

Marine, Mennonite, missionary Couple's journey to 'repent and believe' turns their world upside-down

By ADAM STRODE

People often tell my wife and me that our story is incredible. From our perspective, however, our tale is simply what it looks like to come face-to-face with the Gospel. It is characterized by Jesus' words recorded in Mark 1:15: Repent and believe.

I was an atheist from a broken home who responded to Jesus out of a place of ideological conviction. Jeanette was influenced by her Catholic upbringing, but was not truly introduced to Jesus in an intimate way until she met me—some six months after my conversion.

Despite the differences, the common themes of repent and believe characterize both our conversions and lives: we each had an encounter with Christ through the Gospel; we each experienced a drastic shift in worldview; we each repented and sought what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple. Repent. Believe.

I left high school as a new believer, with little guidance, little theological background, and little foresight regarding the future. With little else lying on the horizon—and in the wake of September 11th—I joined the Marine Corps. Neither Jeanette nor I saw a conflict with the notion of being both a Christian and a Marine; God and Country is, after all, as American as apple pie.

So, in 2005 she left for college and I left for the Corps. We married in 2006, and though Jeanette moved to California to be with me, we saw precious little of each other over the next three years.

From 2007 to 2009, I participated in three overseas deployments: I served as a Detachment Commander, a convoy machine gunner in Iraq, and a pirate hunter in Africa and off the coast of Somalia (as documented in the recent motion picture, *Captain Philips*).



Adam and Jeanette Strode. Photo courtesy of author

Those years were both painful and formative for both of us. I can say with honesty that I would not like to relive that time, but I do not regret my decisions. During my deployments, I began to study Scripture with a greater fervor and as I read, unease began to steal into my soul. Jesus taught to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” How could I reconcile that with my actions?

Once again, Jesus turned my world upside down. Once again, I found the need to repent and believe, to take Jesus' words at face value and follow. I shared my new convictions with Jeanette, along with my desire to leave the service and pursue ministry. She was thrilled—she had come to loathe the war. She too wanted to follow in the steps of the Prince of Peace. Repent. Believe.

When we left the service, our beliefs were Anabaptist—though we didn't know it at the time. We found ourselves alienated from the larger evangelical church. Though we moved back home with the intention of going into ministry, there was no place for us. We felt, however, a deep conviction that we had been called to be

disciple-makers and so we would not be deterred.

By ourselves and with our own funds, we began to plant Christian communities among the working poor of Denver. For the past three years, my wife and I have worked with addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, the homeless, and scores of children. We have been privileged to witness the transforma-

tive power of the Gospel in action.

A little over a year ago, two very important things happened: first, we began to sense a call to live out our missional vision in Thailand. At about the same time, we found the church home of Peace Mennonite Community Church.

In the course of being mentored by Pastor Tim Davis, who had connections in Virginia, God opened up connections with VMM—where, surprisingly enough, first steps to establish a new work in Bangkok were already being taken. God had called us to a new frontier!

Instead of pursuing ministry in the safety and familiarity of Aurora, Colorado, we will venture faithfully forward into the streets of Bangkok, knowing that the Prince of Peace has more work for us yet. Jesus has turned our world on its head and the only appropriate response is to once again repent and believe.

Adam and Jeanette Strode have been approved for a joint appointment through VMM and Mennonite Mission Network for a three-year assignment in Thailand. Pending adequate funding, they will depart for Thailand in Feb/March 2014.

Ending and emerging

By LOREN HORST

I come to the end of my presidency of VMMissions at the conclusion of 2013. As tenures go, eleven-and-a-half years is not so long. Earlene and I for the most part are not record-breakers. Add to these years, however, our years assisting two church plants in Virginia Conference,



Board chair Phyllis Miller (left) presents a cake to Loren and Earlene Horst, thanking them for their long service to Virginia Mennonite Missions. Photo by Gloria L. Lehman

pastoring other churches, serving overseas with VMMissions, and my childhood in a Virginia Conference church in Ohio and I note that VMC and VMMissions envelops nearly my entire life! This has been good! I have spent my life in the church, brought to church when I could not choose and encouraged to attend when I might not have chosen. As a young adult I ratified the choice my parents had previously made for me and I became a Mennonite. I have no regrets.

My kind of church however is coming to an end. Many of my generation are not staying in the church and furthermore, even if we were, we are not producing enough babies. Declining birthrates and the defection of many spell the demise of the church as I have known it. Even if we could halt these trajectories the resulting church would be a status quo church composed of those born into it, a birthright church, if you will. Some of these churches will survive longer than others being better

at the competition for membership among those still interested.

The emerging church is the church resulting from God's mission in the entire world. The church arising is not from birth, but from rebirth, not by blood, but by adoption, not through traditions, but through redemption. The church defined primarily historically and ethnically is a thing of the past, although its long shadow may be visible for some time yet. The doors are swinging open. The train has left the station. Climb aboard or get out of the way! A glance around the world shows unmistakably the future has arrived! "My kind of church" is a thing of the past!

We are not left clueless. Others have gone before us and the book of Acts shows a very precise precedent. As God's chosen few faced extinction or irrelevance, or both, Pentecost arrived! Everything was tried in response to this unexpected movement—rejection, accommodation, domestication, and even murder! God's Spirit would not be tamed or contained. And the rest, as they say, is history. The center of Christian gravity moved West, and East, and South, and North. For generations Jerusalem was not much more than a footnote in human history.

It was a moving experience for me to baptize my own children and I rejoice when my grandchildren embrace faith. After 60+ years of life Earlene's and my family; children, spouses, and grandchildren number 11. Almost infinitely greater is the other family to which I belong, God's family. I want to pay attention to both as the center of Christian gravity moves across our streets and around our world, North, South, East and West. The church of the past is ending! The church of the future is emerging!

Loren Horst
President
Virginia Mennonite Missions

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VMM WELCOMES NEW STAFF



Virginia Mennonite Missions is excited to announce Marvin Lorenzana as the new, part-time Racial/Ethnic Ministries Coach.

Through VMM, Marvin works as director of Mennonite Hispanic Initiative. He will help VMM and Virginia Mennonite Conference engage in the rapidly-growing Latino world around us by empowering other Latino leaders who relate to VMC, helping their life and ministry to flourish.

Martin is also an Advisor for the Multicultural Services Office at Eastern Mennonite University and works part time for Mennonite Mission Network.

Marvin was raised in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and moved with his wife Mariana to the United States in 1994. He has more than 21 years of pastoral experience as a youth pastor, church planter and senior pastor, and holds a BS in Management and Organizational Development from EMU, as well as a Master of Divinity degree from Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

Financial Focus

Virginia Mennonite Conference		• • •
		Sept. 1, 2013 to October 31, 2013
budget		\$42,733
expenses		\$32,636
income		\$26,801
investments		\$0
net		\$-5,835

Virginia Mennonite Missions		• • •
		Sept. 1, 2013 to October 31, 2013
Mission Fund		
total revenue		\$71,145
expenses		\$99,884
Special Projects		
total revenue		\$221,400
expenses		\$193,050

Credentialed leaders meet for *Confession* consultation

By CLYDE G. KRATZ

One hundred and twelve credentialed leaders and invited guests of Virginia Mennonite Conference assembled at Waynesboro Mennonite Church on Friday, November 8, to discuss the role and function of the *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective*. This event was planned by the Leadership Enrichment Committee of the Faith and Life Commission and included times of worship, two presentations and group conversations at tables.

Following a time of worship led by Phil Lehman and Brad Kolb, George Brunk III highlighted the significance of writing or creating a confession was for the purpose of building unity. He highlighted the awareness that when the Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church embarked on creating a new confession, it resulted in two significant groups of people agreeing on specific beliefs that eventually became known as the *Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective*. The document was the result of an effort to bring unity to these



George Brunk III presented on the ways the *Confession* was historically used to build unity among different groups.

Photo: Jon Trotter

an emphasis upon the awareness that as followers of Jesus, we generate our statements of belief as we encounter life and the changing dynamics of our experiences in the world. Subsequently, our faith statements are often provisional statements about specific theological themes rather than a once for all definite statement for all of time.

Video of the presentations by George Brunk and Owen Burkholder are available at

two groups which eventually led to MC USA.

Owen Burkholder's presentation highlighted the importance of an implicit theology based on our experiences. His focus placed

virginiacommunity.org/news/consultation-on-confession-of-faith/

Participants engaged in conversation after each presentation guided by a facilitator and specific questions. These table conversations provided opportunity for participants to tell their stories, engage in clarification of practices, and challenge each other with ideas for further consideration. The relationships that developed through the table conversations and over the lunch time were as important as the presentations. The data received from these conversations will be shared with the Faith and Life Commission for further discernment.

Thanks to Waynesboro Mennonite Church for hosting this event. Participants were grateful for the quality of food, timely service, and graciousness of the hospitality committee that provided for our physical needs throughout the day.



Clyde serves as Executive Conference Minister of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Durham Mennonites stand with immigrant neighbors

By ERIC OLSON-GETTY

On a Saturday in June this year, members of Durham (N.C.) Mennonite Church were working together to paint, clean, and mow around the church property, when several police cruisers parked around the intersection in front of the church. Focused on our work at hand, we paid little attention to them until an SUV turned aside into the church driveway. A Hispanic family with two small children and an infant climbed out and approached us. None of them spoke English, and none among us spoke Spanish, but the urgency in their voices led us to pull out cell phones to reach someone who could interpret for us.

As we dialed and awkwardly tried to understand each other, my eyes drifted over to the police in the road and then it clicked: what we were seeing was a roadblock, and this family needed to avoid it or face possible arrest and deportation. As a signatory of the federal 287(g) program, the Durham Police Department is able to

arrest and detain people on immigration violations, making thousands of Durham residents vulnerable to arrest and deportation at any time. Our congregation was already aware of the precarious situation faced by many of our immigrant neighbors, since in 2008, the pastor of the Guatemalan congregation that shares our building was arrested and deported while driving in another county. We see roadblocks near Hispanic neighborhoods or on major thoroughfares with the stated purpose of screening for unregistered vehicles and unlicensed drivers, but implicitly targeting undocumented immigrants, who by law cannot acquire drivers' licenses.

Once the situation of this family became clear to us, we simply did what was necessary—we invited them to wait inside the building until the police were gone. Had we turned them away, they might have been pursued and arrested for fleeing a roadblock, an event that could have split up the family and left the children without

parents. By inviting them into our sanctuary, our statement to any police officers was clear: this family belongs here, among us, and we belong to them.

The words of Deuteronomy 10:14-19 spoke very loudly in worship the following morning, ending with the words: "the Lord...loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

The passage reminds us that even God's people cannot claim to own the place where we dwell and thereby cast out or exclude those who do not "belong." It ends with a reminder that, as God's people, we are all aliens and sojourners in the places we inhabit. As Gentile Christians, we remember that we are the foreigners grafted into the household of Israel, and so our welcome of the stranger is simply the outworking of God's welcome to us.

Eric attends Durham (N.C.) Mennonite Church.

Making disciples, creating communities—not just churches

By MARSHA RAGOONATH

Jesus did not call us to build churches but to make disciples. These were the simple and true yet profound words from Bro. Skip Tobin as he commenced the Saturday session of a three-day church planting seminar with members of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago (MCTT).

The focal point of the Saturday session was: *Get behind people to create communities, not just church.* This statement echoed through the three days of workshops beginning on the evening of October 4. Those members of MCTT who were in attendance were challenged to search themselves through probing questions, such as, *Jesus got under Peter, who are you getting under? John leaned on Jesus' shoulder, who is leaning on your shoulder?*

Those attending the sessions were taken by surprise! Many came expecting to be told about how to select a church plant team, and how to go about church planting in communities that are remote to their churches. Instead, they were taught the multiplication method used by Jesus to create disciples. Participants engaged in



Skip Tobin (center) leads the Saturday session of a church planting seminar in Trinidad. Courtesy of author

intrapersonal and group reflection as they were encouraged to assess their very own relationship with Christ, our Saviour. The Tobins presented material that was very probing, causing the attendees to critique their own walk with Christ, how much they are a reflection of Him, and the extent to which they were making disciples and empowering them.

The culminating session on Sunday afternoon was restricted to members of church leadership teams, the pastoral team and the General Church Council (GCC). The emphasis was on 'Accountability: Benefits and Boundaries.' We examined and

gleaned many lessons from the Apostle Paul's approach in Galatians 2:1-5, including taking responsibility as a steward of God and opening ourselves to others. So gripping was this session that the leaders attending found it difficult to depart, as many stayed on more than an hour past the intended close time.

The venue for the seminar was the centrally located Charleville Mennonite Church. It was a great pleasure to host Skip and Carol. Despite this being their first visit to Trinidad, they were very much at home with the culture, including the spicy food. Their adaptability was greatly appreciated. Their rich resource of experience and knowledge has enabled them to present life-changing information to the Mennonite Church in Trinidad and Tobago. Thanks to VMM for supporting this venture, and thanks to Skip and Carol!

Marsha serves as GCC Vice President, Mennonite Church of Trinidad & Tobago.

VMC Women's Retreat focuses on 'Familiar Blessings, Blowing Spirit'

By DEONA LANDES HOUFF

Some 85 sisters considered the spirituality of our parents and grandparents and how we focus on Jesus today during the annual Virginia Mennonite Conference Women's Retreat, Sept. 27-29 in Lynchburg, Va. Attendees came from some 20 VMC congregations. The retreat was held at the beautiful wooded Eagle Eyrie Baptist Conference Center.

Dawn Ruth Nelson, Mennonite pastor and spiritual director, presented "Familiar Blessings, Blowing Spirit." Through telling the story of her grandmother's life and her own life growing up in suburban America and spending 12 years doing peace work in Catholic Ireland, Nelson encouraged sisters to let themselves be loved by God.

Attendees worked with the following themes: everyday spirituality, service,

nonconformity, community, *gelassenheit* or meekness, and the person of Jesus and the Bible. Nelson led several *lectio divina* readings of Psalm 139:13-16.

Gifted women of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church led worship music at each session. Theme songs included "Come as You Are" by Paul Gurr and the hymn "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth." Pam de Young, president of Mennonite Women of Virginia shared encouragement in the Saturday morning session.

Saturday afternoon provided opportunity for hiking, knitting and knotting (with two comforters going to MCC), Zumba, silent mediation, weaving, and learning about sharing spirituality with grandchildren. Saturday evening included a talent show and hymn sing.

The retreat ended with a communion service led by retreat planning committee



Dawn Ruth Nelson drew women into conversation about their own spiritual lives. Courtesy of author

chairwoman Karen Guisewite of Warwick River Mennonite.

Nelson is pastor of Methacton Mennonite Church in Norristown, Pa., and author of *A Mennonite Woman: Exploring Spiritual Life and Identity*. She is the daughter of Mennonite author and historian John Ruth.

More than \$900 in offerings collected through the weekend went to support the Mennonite Church USA's Women in Leadership Project, and \$100 went to the Mennonite Women of Virginia General Fund.

Deona serves as communications director of Mennonite Women of Virginia.

Books Abroad: long-time service in small, yet mighty ways

By MELBA HEATWOLE

Books Abroad has closed its doors after many years as a global Christian resource ministry. Over the past years, many pastors, individuals, church, nursing school, seminary, and elementary school libraries have requested books from Books Abroad.

A missionary teacher in the Mennonite nursing school in Shirati, Tanzania, stated that many of the books in their nursing library came from Books Abroad, and helped make it possible for them to be recognized in their country as having a higher quality of nursing education than others. Books not suitable for shipping overseas went to Book Savers of Virginia.

There is still a need for good English language books overseas, but books and money have been slow in coming in and we have reached the end of our resources.

Additionally, no one has been found to carry on the ministry.

Thanks to the individuals and churches which donated many dollars needed to pay for shipping. We could not have operated without your hearty participation. I must also mention the assistance given by the shipping department of Christian Light Publications. They willingly added our shipments on pallets with theirs, which helped to minimize shipping costs.

Over the years, many people have helped at Books Abroad in the physical work of sorting, packing, taping, labeling, recording, etc. I can only mention the few who were very faithful during my 11 years of working with Books Abroad: Ella Coffman Huber worked at Books Abroad for probably more years than any other individual, and Jewel Yoder gave many hours of assistance.

We at Books Abroad have considered that one of the most important things the world needs is education. We have enjoyed, and have been blessed, to have had a part in sharing the love of Christ with those who are eager for the truth and the opportunity to learn.



Melba served as a long-time volunteer for Books Abroad, headquartered in Harrisonburg, Va.

Editor's note: We express deep appreciation for Melba's commitment to getting good books to many places in the world; her persistence, energy, and insight greatly enhanced this service to 'the least of these' near and far. Thank you, Melba, for serving in this way.

Change your vision of the world in Perspectives

By CAROL TOBIN

Every Tuesday night, in the winter of 2008, Gloria Lehman and Philip Rhodes drove 110 miles from Harrisonburg to Chantilly, Va., in order to sit through a three-hour class and then drive the long sleepy miles home. They did it because Matt* had already set the example by driving 240 miles round trip to take the Frederick, Md. *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* class the year before.

in both AmeriCorps and YES (EMM's short-term program). Unsure about his next steps, but sensing a desire to work in India, a mentor had advised that Matt take *Perspectives*.

The rest is history: Not only have Matt and his family been able to walk out a challenging call in India with clear vision and perseverance, but *Perspectives* has indeed come to Harrisonburg. Gloria and Phillip paved the way for VMM to administrate the class.

journey. "Being raised on a Mennonite farm, I was trained to keep to myself and live out my faith in relative isolation. So, I appreciated the opportunity to consider new ways of sharing faith, helping me to look for where God is working and to join in." Jim Hershberger used the project assignment as an opportunity to flesh out a vision for bearing loving and appropriate witness to our Muslim neighbors here in Harrisonburg. Jennifer Davis Sensenig explored how Patchwork Pantry can be a place of good news as well as good works.

This year's class will run on Tuesday nights, beginning January 7, hosted by Grace Covenant Church, 3337 Emmaus Road, Harrisonburg. Register online at perspectives.org (for credit, certificate or key-reading levels.) For more information, email Carol: carol.tobin@vmmissions.org.

Is *Perspectives* your next step forward into God's purposes?

*name has been changed



Matt insisted, "This class has to be offered in Harrisonburg." Matt had served

mediate contexts. Ben Risser shares that *Perspectives* has been part of his missional



Carol is the Asia Regional Director of Virginia Mennonite Missions.

A busy time for NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center

By ALICIA HORST

Fall is always a busy season at NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center. We welcome new volunteers, host the Mexican Consulate, and plan ahead for the rest of the school year. Although our office is open year round, many of the families that come to visit us choose to do so when their children are in school. When the children do come, they are welcomed by books and toys and soft bean bags. We have chairs just their size. We never know what language the children might speak. It may be English, or Spanish, or Arabic, or an indigenous language. Whatever the case may be, the children are welcome. Sometimes, after the “grown-ups” are done with their work, a child is completely absorbed in a book. This book may very well become a new companion as the child walks out our door.

NewBridges IRC seeks to be a leading resource for spiritual, social and economic needs of immigrants in the Shenandoah Valley and to connect people and congregations in building a compassionate, just, culturally diverse community, carrying out



NewBridges volunteers and staff on the left assist community members during the Mexican Consulate event in Harrisonburg in October.

such work and mission from a Christian understanding. Pray with us as we continue the ministry of listening, caring, and connecting people within our community.



Alicia is the Executive Director of NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center.

Roberta Webb Center serves needs of diverse community

By ANGELA LAWSON

Roberta Webb Child Care Center and Preschool (RWCCC&P) provides quality child care and preschool on an affordable sliding fee scale thereby providing an option for our community.

The center serves a diverse population: 2.6% Asian, 2.6% African, 7.7% Turkish, 10.3% Hispanic, 25.6% Caucasian, 25.6% African-American and 25.6% biracial. RWCCC&P enrolls a number of non-English speaking children.

This also increases communications with families.

We provide skill-based instruction in the years before kindergarten. Recently, a Spanish class and music class have been added to the curriculum. The curriculum also includes weekly Bible story time and monthly field trips.



Three-year-olds at Roberta Webb enjoy a field trip. Photo courtesy of author

These children make significant gains in understanding and speaking English while enrolled. The center has Spanish- and Russian-language specialists on staff. Roberta Webb was an early childhood educator. Her home was located just a few blocks from RWCCC. Many neighborhood children received child care and preschool in her home. Roberta Webb's strengths grew out of her background not far removed from oppression and slavery. Her grandparents stressed family ties and the value of education. To honor her faith and love for children, the Roberta Webb Child Care Center was named in her memory. Angela is Director of Development & Finance at Roberta Webb Child Care Center & Preschool.

DECEMBER 2013

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 On this first day of Advent, make a plan to be involved in meaningful ways with neighbors and friends, perhaps some who don't know the new life that Jesus brings.	2 Pray for the church plant at Termoli, Italy, where Giovanni and Fiorella Greco live that it can soon become a visible church in the city.	3 Pray for Valentina Pastorella as she continues to teach languages at Lezha Academic Center through VMM's <i>transSend</i> program. Valentina's home congregation is Centro Koinonia in Bari, Italy.	4 Pray for thousands of persons in the Philippines who are suffering due to loss of houses, businesses, family members and friends. May they receive assistance for recovery from the devastation that they have experienced.	5 In November, Sarah N. Schoenhals returned to the US after serving in Thailand for a year. She asks us to pray that her eyes continue to be open to the Spirit's work in and around her, and for her transition to life in the US in the next months.	6 Gracie and Yugo Prasetyo ask us to rejoice with them that children in their community are completing treatment for tuberculosis and to ask God to open the door for adults to also get tested and treatment. Pray for healing.	7 During December Chris and Melody Riddle and others give out prayer calendars as gifts to friends and acquaintances. Pray that these passages of scripture will have an impact on the people that read them daily.
8 Pray for Al Huyard, pastor of Mt. Vernon Mennonite Church, Grotoes, Va., as he seeks to lead the congregation to share Christ and serve the world.	9 Ask God to give ample grace and patience to Eve Knepp as she directs the Maranatha School students in their roles in the Christmas program. Her creativity shines as she weaves Jamaican and traditional songs into the program.	10 Joel Dewald writes from South Asia that his tutor is teaching him the local language by reading the Bible—this is amazing! Pray for Joel to have great insight as he relates to this person, sharing Good News.	11 Pray for Kevin Goertzen, pastor of Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va., as he provides leadership to grow the congregation's ministry to the local community.	12 Join the Shalom congregation in Brancaccio, Italy, as they meet to fast and pray each Thursday for the many people in their congregation who need work in this time of economic crisis in southern Italy.	13 Pray for Lee Martin, pastor of Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., as he provides leadership to a congregation seeking to help people experience God's grace and forgiveness in our world today.	14 Many congregations are holding special services for the Advent/Christmas season which include children. May they understand the wonder of the birth of Jesus, who came to be the Savior of the world.
15 Today the Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica is holding their annual Christmas program with ASL-signed songs and poems, and a skit. Sponsors have sent gifts to the students which are received gratefully. Thank God for this unique ministry.	16 Pray for Robert Wenger, co-overseer of Central District, as he provides counsel and guidance to pastors in the rural communities of Virginia and West Virginia.	17 During the Christmas season, people in Italy are more open to conversations about faith. Pray that believers have the words to draw them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.	18 Pray for Aldine Musser, an overseer in Northern District, as she provides guidance and counsel to four congregations and women in ministry associated with Northern District of VMC.	19 VMM <i>Partners</i> participant, Lisa Mast, directs the music program at Lezha Academic Center, Albania. Ask God to give her creativity as she teaches the students to be musical and to be listening for God's voice too.	20 Every Friday, the children and youth in Tigmandru, Romania, gather to sing with Jay & Sheri Hartzler. After their practice, they receive soup and bread (see gift list in Nov. <i>Connections</i>). This is a needed reward for their participation.	21 Pray for Jim Mellinger, pastor of Greensboro (N.C.) Mennonite Fellowship as he provides leadership to explore what it means to live life in the way Jesus modeled.
22 The Ramella, Riddle, Campbell, Horst, and Stutzman families are far from home this Christmas season. Pray for them and for parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles that are feeling the distance. May they all experience Christ's peace.	23 Pray for Spencer Bradford, pastor of Durham (N.C.) Mennonite Church, as he provides leadership in removing the dividing wall of hostility in all areas of life thus seeking to create a new humanity focused upon Christ.	24 The Roma children from the Joshua Center in Albania have celebrated Christmas by singing, playing roles, and receiving gifts. Pray for them and for their families—that their physical needs are met, and that their hearts receive love.	25 Jesus came down that we may have love, He came down that we may have peace, He came down that we may have joy. Hallelujah forevermore! <i>Sing the Journey #31</i>	26 This is a good day to continue celebrating Jesus' birth by sharing with others from our bounty. Surprise someone in your neighborhood with your generosity today.	27 Pray for two families in South Asia who serve faithfully with their team of workers, and interact daily with neighbors who do not know the gift of love that Jesus' birth brings. May they have God's strength for each day.	28 Pray for Vernon Moyer, pastor of 3:16 Christian Community Church in Hickory, N.C., as he provides leadership to be a witness for Jesus in the community, workplace, and supportive missions beyond the congregation.
29 As Nancy Marshall celebrates her birthday today in Orange Walk, Belize, pray that God will renew her for another year as pastor of the Jesus' Deaf Church. Nancy plans New Year Eve festivities for the church; may they enjoy the fellowship.	30 Pray for Jerry Sebastian, pastor of Riverside Mennonite Church in Harman, W. Va., as he provides inspiration and spiritual insight to the congregation.	31 The Mennonite Church of Trinidad & Tobago sees in the New Year with Old Year's Night fellowship and prayer services. Let's join them in praying in the New Year.	<p><i>Prayer calendar sponsored by:</i></p> <p>Omar & Lena Showalter</p> <p>to give special recognition and thanks to Galen & Gloria Lehman for their faithful support of our missionaries and in sharing with us the prayer requests in this monthly calendar.</p>			
<p>“For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” 1 Peter 3:17 (NIV)</p>						



Connections (USPS 007-205)
Virginia Mennonite Missions
Virginia Mennonite Conference
901 Parkwood Drive
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Announcements

A **Women Doing Theology Conference** will be held in February 20-22, in Leesburg, Va., (near Washington D.C.) Mennonite Church USA and several co-sponsors invite Mennonite women from across the country to come together for a conference, titled "All you need is love: Honoring diversity in women's voices in theology." Participants will together contemplate what it means to love as Christians in the midst of a world rife with struggle and oppression. Space will be offered for worship, storytelling, theological reflection. For more information and to register, visit: mennoniteusa.org/executive-board/women-in-leadership-project/womens-conference-all-you-need-is-love/

Join a Partners team to China, July 7-22, 2014. In this two-week trip, a team will partner with a local church to provide an English day-camp for local children. The church has identified this outreach opportunity to children and families in their area, and requested local workers send a team that will teach songs and stories, and spend time with children. The church will provide lodging and communal meals. This is also an opportunity to build relationships with Christians from China and make connections between churches. For more information, contact Martin Rhodes, Short-term Missions Coach, at martin.rhodes@vmmissions.org or at (540) 434-9727.



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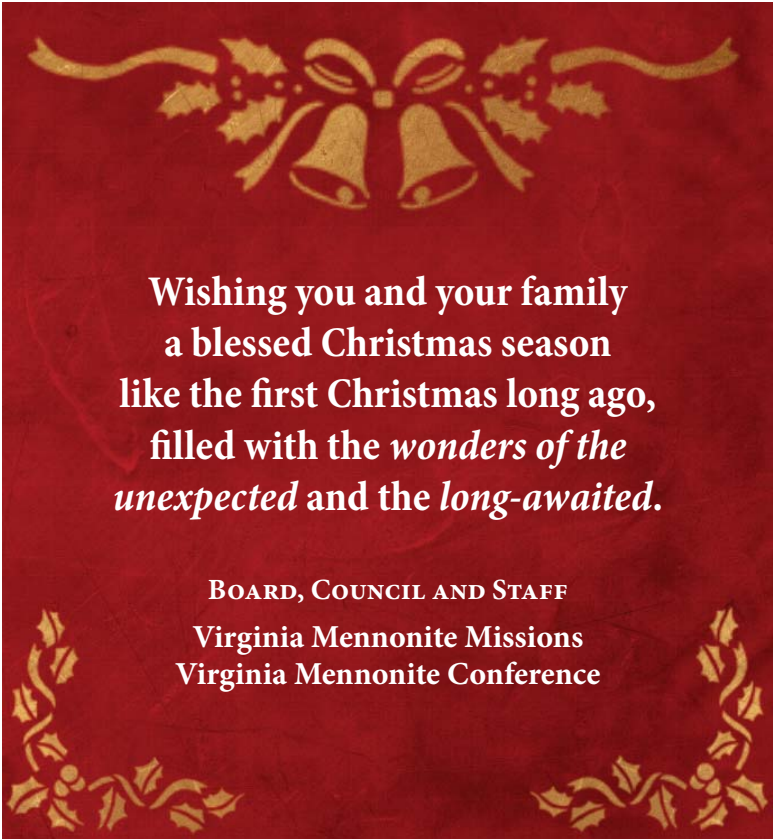
Tuesdays, 7:00-9:45 p.m.
January 7 to April 22, 2014
Grace Covenant Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

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