</td> <td>expenses</td> </tr> <tr> <td>\$628,723</td> <td>\$636,995</td> <td>\$1,386,735</td> <td>\$1,326,662</td> </tr> </table>	Mission Fund		Special Projects		total revenue	expenses	total revenue	expenses	\$628,723	\$636,995	\$1,386,735
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Transforming our congregational story

By DAVID BRUBAKER



The congregation of some 150 members possessed a proud history and a legacy of strong lay leadership. Five years earlier the congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary and simultaneously dedicated a new sanctuary. But while many had hoped a new sanctuary would lead to greater growth, attendance numbers continued to sag. Conflict also erupted between supporters of the young pastor of three years and his opponents. After numerous attempts to resolve the conflict at various meetings, the pastor and Council chair finally agreed to call in an outside consultant experienced with congregations undergoing change and/or conflict.

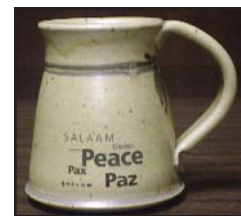
The consultant began her work with a series of listening sessions, starting with the pastor and Council chair but including other individuals and small groups. The most striking finding in her later report was that conflict focused on the pastor was

not unusual for this congregation. On at least three earlier occasions a pastor left “abruptly” due to conflict over his or her leadership. The consultant explained that pastor-focused conflict was common in pastor-sized congregations like this one, but perhaps this time the congregation could honestly examine its pattern of such conflict. The consultant recommended that all in the congregation be invited to participate in a “history boarding process.” This featured large sheets of paper in the front of the room with the first dated “1905” (the founding of the congregation) and the last sheet showing the date of the event itself. Many rich stories emerged and summaries were noted on the sheets stretching through the years.

Two hours later, story-telling was complete up to the present. The consultant invited participants to scan the sheets and observe any apparent patterns. “Commitment to hospitality” and “loving service” were the two primarily positive themes, but several present also commented that “every decade we seem to run off a pastor.” This realization led to a second open meeting to discuss their culture and pattern of tense congregation-

pastor relationships.

During that meeting, several members openly acknowledged that one of the congregation’s greatest strengths (its legacy of strong lay leadership) had also become a liability. One well-respected lay leader tearfully acknowledged that he had succumbed to a power struggle with the current pastor over a worship issue, and that he would now commit to a more cooperative relationship. The pastor acknowledged his own missteps in the change process and embraced the offer of a more cooperative relationship. The consultant sat back in her chair, grateful to God that the congregation was now transforming its own story.



David, of Park View Mennonite, received this year’s peace mug for 25 years of providing consultation, mediation and training services for congregations and organizations dealing with change and/or conflict.

Photos courtesy of EMU/Nicholas Detweiler-Stoddard

Hurricane Irene hits WCRC

By MARCIA A. ROBERTSON
WCRC Marketing & Development Director

While Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center gladly welcomes over 10,000 guests each year, one visitor, Hurricane Irene, was very unwelcome on Saturday, August 27. Fortunately, the strong winds and heavy rain from the massive storm did minimal damage to the retreat center. Electricity was lost at 3:00 pm on Saturday afternoon and was not restored until the following Friday. Several trees were toppled including three which blocked the entrance road but these were cleared on Sunday morning. None of the buildings were impacted. The staff and their homes were also spared any signifi-

cant injury or damage. The retreat center is thankful to God for providing safety during this time.

WCRC would appreciate help with storm clean-up of debris and downed limbs along the trails. Volunteers should contact Bob Briscoe at (757) 566-2256 or wrcr@wrcr.info to schedule a time to come by. Additionally, a wood-cutting day will be planned in the coming weeks to remove larger trees.



Executive Director Bob Briscoe drags limbs off the entrance road at WCRC following Hurricane Irene.

Photo courtesy of author

Schoolhouse becomes house of worship

By SARAH BIXLER
Eastside Church

As students geared up to go back to school, a VMC church plant in Harrisonburg made the schoolhouse rock. Rock for Jesus, that is.

The evening of August 21, nearly 1,000 attended the Back-to-School Bash at the local public middle school, the meeting place of Eastside Church. They enjoyed food, local Christian musicians, and the Sidewalk Prophets, winners of the 2010 Dove New Artist of the Year award. It was completely free to attendees, thanks to the outreach-based financial vision of Eastside Church and numerous local co-sponsors including Eastern Mennonite University.

For Eastside Church, the event flowed from its mission to seek Christ, serve the community together, teach others and join in worship. Event organizer Kinley Simmers explained, "The vision is to chal-

lenge the youth to lead through Christ as they go back to school." For Sidewalk Prophets lead singer David Frey, a former middle school teacher, the location was extra special. And the response was overwhelming. Young people came from across the city and even the state to participate in the worshipful evening.

Concert publicity from the local TV station and newspaper is giving Eastside a recognizable face in the community. Eastside's reputation is growing from other involvements, too, such as taking food to local families, community work projects, eating lunch with students, and sponsoring college students doing summer service. People who don't attend Eastside are contacting pastors Peter Eberly and Matt Schwartz, saying, "Do you still help people?" and "I hear you support people who want to serve God."

The Sunday following the concert, Eastside's attendance jumped from 80 to 185. Most of these new attendees were



David Frey, lead singer of Sidewalk Prophets, sings at a free concert organized by Eastside Church.

returning college students, familiar faces that make up a large portion of Eastside Church. But the congregation hopes that its efforts to be a Christ-like presence in the community, including transforming a schoolhouse into a house of worship each Sunday, is pointing many people toward Jesus.

Hellmanns commissioned as itinerant missionaries in US

By VERNON MOYER
3:16 Christian Community Church

On Sunday August 7, 3:16 Christian Community Church in Hickory, N.C., held a commissioning service for John and Maxie Hellmann, who have a call to take a message of repentance to the nation as itinerant missionaries. They believe the only hope of our country's future is a return to God. Theirs is not a political agenda, but a call for a spiritual awakening.

The morning worship was led by the 3:16 CCC worship team as directed by guest Zack Lenz, John & Maxie's son, along with his wife, Ashley. Skip Tobin VMM USA Ministries Director, brought the morning message challenging the church to get involved with persons in our local community by being the kind of friends that open doors to share the Gospel. The message was followed by words of encouragement and prayers by the Hellmanns' Mission Support Team and family members.



Maxie and John Hellmann at their commissioning at 3:16 Christian Community Church. Vernon Moyer looks on. Courtesy of author

The mission will be named "heal our land ministries." John and Maxie have an ear to hear God's voice directing them. They envision speaking in churches, one-on-one witnessing, ministry to the lost and hurting, and giving out Bibles where needed. They are in the process of divesting themselves of the stuff of life so that they can be free to travel in a motor home

to the places where they will be led.

In 2008, Maxie, following a call from God, visited 83 churches in the Hickory area to take a word from the Lord to the pastors. That word was, "Life as we know it is about to change. If there is anything you need to repent of, anything at all between you and God, you need to take care of it. And call your congregation to do the same." This message was taken to heart by most of the pastors she was able to talk with. This journey has been chronicled in a book she wrote called *From*

our Wicked Ways. This message has expanded to reach out to the whole nation.

Members of the Mission Support Team are John & Susan Myer, Jim Young, Ed Godshall, Chuck Hostetter, and Vernon & Sandy Moyer. They ask you to join them in praying for John & Maxie as they call our nation back to God. Contact John and Maxie at Lordhealourland@ymail.com.

Humility and growth: *Partners in Mission* turns 25

By LARS ÅKERSON
Partners coordinator

When I began working at VMM one year ago, the organization was in the midst of routine transition. A new strategic plan was in development, and several program directors were moving on from their posts. Like a plant entering a new season, the ongoing process of growth was being felt more acutely, in exciting and invigorating ways.

It was as I studied the program I had been asked to coordinate that I learned *Partners in Mission* was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. So, amidst the ongoing work of coming alongside *Partners* groups and hosts, we decided to step back. We needed to take time both to celebrate our history and to look forward to how God is calling us into the future as a program.

Through this process, it became clear how important the program's name is to its identity. *Partners in Mission* is about partnership. Its core purpose is to build relationships within the global church that help both the host and the guest to collaborate in God's reconciling activity through mutual service and learning. God has a big mission, and we want to participate in whatever way we can.

Even more, we hope we can be a conduit to a better understanding of the bigness and the immediacy of that mission. We recognize that we are not at its center, but we have been invited to participate. We know going with the grain of God's universe takes more than lip service and requires better of us than our well-intentioned acts. God's activity surrounds us, our job is to recognize and respond in a way that joins prayer and action, body and soul, the global and the local.



A *Partners in Mission* work camp for youth, June 1986. This was one of the first *Partners* teams. File photo

Partners invites and engages small groups to follow Jesus Christ by practicing the reconciling work of God together through service and learning in a global context.

This robust response is at the heart of the *Partners in Mission* program. This is why we are invigorated by our history and passionate about our direction into the future. With our partners, we are developing trips that integrate worship, and mutual service and learning. We do this in ways that disciple individuals, build community, and edify the Body of Christ.

As we move into fall, we are celebrating a successful season with *Partners*. In this issue of *Connections*, you will read reflections from a number of our five summer teams. One of these groups spent time with people struggling with poverty and homelessness in rural Appalachia. Another rekindled a relationship with a fraternal congregation. Another laid the foundations for future partnerships. Still another responded to a congregation's

desire for musical training and pastoral accompaniment. Yet another built inter- and intra-denominational relationships, and wrestled with the implications of their choices regarding stewardship of Creation. All of them sought to practice and pay attention to God's reconciling activity in the world. I hope you will read their reflections.

Looking forward, we are already planning several opportunities for churches, families, youth groups, and individuals to connect through *Partners in Mission*. Pay attention for more information about a group to Israel and the Palestinian Territories that will explore historical and current contexts through home stays, hiking the Jesus Trail, and volunteering at Nazareth Village. Watch for updates about local *Partners* opportunities within migrant and refugee communities, and among those struggling with addiction and homelessness in Harrisonburg. Keep your eyes open; God's mission is big, and we are partners in it.



Partners pedals to Pittsburgh

Nels Åkerson (left) and Tyler Groff cross the Potomac River on the way to Mennonite Church USA convention in Pittsburgh.
Partners photo

By **PARTNERS BIKERS**
Partners bike team to Pittsburgh

It was a hot day in the City of Bridges as the group wound their way along bike paths and city streets. They were following a couple they met on the Three Rivers Trail a couple miles earlier who had offered to lead them to the Convention Center in downtown Pittsburgh and were telling them about the city's Fourth of July fireworks show coming that evening. Like the thousands of other Mennonites converging on the city for their denomination's annual meeting, this band of pilgrims had traveled with belongings in tow for a week of gathered worship, a celebration of memory and solidarity as members of God's family. Unlike others arriving by highways and skyways, however, these six youth and young adults had covered nearly 300 miles since leaving Harrisonburg, Virginia, by bicycle five days before.

Weighted with an assortment of panniers and trailers, the group had carried all the necessary food and gear for the four-night journey, but by the end of the first day, they realized they had rationed more than they needed. It wasn't their fatigue that told them, but rather the reception they received in Romney, West Virginia, when they arrived.

In the weeks leading up to the trip, they had made contact with the Church of the Nazarene and were prepared to pitch tents and make supper in the church yard in a Romney neighborhood. When they pulled in however, their welcoming com-

mittee swept them and their bikes into the fellowship hall, threw two pizzas in the oven, and told them to make themselves comfortable for the night.

Chatting with the pastor, a city councilor, a wildlife census taker, and other parishioners that night, the riders were immersed in the language of gratitude and impressed with the value of vulnerability. The scene played out again the next night, when they were offered showers at the Catholic church followed by ice cream from a church member's stand in Meyersdale, Pennsylvania. The words "I need help," and "Thank you," they began to recognize as basic vocabulary for life with others and with God.

As they followed the country roads of West Virginia to the C&O Canal Towpath to the Great Allegheny Passage Trail, conversations grew like the wild carrots on the trailside. From essential matters like *What's our cycling team name?* and *If you were to check one book out from the library right now, what would it be?* the group's conversations looked toward the convention theme of reconciliation through Christ. *How do we recognize God's reconciling activity in the world?* they asked. *How can we get in on the action? What needs to be reconciled to God within us? How does our culture of rapid transit and constant communication tempt us to forget our human limits? How do we recover our shared identity with all that God has called good?*

Questions brewed more questions, and conversations rippled through the

pack as long as their blood sugar stayed up. (If it dropped, the questions changed to Gorp, Gatorade, or lunch?) The group acknowledged that their responses were partial at best, but they felt confident that the journey they were on was an important part of their answer. Perhaps it was.

As the group arrived at the convention center, they thanked and said goodbye to their guides. After 290 miles of traveling at a human pace, they at least thought their team name might be The Reconcyclers. And they knew they were grateful.

Virginia youth build relationships with Jamaica community

By **MARK HODGE**
Mountain View Mennonite Church

On July 5, fourteen senior high youth and four adult leaders from Mountain View Mennonite church, in VMC's Southern District, left the mountains of Virginia for the mountains of St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. We were going to do a work project in the Top Hill community, where Rodney & Lindsey Nice were serving as missionaries with Virginia Mennonite Missions. Rodney & Lindsey

Youth build relationships continued on page 8

Educator lays a foundation for new partnerships in Israel, Palestinian Territories

By **ERIC TRINKA**
Nazareth & Palestinian Territories group leader

Partners teams have traveled to the Palestinian Territories and Israel over the last five years to volunteer at Nazareth Village and teach English to local children. These groups have traveled the land, stayed with host families and learned quite a lot about Arab & Israeli history, life and culture in the Galilee.

Through these successful trips, it became apparent that in order to strengthen the trip experience, we would need to continue developing some aspects of the trip. As a Partners team, there was a need to establish stronger and longer-lasting connections between those traveling and those hosting. With this in mind, we began to look for new ways to serve, connect and enrich the lives all parties involved. And so I returned to Israel & the Palestinian Territories with a shared vision to reorient the current program towards the educational goal of thoroughly understanding the first century times in which Jesus lived. Such an experience would allow participants to draw connections between Jesus' life in an occupied territory of Rome with the current Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

I have long been an advocate of place-based learning. As a Social Studies

educator, I know there is nothing that creates a stronger educational bridge than the chance to learn about a historical event in the actual place where that event occurred. Despite changes in the landscape over the millennia and the effects of wars, colonization, industrialization and globalization, Israel and the Palestinian Territories maintain a striking capacity to remain timeless and relay an image of life in the first century. Carefully using this setting and juxtaposing it with the current situation, one can create many teachable moments that bring the teachings of Jesus to life in an exciting and meaningful way.

Upon my arrival, I was reminded of the less-than-perfect aspects of life in a police

Carefully using this setting and juxtaposing it with the current situation, one can create many teachable moments that bring the teachings of Jesus to life in an exciting and meaningful way.



On the Jesus Trail overlooking the Sea of Galilee. Courtesy of Eric Trinka

state that I often purposely forget. The security lines, searches, interrogations and brief detainments make it difficult to see an end to the militancy and subjugation. On the other side of a not-so-peaceful wall, homelessness, hunger, unemployment and immobility reminded me how easily one can lose hope when it seems that all is lost. But it is here in this place that I once again was privileged to experience the tenacity of believers who desire to deconstruct this oppression and create something hopeful, just and life-giving in a place where apartheid, destruction, hopelessness, faithlessness and so many other pessimistic perspectives often take center stage.

Here I worked with brothers and sisters who long to inform the outside world of the injustices that occur in this place. I rekindled my understanding of what it means to be a member of the family of Christ as we created itineraries, hikes, service assignments, lectures and reflections for individuals seeking to understand the life of Jesus more fully and to apply the truth of reconciliation made clear through His life to their own. As I think ahead to next year's Partners team, I am filled with hope because I know that the message of Jesus is alive in the place where it began and ready to be heard with revitalized ears yearning for a greater understanding of their own place in that story of redemption.



Youth from Mountain View Mennonite Church on the playground in Jamaica they built. Courtesy of Mark Hodge



Rodney Nice (at right in baptismal pool) led the baptism for six Deaf believers along with lay leader, Paulene Bent. Photos courtesy of author.

Lives challenged and changed in Jamaica

By **RODNEY NICE**

Mt. View (Va.) Mennonite Church

Top Hill, Jamaica, is in need of a set-apart bunch of folks to infuse some radical living and witness for Christ into its societal structure. This is, at least, part of God's mission there and for the past two years our family was honored to be a part of it.

Serving in Jamaica turned out to be much more intense than we had imagined. We filled most of our time working at Maranatha School for the Deaf. We also took a more central role at Ridge Mennonite Church than anyone had intended. In addition, friendships with

Rodney, Lindsey, Levi, Isaac, Moriah and Judah Nice.



persons in the community, such as Selena, Romario, and the Clarke family translated into large chunks of time spent in fellowship.

Now, add: raising four children, home-schooling two, maintaining a house and vehicles, working to sustain a poultry endeavor, and keeping up with supporters from home. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining about how busy we were; we intended to work hard during those two years. And there were times of respite—a trip to YS Falls or Treasure Beach, but most nights we went to bed exhausted.

In retrospect, I can't say that we did everything right and with perfect success, but we witnessed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On more than one occasion I was reminded that Jamaicans don't put a lot of stock in promises a person makes, they'd rather see a person's actions match the things they profess. Even when we made mistakes, they understood the intention of our hearts.

Regrettably, the façade of Christianity in Jamaica masks the real problems facing the spiritual lives of believers and nonbelievers there. Many Jamaicans can recite numerous scriptural verses but are unwilling to submit to the Bible's authority in their lives. Such ingrained issues are not simply "fixed" through the short two-year term of one Christian family. We experienced many frustrations, but ministry for Christ is measured by obedience to what God calls one to, not effectiveness or efficiency.

Youth build relationships continued from 6

built strong ties with the community, and had a vision to provide a playground for the children.

Our youth group accomplished the playground project including a slide, swings, climbing wall, gym bars, hopscotch, in four long days, along with building three thatch huts that can be used for reading camps, and a few other projects around the community.

While this project was worthy of a trip and fulfilling, it was just icing on the cake. Rodney & Lindsey, prior to serving in Jamaica, had been the youth leaders at our church. They had strong relationships with this youth group, and the youth desired to participate in their ministry in Jamaica.

What neither we as leaders and planners nor the youth anticipated was the rich fellowship with the Deaf community of Top Hill. There were many local Jamaicans who helped during the day, and some of them were deaf. Once the work day was over, they returned to the community center where we stayed, eat dinner with us, and hung around afterwards. The Mt. View youth played card games, communicated, and learned sign language from them, enjoying the fellowship.

By the end of the week, not only did most of the team know the sign alphabet and could communicate some, but they had built friendships with their Jamaican brothers and sisters. In the coming years, these experiences will be the most valuable "things" that they brought back from Jamaica.

Our family saw lives challenged and changed. New believers made commitments for Christ, Christian brothers and sisters asked to be baptized, and the pews in church seemed more consistently full towards the end of our time there. However, we know that much of the change we may not have seen. The Bible teaches that there are many workers for God, one plants the seed, another waters it, another feeds it, and still another harvests it, but it is God who makes it grow.

The Nice family returned to Virginia in July 2011.

LEZHA ACADEMIC CENTER

A vision comes to life

By **DAVID JOST**
Anticipated *transSender* 2012-2013

This summer, I was blessed with the opportunity to teach English in Albania at Lezha Academic Center. I came in with little sense of what to expect, only having met the school's founder Klementina Shahini once, but I have returned excited about what I saw, and I'm eagerly looking forward to working upon my return in January.

A vision for the school has been on Klementina's heart and mind for many years, but it has only recently come to fruition. The school is located in a beautiful, breezy, former hotel that holds both classrooms and rooms for the Shahini family and some teachers. Over my short month, the students steadily increased in number, trickling in each morning to study

English as they prepared themselves for rigorous, quality high school instruction—all in English, a unique opportunity in Albania. The students were strikingly disciplined and hardworking, and they and their parents clearly appreciate deeply the chance to develop minds and language skills.

The opportunity to serve and build Christ's kingdom is even more exciting and important, though. At LAC, we will be able to care for students and nourish their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual growth, rather than chasing profits as Albanians have come to expect from their educators. Klementina and her husband Dini emphasize relational evangelism,



Students and teachers at the first awards ceremony at LAC. David Jost is on right. Courtesy of author

-serving the community to mirror Christ's love and build connections through which we can witness to the Gospel. This kind of witness resonates with an Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, and I know first-hand from my time at Eastern Mennonite High School how wonderful this kind of high school is for kids. I'm so excited about the chance we have to build a new institution and serve in Lezhe, and I look forward to seeing God work through the school to touch the community there.

Many days of dreaming and planning, hard work and faith

By **CALEB BENNER**
VMM *transSender* teaching at LAC

It was great having all the board members and other supporters of the Lezha Academic Center (LAC) gathered together along with the staff of LAC to open the school. We heard stories from many people about how God has been moving in Albania and how this dream of starting a school took some miracles to get to this point. The culmination of hard work and faith that was represented during the ceremony was also affirmed by the school finally receiving the official license.

It was very meaningful to meet those who have been so involved in this project, to hear their stories, and to celebrate with them. After the ribbon cutting, each of the teachers welcomed guests into their classroom to answer questions and reveal the quality facility that has been built here in Lezhe.

Thank you for all of those who are supporting us as we begin the school year on September 12. There are still many needs that require attention before we can

run this school effectively including computers, a copier and resources. Please continue to support this school so that we will be able to fulfill God's mission in this time and place.

By **JESSICA HEDRICK**
VMM *transSender* teaching at LAC

It is hard to believe that we have been in Albania for almost six weeks! It seems like just yesterday we were in Harrisonburg for our commissioning. Every day here has been a busy adventure, but our busiest days were definitely the weekend of September 2-4.

On September 2, we celebrated the opening of Lezha Academic Center with a ribbon cutting ceremony. After 5 long weeks of preparation, it was exciting for us to finally see everything come together. On the morning of the ceremony, the courtyard was packed with people from all over Lezhe, as well as friends and board members from the US. Even the vice

mayor came to show his support. The local news team was wandering around as well, trying to capture some of the excitement for their nightly newscast.

Most of the morning was spent shaking hands and making speeches, then it was time to officially open the school. Everyone crowded around the door to watch as Don Steiner and the Vice Mayor of Lezhe cut the bright red ribbon. Students, parents, family, friends, and neighbors poured into the school to celebrate with food, music, and friendly conversation. Throughout the afternoon we had the opportunity to speak with students and parents, answer questions, and show off our classrooms. Everyone was eager to see the inside of the school and their smiles and wishes for success were abundant.

After so many days of dreaming and planning it finally happened. We are ready to start school. Now we look ahead to the next ten months with confidence; certain that with God's help, this will be an amazing year.

Growing the CrossRoads ministry

By J. ALLEN BRUBAKER
CrossRoads Marketing Director

Since opening to the public in 2006, the number of visitors to CrossRoads is approaching 9,000—from across the U.S., Canada and the world, but also from next door.

This spring the Center hosted five field trips for 315 students, teachers and parents to experience life in bygone days in the Shenandoah Valley. Five elementary schools will bring a similar number of students, teachers and parents on field trips this fall.



While here they will turn a freezer and taste homemade ice cream, hand crank water from a cistern, drub clothes on a washboard, hang them up to dry, use hand tools and make a name tag, shake cream into butter and eat it on a soda cracker, attend a one-room school, etc.

The Center recently also saw work teams lay logs for the 1829 Weaver-Brunk House, add a metal roof to it, and begin the chinking. Ervie Glick laid the stone walls for the 1795 David Heatwole Cobbler Shop, and the Breneman-Turner Mill hosted eight open house events.

Consider attending the Nov. 13 lecture on “Stories of Women during the Civil War,” the Dec. 9-10 old-fashioned Christmas tours along lighted paths and the Dec. 16-17 Christmas dinners (see www.vbmhc.org for details).

Stop by the CrossRoads campus soon to meet our new Executive Director, Joan Daggett, who began her



new assignment on September 19. She would love to share with you her vision for growing the ministry in the coming years.



Roberta Webb Center strives to model Jesus' character to children

By ANGELA LAWSON
Director, RWCCC

Roberta Webb Child Care Center is located in the basement of Immanuel Mennonite Church. RWCCC is dedicated to providing affordable, licensed, quality child care and preschool in a safe and nurturing environment, serving diverse families in our neighborhood and city. At RWCCC, we strive to enable each child to learn all he or she can in every aspect of development: intellectually, emotionally, socially, academically and creatively.

Our model of care is based on Jesus' own care for the children when he states, “Let the little children come to me.”

Roberta Webb Child Care Center is the only daycare and preschool in the area that has a sliding fee scale that is also Christian based. We proudly offer weekly Bible story time, prayers before meals, and teach the true meaning of Christmas. RWCCC embraces the ‘whole child’ approach; increases collaboration of family, church and community; and builds on proven success that leads children and families to being healthy, informed and kindergarten ready. In the midst of this recession, Roberta Webb Child Care Center is pressing forward and making a real difference for children ages 2 - 5.



OCTOBER 2011

Connections

Prayer Calendar

Sunday

30 Pray for Pastor Ganes Kalloo as he and his wife Risha give leadership to Charleville Mennonite Church, Chaguanas, Trinidad. May the church grow and thrive as they reach out into the community.

2 Ask God's Spirit to continue inspiring youth to shape and share their faith stories, following the VMC Middle School Retreat in late September.

9 Jesus' Deaf Church in Orange Walk, Belize, holds lively worship services on Sunday morning. Pray for the young woman who recently returned after being absent for months. Nancy Marshall is the pastor.

16 Pray for Donovan Matland who leads the Bethel Mennonite Church in Mandeville, Jamaica, and also preaches once a month at Ridge MC on the Maranatha School campus. May he experience God's insight and wisdom.

23 Intercede for the few believers around Bari, Italy—for boldness in sharing about God's transforming work in their lives. Pray that a "people movement" will be ignited!

Monday

31 Grace Schrock-Hurst prays that God will sustain her and her team each day and protect them against discouragement. Let us join in that prayer.

3 October is Pastor Appreciation Month; lift up your pastor(s) in prayer in a special way. Consider how you might show your gratitude in a tangible way for their spiritual leadership.

10 Pray for the staff at Joshua Center (kindergarten for Roma children) and Lezha Academic Center (newly opened Christian high school) in Albania where education is highly valued.

17 Thank God for Andrea & Sheila Crocivera, *translators* in 2010, who opened a Youth for Christ center in Palermo, Sicily. May their work among youth continue having eternal impact and results.

24 During the next two weeks, Willard Eberly teaches Romans in the discipleship school in Palermo, Sicily. Pray for spiritual insights and guidance as he opens the "treasures" of this marvelous book of the Bible.

Tuesday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by

Evonne Showalter

in honor of the marriage of Gerald & Evonne Showalter on October 21, 1955, and in loving memory of Gerald who died on March 29, 2011.

4 A baptismal celebration is planned this month at Centro Koinonia (Italy). Pray the Spirit's special anointing on those making this public commitment of faith in Jesus.

11 Pray for Mark & Sarah Schoenhals in Det Udom, Thailand, as they anticipate the birth of their second child and relate to the Life Enrichment Church.

18 David Shenk, *translators* in Ecuador, relates to Colombian refugees, assisting them in making a new life, and listening to their life journey stories. May God grant him grace in every situation.

25 Michael, Ruth, Lia, Gabriel and new daughter, Eden Hope are returning to South Asia this week after being on home leave. Pray for them to have safe travel and to get settled into life again in Metal City.

Wednesday

"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."

1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

6 Lawrence Yoder instructs the *Perspectives* (H'burg) class tonight on "The Expansion of the Christian Movement," showing how the Gospel surged through peoples and countries in the past with insights for today.

13 "Eras of Mission History & Pioneers of the Christian Movement" is the topic that Loren Horst is teaching tonight at *Perspectives* (H'burg). Ordinary people have done extraordinary things through Christ!

20 "How Shall They Hear?" is the topic of *Perspectives* (H'burg) this evening. Skip Tobin instructs the class on how to incorporate relevance and yet avoid syncretism. Pray for students' new understanding.

27 In *Perspectives* this evening, Joe Steinitz instructs the class on "The Task Remaining," explaining "unreached people groups." The imbalance of mission resources and allocation is addressed. How do we respond?

Thursday

7 Pray for God's guidance as the officers and representatives of VMC's Conference Council meet this weekend.

14 Invite God's presence among the many alumni and friends who will gather at the homecoming celebrations of Eastern Mennonite School and EMU this weekend.

21 VMC's Faith and Life Council meets this weekend. Pray for our church leaders as they listen for God's leading and discover how God's Spirit is moving within our conference.

28 Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center's Music Weekend starts today. Praise God for the gift of music and for those who lead us in glorifying God through music.

Saturday

1 The Virginia Relief Sale attracts people from far and wide. Thank God for this way of raising funds for relief and development work around the world. Praise God for the many volunteers who work hard to make it happen.

8 Richard & Margaret Keeler visit and pray with church members of Sangre Grande Mennonite Church in Trinidad on Saturdays. This is encouraging as new believers walk in faith. Pray for the Keelers' health and strength.

15 New Song Anabaptist Fellowship is celebrating their first congregational retreat this weekend! Join in prayer with Pastor Basil & Diane Marin and the leadership for spiritual refreshment and encouragement for all who participate.

22 Join with Pastor Juan Carlos Malvaez and the Manatíal De Vida Church as they ask for God's guidance in finding land to build their own church building

29 May our Lord give wisdom to the new leadership team of the Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church as they search for a pastor. Their previous pastor, Chaiya Hadtasunern, is now studying at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.



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

Announcements

The **Chuck Wagon Gang** will perform in concert at Park View Mennonite Church, October 23, at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$16 and \$18 at the door. They can be obtained at Park View Federal Credit Union, Park Gables, and Red Front. This will benefit the residents of VMRC, toward a wheelchair accessible bus to transport residents as needed, through the Auxiliary.

Highland Retreat's Annual Fall Banquet will be held Tuesday, October 25 at 6:30 p.m. at Eastern Mennonite High School. All who are interested in the ministry of Highland Retreat are welcome. To make your reservation call (540) 852-3226, e-mail: info@highlandretreat.org or sign up by Oct. 17 online at www.highlandretreat.org.



A wonderful **Women's Weekend Retreat** is planned for women of all ages Oct 28-30 at Best Western Plus Waynesboro, with Pastor April Gunderson as speaker. For reduced retreat and hotel fees, registrations need to be made by Oct 10. Registration brochures are available at VMC and can be downloaded at vmconf.org/related/mwv.htm.

CrossRoads Events:

Bus Tour—The CrossRoads Heritage Center's bus tour on October 22, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m., will explore Civil War campaigns in the Valley. Bus Fare: \$70 each, \$120 per couple, and \$60 per senior, CrossRoads member or repeat tour registrants. Register before October 3. Begins and ends at CrossRoads, 1921 Heritage Center Way, Harrisonburg. Paige

Kauffman and Dale McAllister will lead the tour. Contacts: (540) 438-1275, info@vbmhc.org, www.vbmhc.org.

Fall Lecture—Kirsten Beachy will share the women's story during Civil War days on Sunday, November 13, 4 p.m., at the Mt. Pleasant Church of the Brethren, 2788 Taylor Spring Ln., off Boyers Road, Harrisonburg, Va.

Participate in the 2011 Apple Drying Project. The 33rd annual apples-for-relief project sponsored by the Southeastern Mennonite Conference churches is scheduled to begin Monday, September 26. The project is scheduled to run three weeks, ending October 14, with apple cutting Monday through Friday evening each week. The project goal is to dry 500 bushels of apples.

Many different Mennonite groups are planning to assist. VMC churches are scheduled for Monday, September 26, and Monday, October 3.

The peeler will be provided, but peeling knives and pans should be brought. Suggested starting time is 6:30 p.m. The project will be held at the Hinton Mennonite Relief Center in Hinton, Va.

If you have any questions, contact Branson Good (810-6312), Daniel Good (810-1704), or Matthew Knicely (879-2298). Although the specified groups are responsible for the evenings designated, anyone is welcome to help any evening.

Come enjoy the fellowship while helping those who are less fortunate!

There will be a **Festival of Praise** concert in the auditorium of Eastern Mennonite School on Sunday, November 6, at 4 p.m. The offering will benefit ministries of Virginia Mennonite Missions.

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.



Call for Recipes: Submit your best recipes of the Christmas season to *Festive Flavors: Holiday Favorites from the Regions of Virginia Mennonite Conference*. This collection features foods that bring church, family and friends together throughout VMC in the joy of Christmas. Your specialties are needed!

Send your name, congregation, city and recipes to sarah.bixler@vmconf.org or 901 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Or fill out the online recipe form at www.vmconf.org. Include stories and food photos if possible! Submission deadline: November 1.

NEW entrance at
Parkwood Drive door
 for offices of
 Virginia Mennonite Conference
 and
 Virginia Mennonite Missions
 MAX offices are now at Rt. 42 entrance