

Conference facing significant staff changes in 2013

By **SHIRLEY YODER BRUBAKER**
Virginia Mennonite Conference Moderator

Significant changes in leadership for Virginia Mennonite Conference will happen in 2013.

Three administrators will terminate their positions: Jason Gerlach as Conference Youth Minister, Owen Burkholder as Conference Minister, and Sarah Bixler as Conference Coordinator.

Conference Council has appointed a "Task Force for a Financially Sustainable VMC" which will bring recommendations to Conference Council in March for the role and function of conference and which staff patterns will best serve us in the future.



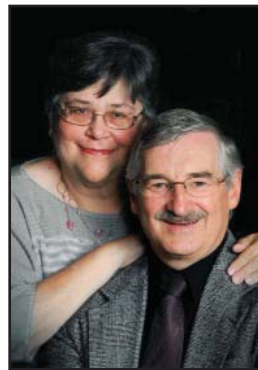
J a s o n G e r l a c h left the VMC Youth Minister role on December 31, 2012. He is serving as full time associate pastor at Community

Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

For five years Jason cultivated connections with youth ministers and youth sponsors across VMC. He also guided the work of Shaun & Wendy Hostetter Davis, Western Regional Conference Youth Ministers (Hickory, NC), who connect with youth workers in Eastern Carolina District, TCK District, and the Christiansburg congregation.

The Youth Minister's office has maintained a vibrant junior youth retreat each fall, an annual youth workers retreat, and occasional senior high retreats. Jason has

also served as a VMC connection with the Mennonite Church USA youth convention planning. (*Read his reflections on page 3.*)



O w e n B u r k h o l d e r will be completing his work as Conference Minister on August 31, 2013, after almost eighteen years of service.

For several years, Owen did both administrative coordination (Conference Council) and ministerial leadership (Faith & Life Commission). Eventually a Conference Coordinator position was created which enabled Owen to focus on FLC work and on connections of VMC with Mennonite Church USA.

During these 17+ years, the makeup of the team of bishop/overseers has changed completely as an earlier generation retired.

Owen helped develop a series of "special ministry clusters" (chaplaincy, leadership/administrative, teaching) to provide overseer support and accountability for those in other than congregational ministries.

Mennonite Church USA was birthed in 2002. Owen was deeply engaged with guiding VMC's participation in that process. Losing the affiliation of two districts (Cornerstone and Mountain Valley) along the way was very difficult for this "bridge builder."

Owen & Ruth Ann became grandparents of three during these years. They have traveled extensively throughout the conference and express their gratitude for this privilege. Owen says his only ambition in life was "to be a good pastor." He anticipates serving in that role again as the Lord leads.



S a r a h B i x l e r will complete two years as Conference Coordinator in August 2013. Her administrative duties have included relating to Conference

Council and coordinating delegate sessions and conference Assembly.

Sarah has also cultivated relationships with young adults across the conference. A significant milestone was VMC achieving a small positive balance in this past fiscal year!

This September, Sarah will begin the Master of Divinity program at Princeton Theological Seminary, with a focus on Christian formation. She has enjoyed her work with VMC and is preparing for continued service within the Mennonite church.

Although administrative and ministry personnel changes are normal in any organization, these changes will be an opportunity for VMC to continue to live out its stated mission: *to be an agent of God's call to individuals, congregations and organizations to follow Jesus and embody faith, hope, peace and love in the world.*

Giving one's life



Loren Horst
President of VMM

During our Christmas holidays my five year old granddaughter came to me and said, "Do you know what, Grandpa? I gave my heart to Jesus."

Bless that little heart! She told her mother, "When Jesus knocks, you must let him in!" I was much older when I accepted Jesus. I was all of eleven! I doubt if my granddaughter knows much more than I did at that time, but still, it's a start. I could tell her that much will happen in the decades to come to fill in the empty pages of a life given to God. My granddaughter will learn that in time.

Lives given to God

Two couples illustrate this like no others in the history of Virginia Mennonite Missions. Willard and Eva Eberly have served in, and on behalf of Italy since 1969. Richard and Martha Keeler went to Trinidad in 1971. After Martha's death Margaret joined Richard until both the Keelers and the Eberlys retired this past year. Both the Keelers and the Eberlys have taken breaks along the way, but not

breaks from God's service, and never far from the call and passion that guided their lives, serving another people in another country while inviting others to follow Jesus.

Few people have given their lives with such singular commitment to one place and people. Much more common among us is the practice of committing ourselves a year or two at a time, here and there. As we get a bit older, make that five or ten years at a time. And too, the more common theme is our own life's journey. Our search is for that which is life-giving, for ourselves. Unusual are the folks who truly give their lives away, who give their entire lives in service to God. Perhaps only then do we truly discover what Jesus predicted, that part about losing one's life to find it.

On a recent visit to Italy I was reminded of other lives lived for God. Francesco and Martha Picone may be less visible to us, but no less important to God's work. Nearly 40 years ago Francesco and Martha Picone committed themselves to God's service in Palermo. Still there 40 years later, they help give leadership to a group of congregations in Sicily, extending the example and invitation to give one's life to God.

None of these mentioned have given their entire lives. They still have a portion of their lives ahead of them, and we trust

Christian Conquest Ministries founder dies



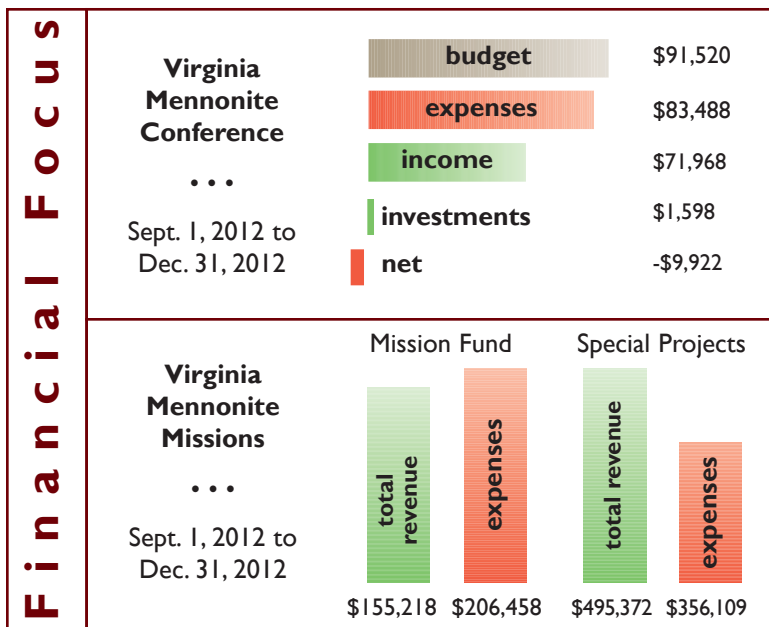
Paul L. Gaskins, 71, died on January 3, 2013. Bishop Paul was founding pastor of Christian Conquest Ministries in

Washington, DC (Potomac District) with his wife Belinda. Paul nurtured relationships with other ministries from Maryland, South Carolina, North Carolina, Michigan, Virginia and India, forming the Leadership Fellowship conference. Many from these groups gathered to say good-bye in "A Symphonic Celebration of Life" on January 10, 2013.

it will be long and fruitful. All however give testimony to the worthiness of giving one's life for God. They have not held back, given up, quit, or gone home. Would that many others follow!

Loren Horst

Correction: In the January issue, the author of the Eastern Mennonite School article "EMS Student Ambassadors welcome and lead" was incorrect. The author is Mary Golden-Hughes, *Director of Advancement*.



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

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

Phone (540) 434-9727
(800) 707-5535

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

Web www.vmmissions.org
virginiaconference.org

Editor
Gloria Lehman

Assistant Editor
Jon Trotter

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

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

Reflections from 5+ years at Virginia Mennonite Conference

By **JASON GERLACH**
Conference Youth Minister (2007-2012)

Reflecting on my work at Virginia Mennonite Conference over the past five years, I remember the annual retreats—how much joy middle school students experience in a game like Capture the Flag, and the significant impact that quality speakers and worship leaders have in the lives of youth. I'm gratified that VMC has offered the Senior High Retreat as an opportunity to bring youth together on a regular basis.

God ministered to me in numerous ways while organizing retreats, mostly with the opportunities to talk with persons working with youth at the annual VMC Youth Workers Retreat. Comparing how I lead the youth of Community Mennonite Church, my role since 2005, to

other VMC congregations in similar or vastly different settings has blessed me.

Not only has conference employment provided me a window into how VMC congregations minister to/with youth; it also helped me become more sensitive to the significant faith development youth experience in VMC congregations. I see the significant impact that pastors, youth sponsors, mentors, and Bible quizzing coaches have on youth.

Additionally, I am more convinced that youth benefit the most from long-term commitment from adult leaders and that the typical two-year commitments do not provide enough consistency for deeper, and necessary, relationships.

This past summer at VMC Assembly, Lesley Francisco, Youth Pastor at Calvary Community Church, led three sessions. Lesley is a gifted communicator, which

was apparent during her sessions with the youth, and her leadership role as an African-American woman in congregational ministry provided an example. The youth envisioned what their lives may become. VMC was able to provide the right person at the right time for the youth in attendance.

As I depart, I am grateful for the many persons who have accepted my invitation to participate in helping form the lives of VMC youth over the past years.

My pastoral role at Community Mennonite Church has expanded from half to full-time so I need to leave my VMC role. I am grateful that this job change has not taken me out of VMC and into another Mennonite conference, so many relationships continue. I look forward to being involved in shaping lives of VMC youth over the next five years.



The core group of the second IDA church plant. Courtesy of Marvin Lorenzana



Abel Uribe, Arturo Chavez, Brigido Carbajal, Fernanda Carbajal, Beatriz Zaldivar and Maria Abascal. Courtesy of Marvin Lorenzana

MHI launches second church plant

On Nov. 17, 2012, Mennonite Hispanic Initiative successfully launched a second *Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista* (IDA) church-plant.

The new IDA is hosted by Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va. Community joins two other Mennonite Latino churches: *Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista*, at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, led by Pastor Byron Pellecer, and *Iglesia Enciende*

Una Luz in Northern District led by Pastor Armando Sanchez. Pastors Marvin & Mariana Lorenzana lead the establishment of this plant.

"We are committed to planting a whole family of Latino churches in the area of Harrisonburg," Lorenzana said. "These churches will work together in the areas of disciple-making, leadership development and church planting." The new church meets on Saturdays at 7 p.m.

IBA graduates six Latino students

The MHI sponsored Instituto Bíblico Anabautista center in Harrisonburg, Va. has graduated its first six students with a diploma in Theological Studies from Mennonite Education Agency.

This important milestone was marked with a special ceremony at Martin Chapel on Friday, Jan. 11. Lonnie Yoder, Vice-Dean of EMS, and Ken L. Nafziger, Vice President for Student Life at EMU, shared a few words of

encouragement with the students.

"These students have been part of the IBA program for six long years," said Marvin Lorenzana, who was their tutor. "Coming from the Pentecostal tradition, they seem to be extremely appreciative of the Anabaptist perspective of the Christian faith."

Congratulations to the graduates for their academic success!

You can tell the Christmas story, even if you can't hear

By **GLORIA LEHMAN**
VMM Caribbean Regional Assistant

Sunday, December 16, the hill of Top Hill in the rural parish of St. Elizabeth was filled with mothers, fathers, aunts, grandmothers, and the students and teachers of Maranatha School for the Deaf. The annual Christmas program brought people from near and far, and both hearing and deaf persons attended.

VMM worker Eve Knepp worked with the other teachers and the students to prepare a program of interest to this variety of people. She led the youngest students in "The Little Drummer Boy," (they did the 'pum, pums' on oatmeal boxes hung on string around their necks—very creative!) She also led them in singing the Jamaican traditional carol "Little Donkey."

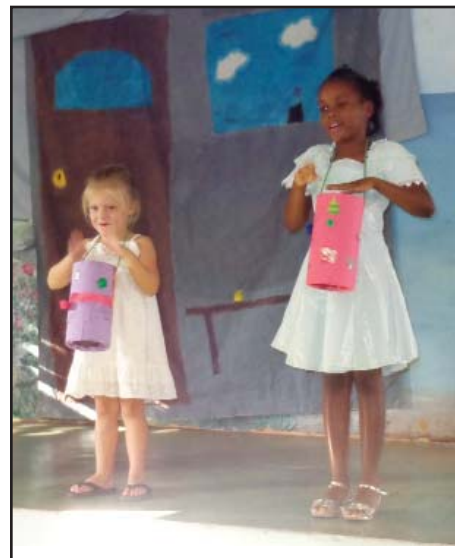
Paulette Dennis, teacher, led Level 5 (ages 13-17) in "O Come, O Come Emmanuel." Verica Senior, teacher, led them in "O Holy Night" which was done expressively. Angie Alexander, teacher,

led the Level 3 & 4 students (ages 10-12) in signing "Go Tell It on the Mountain" which was quite upbeat.

Most of the students were involved in the Christmas play, "The Brand New Star" directed by Eve Knepp. It had all the features of the Christmas story enacted by the students including a donkey on which Mary 'rode' to Bethlehem. The students were sheep, angels, shepherds, wise men, and the climactic moment came when the lit star moved across the front of the chapel as the wise men followed (due to Rodney Knepp's ingenious rigging!)

Sponsors of the Maranatha students sent Christmas gifts for them, and Gloria Lehman had the privilege of handing them to the recipients. Big smiles, hugs and signing 'thank you' demonstrated how excited the students were to receive these tokens of love and care. Thank you to all the sponsors for your generosity in sharing with the students.

After a three-week holiday break, school is back in session with daily



Maya Knepp and Kimberly Brown playing oatmeal box drums during "The Little Drummer Boy." Courtesy of author

learning, playing, and growing together. Thank you for praying for this unique place where Christ's love is shown every day.



Members of Jesus' Deaf Church act in the Christmas pageant. Photo by author

The Jesus' Deaf Church was blessed with meaningful reminders of the birth of our Savior. We gathered several times, and everyone kept coming to the events and commenting about the blessing of being together. On Sunday, December 23, we had our annual pageant worship. We read scripture, sang songs and re-enacted the Christmas story. This was preceded by a rehearsal on Saturday night. Argh! How confusing that was, but on Sunday morning when the actors prayed, I said, "Just let God lead. If anyone goofs in what they are supposed to say, it's OK. It's worship.

God knows the story." It all came together! I was awed by how some of the people who were most confused on Saturday did their part with ease. Glory to God! The service ended with everyone singing "O, Come Let us Adore Him." I felt many of us were speaking the words from our hearts.

The next day was Christmas Eve. We arrived at church at 8:00 p.m., ate snacks and watched the hour and a half movie "The Nativity." The movie was a great visual of the whole Christmas story. After briefly talking about what was in the movie that was "new" to us, or made us think, we gathered around the table in the front of the church and lit an advent wreath that was encircled with about 15

A holy night in Orange Walk

By **NANCY MARSHALL**
VMM worker in Belize

candles. That light was enough to see each others' faces and hands. We sang carols, prayed, and anyone who wanted shared something. Sulmi said, "OK, everybody, tomorrow morning when you open presents be sure to remember that Jesus is the reason we are celebrating," She's an angel sometimes. Juan, too, who is usually quiet, shared about treasuring Jesus in his heart. We ended the night with Brittany leading us in "O, Holy Night."

I could have left it at that but several of the boys had firecrackers in their pockets that they were eager to send off. So we went outside and they made some noise and we saw some fireworks lighting the sky and heard loud cherry bomb firecrackers from all over the neighborhood going off simultaneously.

It was a holy night in Orange Walk.



Willard and Eva Eberly

By **JANET BLOSSER**
VMM Italy Field Director

On December 27, VMMissions held a celebration for Willard and Eva Eberly for their forty years of ministry in the Mediterranean region.

After a worship song led by Shawn Green, Janet Blosser presented a slideshow reflecting on their 40 years of ministry. Their initial assignment included planting churches in Sicily; later they became Mediterranean Regional Director and Assistant, expanding the work to include Albania and the Balkans.

The Eberlys not only touched the lives of many Italians and Albanians, but opened their hearts and home to many missionaries who came and went through the years.

The Eberly children: Maurita, Mike and Andy were present at the celebration and shared their reflections and affirmations of growing up in Italy and living with missionary parents.

The Gospel poured out: a celebration of Eberlys' retirement and long-time service

Loren Horst, President, gave recognition of their 40 years of ministry to VMM and presented the Eberlys with a custom hand-made pitcher engraved with the verse from II Corinthians 4:7— "...for we have this treasure in jars of clay." It is symbolic of the treasure of the Gospel within the Eberlys that has been poured out and given freely to others. Many lives were transformed by the Holy Spirit over the years through the ministry of the Eberlys.

VMMissions recognized the Missionary Support Team of the Eberlys, who met to pray for the Eberlys each month, as well as the many people who had supported them over the decades. Many who were present received the gift of the booklet written by Willard & Eva



Maurita and Mike Eberly, daughter and son of Willard and Eva, performed a medley of Italian worship songs that had been significant for their parents. Photo by Ken Horst

that contained inspiring stories of persons that Eva wrote about persons' lives transformed by the Gospel.

On January 8, the Eberlys returned to Italy to live in northern Italy close to Mike and his wife Prisca and two children. They look forward to caring for their grandchildren as needed and finding other ministry opportunities.

Sister Maxine's varied connections a blessing to her community

By **GLORIA LEHMAN**
VMM Caribbean Regional Assistant

Along the north coast of Jamaica, close to the tourist city of Ocho Rios, in the small village of Retreat, the Smith family resides in the church parsonage.

Donovan Smith is the pastor of the Calvary Mennonite Church and works as a chef in one of the hotels. His wife, Maxine, is a lay leader in the church. They have three children: Chrysantha, who just graduated from teachers' college, and Shamara and Timmy who are in the local schools.

On a recent visit, Maxine told us about being the principal of the Retreat Basic School, a place where 3-5 year olds learn numbers, the alphabet and other



Maxine Smith with custom made school uniforms. Photo by Ruth Rittenhouse

foundational skills. That job ends in the early afternoon, and then Maxine goes to

her shop where she has her own custom sewing business. She designs and creates dresses, outfits, and school uniforms which are in demand just prior to the school year. She also sews household items like sheet sets and draperies.

Maxine's shop gives her a window on the comings and goings at a busy corner in the road, across from the Calvary Mennonite Church. She has contact with a wide variety of people. Her love for Christ shines in her smile and her willing, helpful heart. So if you need a school uniform, or a "sweetie," or a listening ear, stop by Maxine's shop.



Gift & Thrift, Inc., located at 731 Mt. Clinton Pike, Harrisonburg. Courtesy of author.

Pleasant View supports those with disabilities

By **STEPHANIE BILLER**

Communications Coordinator, Pleasant View, Inc.

Pleasant View currently supports about 130 individuals with intellectual disabilities in a variety of residential and day support services.

One such individual, Sarah, is so full of life and she loves to make people laugh. Many days, you can find Sarah in her bedroom looking out the window at the view of the mountains or teasing with staff. She enjoys



Sarah

going for rides and will laugh heartily when riding over speed bumps. Often she will laugh if a peer or staff person trips and Sarah will ask, "Did you bump your head?" Sarah makes everyone around her smile.

There is a very long waiting list of individuals needing support in Virginia. The need is always greater than the funds. Pleasant View offers a wide array of supports, but much of what we provide is funded only partially by state and federal dollars. The cost of some of the supports we provide, such as creative day support services and intentional spiritual care is supplemented by, or totally provided by, our donors. For this we are truly grateful.

Please pray with us for the support that is needed to sustain our support services to Sarah and others with the nurturing care we try to provide.

Local university student spreads the word

By **DEB KING**

General Manager, Gift and Thrift, Inc.

Every year, Gift & Thrift receives multiple requests from students who need to fulfill class assignments requiring them to perform service hours.

We happily accommodate these young people, seeing this as a win-win situation for all of us. Recently, after volunteering the assigned number of hours, one student completed her assignment by writing an essay about her experience.

Her professor was so impressed with the work that Gift & Thrift does, that she decided to visit our shop and check it out. While here, the professor spoke of her roots and expressed a desire to reach out to

people in need in our local area. This woman's visit to Gift & Thrift resulted in a \$300 purchase of gift cards to be distributed by a local church to people needing assistance.

We continue to encounter innovative ways that compassionate people offer support to their neighbors, both near and far. We here at Gift & Thrift have witnessed generosity through the hearts and hands of individuals from a variety of religious, ethnic and socio-economic communities. May we offer our gifts of time, talent and materials, declaring the ultimate generosity of the Giver of all good.

Congregational Resource Center

Does your adult study group need something stimulating? Are you gearing up for VBS?

The CRC is excited to see new resources coming in due to generous donations from several persons!

For young adult/adult study groups:

"Faithful Citizen: Living Responsibly in a Global Society" - DVD/study kit on global society, economy, ecology, security & governance, health, and civic virtue. Answers the question: "Why worry about the world's troubles? I've got enough of my own!"

"Embracing Emergence Christianity: Phyllis Tickle on the Church's Next Rummage Sale" - Six DVD sessions examine the changing face of Christianity and culture.

"Embracing an Adult Faith: Marcus Borg on What It Means to Be Christian" - Five DVD sessions with Borg and Tim Scorer revisit the most fundamental questions of Christianity: Who is God? What does salvation mean? What place does Jesus hold in contemporary Christian faith?

"Embracing a Life of Meaning: Kathleen Norris on Discovering What Matters" - Five DVD Sessions include Belief, Bible, Community, Place, and Us. Are these the things that mean the most to you?

"Embracing the Prophets: Walter Brueggemann on Confronting Today's 'Pharaohs'" - Six DVD sessions by a leading Old Testament scholar take us on a wild ride through the poetic prophecy, drawing connections between Israel's sociological, economic and spiritual status and that of America today.

"The Shelter of God's Promises" - Ten sessions on a DVD-based Bible study by Sheila Walsh explore what God has promised and what that means for our lives today.

Two more Beth Moore study sets have been donated to our collection as well.

And what about the children? The Resource Center will have one copy of the newest VBS material from MennoMedia for you to borrow. You will need to purchase additional student guides and possibly more teacher guides for your school. Some supplementary materials will also be available at the CRC.

Visit the Congregational Resource Center

Contact: crc@emu.edu / (540) 432-4219

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

FEBRUARY 2013

Sunday

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by:

Marvin & Sarah Ellen Slabaugh
in loving memory of their spouses,
Carolyn Slabaugh and Bob Histand.

“...that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

3 Asheville (N.C.) Mennonite Church takes an intentional approach to discipleship, building community through both large and small groups. Pray their ministry bears fruit as participants grow closer to Christ.

4 In Thailand, Mark & Sarah Schoenhals report that there are many new believers and others who are interested in the Gospel. Pray for the Life Enrichment Church believers as they evangelize and disciple.

5 Mark & Sarah also ask that we pray for new church leaders to be raised up, so evangelizing and discipling work can be more widely shared in the Life Enrichment Church.

6 In Lezhe, Albania, VMM *Tran Sender*, Justin Rittenhouse teaches math to the students at Lezha Academic Center. Pray for him as he directs classroom learning and pray that the students will attend with interest for the class.

7 In a large city in South Asia, Michael & Ruth have located housing for their family and co-workers. This is an answer to prayer! Join them in praying that the Holy Spirit will direct each step as they witness in this new location.

8 Nancy Marshall, pastor of Jesus' Deaf Church in Belize hosts "Girls' Night Out" every Friday evening. This important time of fellowship, Bible study, and making a craft builds strong bonds and encourages all in their Christian walk.

9 Tribe's Impact is the youth group of Centro Koinonia. Pray that Dino & Mara have stamina to continue leading this group as it develops and grows. Pray in two weeks when the group meets again.

10 Zion Mennonite Church in Broadway, Va. is currently engaged in a pastoral search process. Pray that God will prepare a new leader for the ministry, vision and nurture of that congregation.

11 Rodney Knepp has a "full plate" at the Maranatha School for the Deaf, Jamaica, as he teaches at the school, does maintenance jobs, works with the community and is a husband and father. Pray for him to have strength and wisdom.

12 Pray for Klementina Shahini as she oversees the Lezha Academic Center, Albania. Ask God to give her the health, energy and wisdom to face each challenging day and thank Him for her creativity and insight for this endeavor.

13 In Germany, David & Rebekka Stutzman connect with a variety of groups that have a new vision for the church. Thank God for their creativity and perseverance in seeking ways of reaching this generation for Christ.

14 On this Valentine's Day holiday, consider examples of human relationships that model the love Christ demonstrated for all of humanity. Thank God for those in your life who have shown you God's love.

15 Steve & Laura Campbell ask us to pray that they will keep God, family and mission work in proper perspective as they live and work in Podgorica, Montenegro. They recently enjoyed a visit from Laura's parents.

16 Centro Koinonia, Bari, Italy, hosts three meetings on spiritual warfare over three days. Pray for Christ's presence as they explore this important aspect of our walk with Him.

17 Pastor James Akerson was recently ordained at Beldor Mennonite Church in Elkton, Va. Invite God's Spirit to guide James and the congregation as they minister within their rural community.

18 In Ecuador, David Shenk meets a wide variety of people as they face enormous challenges in their living situations. Ask God to give him health, patience and insight as he works with them to meet the needs they have.

19 Chris & Melody Riddle lead Tuesday afternoon English classes to reach out to the community around Centro Koinonia. Pray that the youth will hear more than just another language, but also the love of Christ shared freely from the heart.

20 In Albania, Norma Teles faces new experiences every day as she teaches the Roma children at the Joshua Center. Thank God that she loves all of His children, and guides them with nurture and care. May she have energy every day.

21 In this Lenten season, listen closely for the voice of God as you are nudged toward learning something new from the death and resurrection of Jesus our Savior. What new path is He calling you to follow?

22 Thanks to everyone who supported the Alternative Christmas gift projects this year! These funds will help the VMM workers enhance their ministries. Join us and them in thanking God for this provision.

23 This fall, Grace Mennonite Fellowship in Lacey Spring, Va. expanded to two worship services to accommodate a growing number of attendees. Ask God to continue to bless and strengthen their ministry.

24 If you have reserved your meal, be sure to attend the Celebration of God's Mission at Warwick River church today at 3 pm. Myron Augsburg speaks on "Christian witness." Come and celebrate what God is doing!

25 A new government is elected in Italy! Pray for wisdom in this country struggling to deal with economic crisis! Pray also that people find hope not in the political process, but in Christ who alone brings peace.

26 Pray for Dini Shahini as he serves with the church in Lezhe, Albania. Ask God to give him vision for the group to grow in faith and numbers.

27 Pray for the leaders of the Jamaica Mennonite Church as they prepare for the 55th annual conference in Kingston this weekend. They will gather around the theme "Godly Fellowship: United in Spirit, United in Purpose."

28 Youthworkers and pastors gather tomorrow at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center for the VMC Joint Ministry Retreat. Pray for inspiration as they explore *Learning the Bible in Life-Giving Ways*.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead."
Philippians 3:8b-11 (NIV)



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

Announcements

VMC Delegates, please attend **Winter Delegate Session** on Saturday, Feb. 2, from 9:00-3:00 at Springdale Mennonite Church, 170 Hall School Road, Waynesboro, VA. Coffee and pastries will be served at 8:30am and lunch is provided. The session will focus on the theme of Stewardship, and the full agenda is at virginiacommunity.org (click on "Delegates").

Highland Retreat will be holding its **Annual Benefit Auction** at the Eastern Mennonite School dining hall, Saturday, February 23, 2013. Doors will open at 8:30 a.m. and the live auction will begin at 9:30 a.m. Fresh baked goods, pork BBQ, and other food will be available throughout. Highland will begin posting photos and descriptions of items to be auctioned on-line starting early February. Visit highlandretreat.org for details. Please join us!

Everyone is invited to attend the upcoming **Celebration of God's Mission events:**

Sunday, Feb. 24, **Warwick River Mennonite Church** at 3 p.m. To reserve your space for program and supper, contact Brenda at wrmc1@juno.com (757) 874-0794.

Tuesday, March 19, **Springdale Mennonite Church** at 6:30 p.m. To reserve your space for dinner and program, contact Nancy at office@springdalemennonite.org or (540) 949-8945.

In both locations, Myron Augsburg will give the address "Christian Witness: Lessons from the past, Vision for the future." Come celebrate how God is moving in the world!

The **Mennonite Central Committee meat canner** is coming to the Hinton Mennonite Relief Center in Dayton, Va. February 26 is

Virginia Conference day. Individuals and groups are needed to help if available; funds are also needed. Please contact Gerald Knicely at (540) 478-4203.

A Women's Community Bible Study is coming to Harrisonburg Mennonite Church using Beth Moore's study: *JAMES: Mercy Triumphs*. Bible

scholars compare James to the prophet Amos. Study dates are Tuesdays, March 5 to April 30. Sessions will be 9:00-11 a.m. and 6:30-8:15 p.m. For registration details, contact Jeannie Smith at (540) 434-4361 by February 19.

Ryan and Friends, ventriloquist and comedian, will perform March 21, 6:30 p.m., at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, benefiting VMRC Auxiliary Bus Fund. Enjoy this family-friendly event. Family and group rates available. Contact Sandra Rush at (540) 833-2405 or (540) 478-7802 for details.

A Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity seminar will be hosted by Everence on April 12-13 at the Gathering Place, Harrisonburg, Va. Pastors and ministry leaders will explore steps for energizing congregational generosity through this seminar led by Beryl Jantzi. Congregational ministry teams of 3-5 persons are invited to register by March 1 for a \$100 fee plus workbook costs. Call (800) 442-7930 for more information and registration.



On January 5, **Grace Schrock-Hurst** and **Yugo Prasetyo** were married in a Mennonite Church in Jakarta, Indonesia. Grace has carried 'approved ministry' status with VMM in her appointment under Servants to Asia's Urban Poor; both Grace and Yugo have been deeply connected with members of displaced slum communities in Jakarta. Pictured above are Aris and Munarsih Prasetyo (Yugo's parents), Yugo and Grace Prasetyo, and Luke and Carmen Schrock-Hurst (Grace's parents).

Photo courtesy of Carmen Schrock-Hurst

The British Isles, a trip to England, Scotland & Wales is planned for September 13 - 25, 2013 with hosts Dave & Joyce Eshleman. This trip planned by TourMagination will include points of interest in the lives of Charles Spurgeon, C. S. Lewis, John Bunyan and John Newton. Other points of interest will include: Snowdonia National Park in Wales, the Lake District of England, the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland and much more. For details go to: TourMagination.com or call (800) 565-0451.