

Mission Connections



A special issue of *Connections* focusing on the ministries of Virginia Mennonite Missions

April 2014

Time to work

Teaching a biblical view of work without dependence

By CARL & JESSICA*

Last spring we had one of the *worst* elders meeting we have ever seen. The young men Carl* disciples were sul- len and quiet until the meeting's end when they bubbled over in sudden anger towards the elders: "When have you so much as lifted a finger for our future? You just talk, and the believing community will die out if you don't establish a provision for our employment."

In this culture, youth often look to their elders to provide employment and in Christian circles, this generally means working for a Western charity.



Needless to say, we were embar- rassed at their behavior and after a sleep- less night of prayer, the youth group boys apologized to the elders. But of course, their unemployment didn't change. Now as affluent Westerners, we could con- nect them each up with a foreign-funded job if we wanted to, but since it sets an

unsustainable pattern for the future we've chosen not to. What we can do is instill in them a biblical view of work, which is radi- cally different than the standard mentality. Each phrase of these verses contradicts society's views:

"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." (Ephesians 4:28)

"Make it your ambition to...work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of out- siders and so that you will not be de- pendent on anybody." (1 Thessalonians 4:11,12)

Four months ago these same youth found a creative business opportunity in multimedia, worked hard together for three weeks, and earned a good sum of money. They kept none of the money for them- selves, but after giving ten percent to the church, they invested their entire profits back into this newly- formed company called "Transfor- mation Multimedia."

Over the past four months, through hard work, frugality and ingenuity, they have accumulated equipment & skills for a successful multi- media business.

Being in the multimedia industry my- self, I'm delighted that they have chosen this line of work so I can coach and train them.

Not only so, but how great to be part of forming a business which isn't

dependent on a Western connection for its profit source! Last week as I showed them how to keep accounts in Excel, my friend said, "Remember how we complained about not being handed employment? Now we've figured it out ourselves!"

Max Weber was right: a Biblical worldview uniquely fosters economic suc- cess. What's the difference?

- This society attributes a person's success or failure directly to God's predetermination; God is ambiva- lent. The gospel by contrast clearly shows a God who passionately, actively wants our good. It gives us a tremendous sense of hope which is necessary for business.
- Often business initiatives get sidetracked with instant gratification—"I'll spend my first profits on a new phone." The gospel really hammers on learning delayed gratification—investing our hope and faith in what is unseen now.
- Adam worked in the perfect garden; work is not a curse or worldly distraction, it is something God designed us to find satisfaction and fulfillment in.

How is God's perspective shaping the way you work?

* Carl and Jessica (not their real names) serve with their children in a sensitive location in South Asia, in partership with Pioneers.



Hope for a harvest

By AARON KAUFFMAN



Signs of spring are finally appearing. The snow has melted. The birds are chirping. Farmers and gardeners are sowing their seeds, foreseeing

a harvest in the months to come. It's a profoundly hopeful time of year, brimming with expectation.

It reminds me of what many consider a classic mission text in Scripture: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:38 NIV)

One might wonder how this is a hope-filled text. Doesn't it emphasize the scarcity of people to carry out God's work? Doesn't it merely add to the guilt we feel over not doing enough?

That's certainly a common way of reading these words of Jesus to his disciples. But a central paradox stands out to me when we read it carefully.

Jesus is both 100% honest about the challenge before him and 100% hopeful about what God will do.

Seeing God's *kingdom come and will be done* through the gospel is a massive undertaking, and Jesus knows it. The Message puts it this way: "What a huge harvest! How few workers!"

Any of us who have ever felt overwhelmed by the needs and brokenness in our communities or around the world are not alone. Jesus, too, feels the enormity of the task.

But notice Jesus' language here. He doesn't refer to the world as a huge problem that needs fixing (though that's true

enough). It's a field bursting with produce just waiting to be plucked.

Situations of poverty, sickness, injustice and immorality are right where Jesus wants to be, because they are ripe for the change God's kingdom offers.

Jesus looks at the world and sees hope.

And he sees his Father, the Lord of the harvest, as more than able to provide, if only his followers will ask.

Virginia Mennonite Missions is seeing answers to our prayers, and signs of new life as a result. The changing roles and faces of the VMM staff highlighted in the next column are a reflection of God's provision.

So are the stories in this issue from our mission workers around the world, a group of people that has more than doubled over the past decade. Remarkably, our staff has remained the same size, about ten full-time positions. In fact, VMM has a lower staff-to-missionary ratio than agencies with budgets three or four times its size.

All told, we have recruited, trained, sent and supported 125 people in domestic and international mission assignments in the past year. This is thanks to God who supplies workers for the harvest and our committed staff who provide the behind-the-scenes work needed to send and support them.

Read these stories and rejoice at what the Lord is doing to gather people into the harvest. And join us in asking that God send even more workers into the fruit-laden fields.

Aaron Kauffman
President
Virginia Mennonite Missions

STAFFING CHANGES

VMM welcomes new staff; transitions noted



Virginia Mennonite Missions has hired **Sarah Schoenhals** as Receptionist and Administrative Assistant, starting March 17. Sarah

is a recent alumna of VMM's tranSend program, serving with young adults and children in Det Udom, Thailand.



Janet Blosser's role as Italy Field Director has been expanded to include VMM's work in the Balkans (currently

Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo) as the Mediterranean Regional Director. Janet's giftedness in caring for missionaries and tending international church relations, her many years of experience as a missionary in Italy, and her knowledge of VMM workers in the region make this a natural transition.



Ken Horst, who has served as Regional Director for the Balkans since 2011, has transitioned

into the role of VMM Development Associate. This role combines Ken's heart of service in missions and joy in connecting with people of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

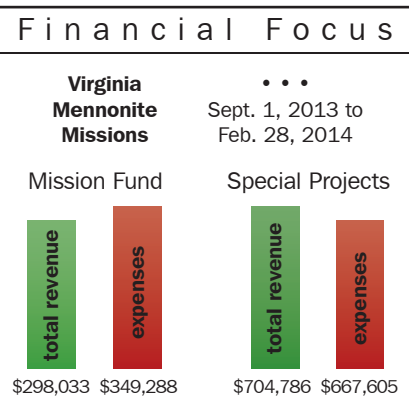
Connections April 2014 – Volume 24, Number 6

© 2014 by Virginia Mennonite Missions and Virginia Mennonite Conference. *Connections* (USPS 007-205) is published monthly to connect congregations and agencies with each other. Editor: Gloria Lehman Assistant Editor: Jon Trotter

Connections is distributed free to each household of supporting congregations. Subscription rates: \$5/year, 2 years/\$9. To subscribe, contact: *Connections* Circulation Manager, (540) 434-9727 • (800) 707-5535 info@vmmmissions.org

Websites: www.vmmmissions.org www.virginiakonference.org

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





Muslim pilgrims gather at a shrine holy to Islam. Courtesy of author

Beyond the limits of law, into new life

By PHILIP & MEGAN*

We obey God by following the *sunnah* of Jesus the Messiah (*Isa al-Masih*). This is the way that we describe ourselves to our Muslim neighbors. *Sunnah* is a term used to describe the way of life prescribed as normative for Muslims on the basis of the teachings and practices of their prophet and interpretations of their book.

This includes specific words, habits and practices of their prophet. We like this word because it helps to describe our faith using a term they are familiar with, while also opening up opportunities to talk about the way of life that Jesus demonstrated and invites us to imitate.

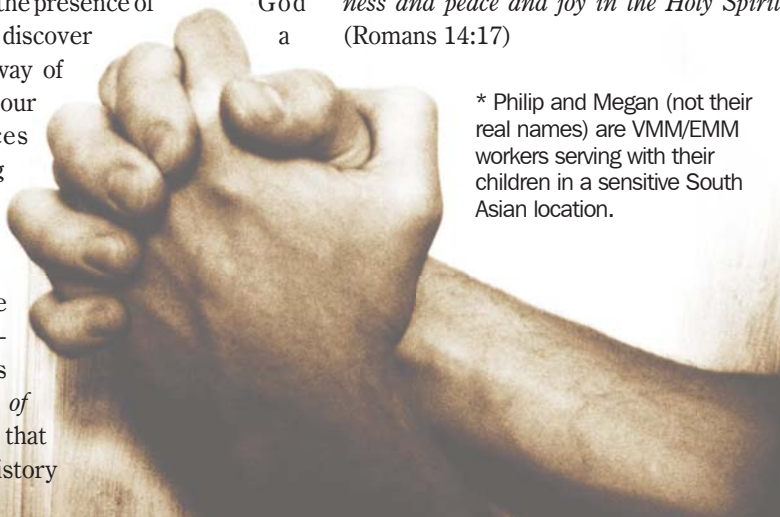
The way of Jesus is like no other way, it takes us into the presence of God where we discover a whole new way of interpreting our circumstances and engaging the world around us.

There is a quote from Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline* that says, "The history

of religion is the story of the almost desperate scramble to have a king, a mediator, a priest, a pastor, a go-between. In this way we do not need to go to God ourselves. Such an approach saves us from the need to change, for to be in the presence of God is to change...but the way of Jesus boldly calls us to enter into the living presence of God for ourselves." (p. 24)

This connection with the Father is what gives life to everything else that we do. We've heard Muslims describe their faith in terms of way, truth and law. The commission for us is to demonstrate and teach a life of love and power that compels Muslims to step out beyond the limits of the law into a whole new life of *righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*. (Romans 14:17)

* Philip and Megan (not their real names) are VMM/EMM workers serving with their children in a sensitive South Asian location.



Discipling others to tell the Story

By MARK SCHOENHALS

It started with a simple request from Pastor Joi, "Please help us make a list of methods Jesus used to make disciples."

Joi and Brother Phonthawee were beginning to prepare what they would teach in a gathering of Isaan church leaders. I was being asked to teach teachers and give theological foundations for their teaching of other pastors and church leaders. I was greatly humbled.

I felt led by God to summarize Jesus' disciple-making methods through a survey of the Gospel of Mark. The next day, I walked through an outline with them and asked them to study it on their own. We agreed to meet again three days later. They asked me to use the methods I had outlined as a way of preparing them for what they would teach.

Specifically, they wanted me to model how I would use the points, share from the passages cited, and include examples from the church's experience in making disciples. After modeling Jesus' method, they then followed my example and practiced.

The conference began two days later. The afternoon was hot and long, but by God's grace, Joi and Phonthawee held people's attention and we walked through ten chapters of Mark!

After showers, supper and worship, people were refreshed and ready to complete the Gospel story. The Holy Spirit empowered Joi's words and he spoke with authority and passion. Those present were inspired again by the power of the resurrection and the charge for the disciples to go and make disciples.

I was thrilled and returned home full of thanksgiving. I was entirely in the background, but I had been given the opportunity to walk with them in their preparations, and in so doing, not only building them but also many others who are about the work of making disciples. Thanks be to God!



Mark is a VMM/EMM worker serving with his wife Sarah and daughters Heidi and Hannah in eastern Thailand.

Testimony of transformation

By STEVE & LAURA CAMPBELL

A powerful, challenging speaker shared his story of being delivered from a life of drugs and crime by the love and salvation of God to a gathering of 60 teenagers in Montenegro.

The young people from all over the country gathered on February 8 for worship after some of the teens had had an experience in Germany at a 'Mission-Net' conference.

We believe God orchestrated the event and answered our prayers for this particular one, so it would have drawing power for future meetings. Please keep praying for breakthroughs.

The evening opened with songs of worship, it was powerful to hear the youth singing praise to God, the songs were led by leaders from Niksic. Next, Lazar Simonovic shared from God's word,

he connected God's plan to pour out His Spirit on the nations, tracing from Moses' prayer in Numbers 11:28-29, "[...] *Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!*" to Joel 2 to John 15-17, to Acts 1-2.

Connecting these passages with his testimony of God's mercy on his life, leading him to salvation and to Jesus being Lord of his life, he then challenged the young people to pray and see if God would meet them in changing areas of their lives based on some challenges in Matthew 5-7. His

audience seemed riveted on his every word.

After a brief pause for food and fellowship, we broke into four groups and prayed for the four quadrants of the country, praying for folks to come to salvation and relationship with God.

We really sense God was in it all. This is where God is working and we are able to join His work here. We believe that God is beginning the transformation of this nation.



Steve and Laura serve with their daughters Ruth and Esther in Podgorica, Montenegro.



The ministry team working on the outskirts of Jakarta: (back row, left to right:) Manu, Sage, Yugo, Grace, Lina (front row:) Lucky, Freya, and Anna. Courtesy of author

Praying for the Kingdom while sharing sweet tea



By GRACE

We have been living and serving in this slum community on the outskirts of a major Southeast Asian city for two years now.

After a devastating fire and eviction in our previous slum, God led us to this new community with some of our old neighbors. Beautiful things are growing here; if one can look past the piles of trash, raw sewage, rats, and other ugliness that is stark poverty. God, give us Your eyes to see the beauty that is here and can be here.

Two months ago, our neighbors celebrated with us in my reaching seven months of pregnancy. *Tujuh-bulan*, the local celebration is called. The day included special food, fruit salad with seven fruits, seven colorful fabrics wrapped around me, and water with seven flowers poured over my head in blessings.

As we all gathered together, my teammate Lina told the story of Hannah from scripture and in the process invited all the neighbor women to gather every Tuesday to continue hearing stories of ancient women.

So now each Tuesday we gather with our Muslim friends: beautiful women who have endured numerous floods, fires, evictions, and the

daily grind of poverty. We study stories of women from scripture, beginning with stories from the Torah. Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Lot's wife, Job's wife, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Potiphar's wife, Jocebed, Miriam, Sifra and Pua (midwives in Egypt), and others.

As we share sweet tea and homemade snacks, they ask good questions about these ancient women. My neighbors help me see the stories with fresh eyes. And somehow in this twenty-first century slum, I find myself feeling much closer to the culture and time of the Biblical women. We end each Tuesday meeting by praying together.

This is only the beginning, but we are full of hope and expectation for the future: that as we journey through stories from scripture our neighbors will encounter the love of Christ. *O Lord, make Yourself known to our Muslim friends. May they meet you not only as prophet but as Lord and Savior. We offer our lives to you in this service. Amen.*



Yugo and Grace serve with Servants to Asia's Urban Poor, an approved ministry of VMM, in East Asia.



Rachel and Kris Bucher stand outside the warehouse being renovated for the milk plant. Courtesy of author

New milk plant founded in Albania will speak Good News with values

By ALLEN UMBLE

Part of my role as team leader in Albania is to keep in touch with the various long-term Mennonite missionaries working in Albania. Eastern Mennonite Missions and Virginia Mennonite Missions have a history of cooperation in Albania.

We welcome the Bucher family and the Zguri family that have come to Korçë the latter half of 2013 under EMM serving in “Business Transformation.”

They are currently renovating 1000 square feet of space that they are renting in part of a warehouse from the Communist period of Albania and are preparing



(left to right) Kostika with Ilijan, Ori, Rakela; Rachel and Kris with Eden. Courtesy of author

to set up their equipment. They have a plan in place with goals for the next three years for production of quality fresh milk products. This mission is supported by a stateside board and by a group of investors in the United States. They have also

registered an Albanian business called “Albael LCC, with “Alba” for Albania, and “El” for Elohim—God is with us.

But you may ask, “What does this have to do with *making disciples in the way of Christ?*” By operating a business that functions with honesty, with integrity, and that values and properly treats its employees will speak loudly in this culture and will open doors for the Good News of Jesus.

After my visit to the warehouse, Kris Bucher, Kostika Zguri, and I sat down for a coffee as Kostika told his story of leaving Albania for the States as a young man when his parents won the immigration lottery.

In the States, Kostika encountered God through Jesus Christ in a personal way that brought about his newfound spiritual faith and life. He married Ori, a person of like faith from his home area of Korçë, Albania, and started their family in the States where Kostika worked for Turkey Hill Dairies.

These two families have responded to God’s call to serve in Albania, the home place of Kosti and Ori.



Allen Umble serves in Lushnje, Albania.

God keeps my ‘lamp burning’

By NORMA TELES

Last year after a very bad case of bronchopneumonia, it was discovered that I have an ostium secundum, a congenital condition that needed surgery to close the hole in the heart. Without treatment, it could cause heart failure due to pulmonary hypertension. The doctors were astonished how it had gone without a diagnosis for so long.

I had the surgery to close the atrial septum last December in my home country, Brazil.

The night before surgery the doctor talked with me about what could happen; he told me that a patient had died with this condition. I told him that God is the one that keeps my ‘lamp burning,’ that he should operate on me and not be afraid. That gave me an opportunity talk with him about my faith in Jesus.

The surgery went well, and the healing was fast. God gave me the opportunity to witness about Him. People said with surprise, “You are recovering very well!”

I replied, “Why not, when people in Albania, Brazil and the U.S. are praying for me!”

I returned to Lezhë and the Joshua Center on January 23.

Some weeks ago, the girls group that I meet with in Lezhë had a good discussion on why Christians suffer.

We face trials and suffering simply because we live in a world full of sin, and sometimes the suffering is more to test and purify our faith.



Norma Teles is a VMM/JMMI worker at the Joshua Center in Lezhë, Albania.

Good Samaritan opportunities

By LAVONNE RAMELLA

Our family moved to Kosovo in August of 2013. We are in the “culture, language and relationship building phase” of our time here.

Because of our infancy in our language acquisition, our ability to communicate with the locals is fairly limited. Our actions are the loudest and clearest voice we have.

We live in a community that was destroyed by war 15 years ago. At that time, our neighbors lived amidst people of the opposing side. For this reason, they are fairly guarded initially. Once we have been formally introduced by one of our friends here, doors are opened and we are warmly received. If this introduction has not taken place, we find it harder to initiate relationships on our own.

Recently, from the comfort of my home, I was an unseen observer to a man in his late 70s that was stranded along the side of our road with a flat tire. My husband Vince was on his way home when he happened upon this stranger. Abram initially declined Vince’s broken Albanian offer to assist him. Noticing that he was unable to even loosen the lug nuts, Vince stepped in. Abram was very grateful.

He took Vince for coffee as an expression of his gratitude. With the help of an English-speaking friend, Abram told Vince that many people had passed by, not even looking at him. Yet, here was a person who he couldn’t even communicate with, willing to help.

I know that God has placed us here for His purpose. Even though specifics of this plan aren’t clear to us, along the way, we are still called to be His light to the world. My heart is warmed by this event and challenged to walk with open eyes—being aware of “Good Samaritan” opportunities.



Melody Riddle (right), Elena (center) and her mother enjoy New Years together. Courtesy of author

Spending time with people opens doors to discipleship

By CHRIS RIDDLE

Do we have to *do* something extraordinary to make a people into disciples? Is there a program that we insert people into and *poof!* We now have a new disciple of Christ!

Did the apostles follow a program planned by Christ? No, they spent *time* with Christ. They witnessed His daily rhythm of life. They lived with Him as He traveled from town to town and they ate with Him at the table.

A gift for us here in Italy is when we receive an invitation to a family event (Christmas, New Years, etc.) and we are able to interact with people on an individual basis. It is not possible to do this with every member of the church, but it is important to be able to spend time with others at various events in their lives.

Once a week we have lunch with a family from the

church. There is often a small Bible study involved but more often, it is a time of discussing what it means to live what we read in the Bible.

We enjoyed New Years with Luigi and Elena at the home of her parents. It gave us time to talk about what we do believe in a safe atmosphere for them. It was fun to attend a *dama* (Italian checkers) tournament with Luigi, especially because his father and nephew played in the tournament.

Living with people makes disciples real and it opens doors that would never open otherwise. Luigi’s father does not believe and does not talk to people about religion, but the Wednesday after the *dama* tournament, he and his wife willingly attended the Bible study in Luigi and Elena’s home.

Making disciples is not about a program, it is about living with people where they are!



Vince helps fix Abram’s tire. Courtesy photo



Luigi competes in the tournament. Courtesy of author



Chris Riddle serves in Bari, Italy, with his wife Melody and sons Micah, Adam and Isaiah.



LaVonne serves with her husband Vince and sons Sid, Bradie and Justin in Istog, Kosovo.

Letting go of preconceptions

By LAURA GREEN

Having just arrived here in Italy on March 5, our official work has not yet begun, due to recovering from jet lag, getting documents, and setting up our apartment.

However, even in the short time we have been here, we have had to let go of some of our American preconceptions in how things are done in order to allow others to help us navigate and set up. We want to build relationships with those around us and connect in order to be able to share Christ and what He has done for us.

One of the ways we have seen relationships being built is that people are willing to come help put together furniture and clean our apartment.

It can be very easy to get into the American mindset of productivity where we want to get it done. But in letting go and allowing others to help and even

do things differently than our way makes connections with the people around us.

Getting acquainted with the neighbors in this community is essential. In the Italian culture, when you have a level of confidence with someone, they introduce you to their circle of influence; you are accepted and can begin building other relationships. Most of what Christ did in His time on earth was accomplished through building relationships and sharing hospitality around a table, which is one of the main ways we will be able to meet people and foster community.

We are excited to see who we will connect with and what God will do through those connections.



Laura Green serves in south-eastern Italy with her husband Shawn and children Lucas and Emmanuel.



Shawn and Laura Green with children Emmanuel (left) and Lucas (right), in their apartment in Italy. Courtesy of author

One in Christ

By CINDY MOYER

One of the blessings of worshipping at “Cornerstone” Mennonite Church in Lezhë, Albania, for me has been the cross-cultural experience.

In addition to the regular Albanian members, there are the short-term American missionaries that teach at Lezha Academic Center, and VMM missionaries from Brazil and Italy. On any given Sunday we represent four or more nationalities, and yet we all join to worship the same Lord.

The majority of the service is in Albanian of which I understand very little, however many of the songs are familiar tunes. I may not be able to join in the lyrics but my heart and mind are in unison as I meditate on what I know the song is about.

The other Sunday we sang Chris Tomlin’s song “Here I am to Worship.” How beautiful to transcend language and worship God in community.

One of the things that has become very real to me through this experience is the diversity of our God and as our “Heavenly Father,” His ability to relate to all people



Cindy Moyer gives her testimony to students at LAC. Courtesy of author

everywhere on the Earth. The “Good News” is for everyone everywhere.

I drew courage from this concept recently as I prepared to give my testimony to the students at LAC during an assembly. I wanted so very much to be able to communicate in a way that was relatable to these students in spite of the cultural and age difference.

As I discerned what to share I knew that God’s story is always relevant and that His Spirit could find a way to reach these students. I decided to include in my sharing the kinship we can experience in Christ and that I appreciate the resemblance we

“In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.”

Galatians 3:26

as Christians have and the bond we can share all across the world.

This reality of the “Global Church” has been one of the highlights of my time in Albania so far. I marvel at my God who transcends all time, language, and culture to have a personal relationship with each of His children

and as a result allows me to have brothers and sisters in Christ to relate to everywhere I go.

I encourage you the next time you are in corporate worship, take a minute and try to wrap your mind around the reality that people all over the globe in various languages and cultures are also raising their voices to praise the same God. Marvelous!



Cindy serves as a school counselor at Lezha Academic Center, Albania.

Building outward-oriented networks of discipleship

By DAVID & REBEKKA STUTZMAN

When we began exploring what it would mean to help develop a network project, we knew that we had a lot of learning to do.

Since moving to Bammental in the fall of 2012, we have spent a good deal of time making connections, building relationships, and learning from young people about their experiences in the church and their vision for church.

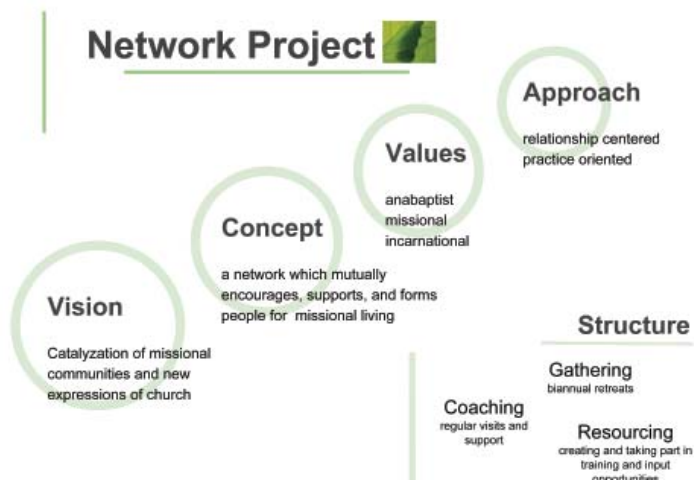
Our focus was to connect with those who have moved away from their home congregations, but have remained engaged in ministry in other churches. Essentially, what we were pleased to discover is that there is a desire for people to stay connected to their roots and to network with others in community. Thus through our experiences, a vision began to emerge, for how a network could help encourage and support a new generation of leaders toward the creation and formation of contextual missional initiatives.

Our second year in Germany has become much more about creating a network structure. Through prayer, discernment and many conversations, a vision has begun to emerge. We see the network's vision is

to help create and form new missional initiatives and would exist to encourage, support and resource people involved in or starting new churches or new expressions of church. It will be centered on forming relationships and sharing community, and encouraging each other in our commitments and involvements in ministry.

Additionally, we hope that several values can help shape the identity of the network community, like an Anabaptist perspective on Jesus-centered discipleship, a missional approach to understanding church as outward oriented, and an incarnational commitment to embodying the gospel in a particular, neighborhood, town or city.

The coming year we are looking to develop the network more concretely. We are organizing a retreat in October 2014, which will be a huge step toward forming an initial community of peers.



It has truly been an exciting journey to be on, with all its challenges and joys, uncertainties and epiphanies. We sense God's hand in what we are doing and we have learned to trust more in God's timing and guidance as we try to do our part in creating new ways to think about church and mission, and to be part of creative ways to form leaders and disciples for God's Kingdom.



David & Rebekka are VMM/Network workers serving in Bammental, Germany, with their children Immanuel and Liana.

Youth show deep commitment, longing to know God

By EVE KNEPP

While there have been times where we have struggled to find adults who are yearning to dig deeper into God's Word or commit to meeting regularly for a Bible study, we have been blessed by the youth in our youth group.

Most of them show a deep yearning to know more about what God has to say through the Bible and a deep commitment to the youth group. We have been able to have some deep and real conversations when we studied about forgiveness, we have seen the youth challenged as we dug into Daniel's life, and we are now starting to see what God would have us learn from Job (per request of 'our' youth!)

Walking alongside our youth has been a joy and a challenge. Sometimes



Abby and Shanice during a Bible Study. Courtesy photo

they ask the hard questions where we can only say, "You're right. It's not easy!" and "We don't know."

Sometimes we hear things that they are going through that the only thing we can do is hug them, pray for them, and tell them that we are here for them whenever they need us to support them.

God is working in their hearts and in their lives as we continue to meet, read,

discuss and enjoy each other's fellowship. It brings us so much joy to see them grow in their relationship with Jesus and their knowledge of the Bible. We continue to pray that this time of seeking God will strengthen them for whatever comes in their lives and that they will continue to be dedicated to reading God's Word and spending time seeking relationship with God.

As we are preparing to end our term here, please join us in prayer that God will raise up a committed Jamaican Christian adult to continue our work with the youth.



Eve serves in Jamaica with her husband Rodney and children Maya, Micah and Jayden.

A plan of God's design in Winchester for *the exchange*

By CHRIS SCOTT



Participants in "Operation Turkey Sandwich" decorate cookies to go in brown bag lunches. Courtesy of author

There is a brilliant song in the Broadway musical *Rent*. Among the lyrics for "Seasons of Love" there is the question "How do you measure a year?" You can use a lot of ways, as the song suggests, "In cups of coffee, in inches, in miles, in laughter."

The exchange gathering church plant in Winchester has been in progress for roughly two years. In that time we have had a lot of cups of coffee and laughter, and conversations about what it means to be the people of God in our time and place. We have sought God and sought ways to connect



Participants in "Operation Turkey Sandwich" decorate cookies to go in brown bag lunches. Courtesy of author

with the people around us.

Our group, whom my wife Heather and I give leadership to, spent last Thanksgiving morning delivering brown bag lunches of a sandwich and cookie to Winchester shops and businesses. As part of our "Operation Turkey Sandwich," we attempted a simple gesture of love for those who had to work on the holiday, many working so that others could be home with their families.

Operation Turkey Sandwich led off Winchester's evening newscasts on the local ABC affiliate on Thanksgiving Day with a very positive story about a group of Christians serving the community.

We gathered at a local restaurant on a Sunday evening two weeks before Christmas to sing carols in a public space. In an attempt to take the hopeful message of the



Jim makes brown bag lunches for workers at shops and businesses open on Thanksgiving Day. Courtesy of author

birth of Immanuel to a nontraditional place, we invited patrons to sing with us and remember the Christmas story. They sang along.

We gather every Sunday evening for a meal together and worship, sharing, and prayer where we engage the scriptures and break bread and

pour out Eucharist wine. Communion is a weekly practice for us as we reflect on what the invitation to come and die means for us.

Our posture of missional living in Winchester is an intentional choice. *The exchange* exists to help people discover God and we recognize the privilege of being on mission with God in God's work of reconciliation of all things. We desire to follow God in the way of Jesus and want to invite others along. We want to live as a benefit and blessing to the world. These two years have been challenging, and have not gone the way I thought they might; I have to believe that it is a God-designed plan.



Chris serves with his wife Heather at *the exchange*, Winchester, Va.

Announcements

Fish Eyes 20-year anniversary! An unforgettable and funny series of detours through the Gospels, starring Ted Swartz as Peter and Jason Hildebrand as Andrew, Fish Eyes will be at Court Square Theater in Harrisonburg, April 10, 11, 12 at 7:30 p.m. and April 13 at 3:00 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 in advance, \$18 at the door. Seniors, students and groups (10+) \$12 in advance, \$15 at the door. Tickets available at valleyarts.org/court-square-theater More information at tedandcompany.com

Mennonite Women of Virginia announce the **Annual Missions Day**, May 3, at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Join women from throughout the Conference in worship, sharing and friendship-building, starting at 9:00 a.m.

Sarah N. Schoenhals will be sharing with us about her service experience in Thailand with Virginia Mennonite Missions. Come and experience what the Lord is doing among us near and far.

Family Life Resource Center invites you to a fundraising banquet, **Hand in Hand: Partnering for Congregational Care**, Saturday, May 17, at 6:00 p.m. in the Hartman Dining Hall of Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community.

Learn about FLRC's renewed desire to partner with congregations and the community for care, support, and counseling. Entertainment is by Good Company, an *a cappella* group. RSVP to Marie at (540) 434-8450 or marie@flrc.org by Thursday, May 8.

Harvesting water

By ERVIE GLICK

It hit hard when I opened the hot water tap in my bathroom. I had just returned home from two weeks in Kenya in a region where water is available for most people only from a distant river. Of course, if you have means and can buy bottled water and drive your vehicle to your well-plumbed place of lodging, getting water is less of a problem, but most people in Ukambani district don't have those luxuries. They have to "harvest water."

That was a new concept for the team from Park View Mennonite Church that went to Kenya on a *Work And Learn* (WAL) tour under Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to help build a sand dam.

From January 23 to February 4, 2014, we witnessed how the local people of the region worked together to solve the problem of water access by several means to "harvest" what fell from the sky. One means is to build a sand dam along with all of your neighbors, one that provides water for up to 100 households and slakes the thirst of up to 1000 people.

What is a sand dam? As the name suggests, it dams the sand that for centuries has washed off the mountainsides and down



Joan Chamberlain joins the team of shovelers of sand, moving the pile closer to the dam forms.

seasonal rivers with the torrents of rain that always come in the rainy season and into the Indian Ocean. Of course, it dams water along with the sand, and the sand preserves the water from evaporation in the hot sun, cleansing the water, too, as local residents dip into small sand pits to fill their five-



Team members Deryl Kennel (with back to the camera), Ralph Swartzentruber (white t-shirt and hat), and Joan Chamberlain (pink shirt and hat) with a view of the forms in an early phase of dam construction. Photos courtesy of author

gallon jerry carriers. They then tote the containers home on their heads or backs, or they load them onto their donkeys. Toting water that way is not new to them, for before they had a sand dam, they walked many kilometers during the dry season to a major river, then back home again. Now with a sand dam in their neighborhood, they must walk only a fraction of the distance to get water, clean water.

Not only is the distance shorter, but the dam raises the water table along the river banks, so that people can grow vegetables for the table and for marketing; they can grow fruit trees such as bananas and mangoes. Selling produce helps to pay for the children's school fees and to improve their living conditions, using solar power and other amenities not affordable before. Sand dams are dramatically life-changing, improving health and happiness on many levels. Women and children need no longer to suffer through the dry seasons that come regularly twice a year.

Building sand dams is not particularly new in this part of Africa, but Harold Miller, then MCC country representative for Kenya, partnered with Joshua Mukusia some 20 years ago to initiate the practice in eastern Kenya. Since the beginning, some 1000 dams have been built, and many more are planned. Utooni Development Organization (UDO) grew out of their effort and has today become one of the most successful agencies in the country in "harvesting water." They built 40 dams last year alone.

PVMC funded the material costs for one dam and sent a team of five to help with

construction. Each of us will say that the experience was one we will never forget.

Ralph Swartzentruber, Deryl Kennel, Joan Chamberlain, Ed Bontrager, and Ervie Glick made up the team from Park View, none of us engineers, nor construction contractors or heavy equipment operators. But we had willing spirits to learn and participate. Here is where our admiration for UDO rises to the top of the charts.

UDO is totally African; no well-heeled white faces call the shots. They are well-organized, highly ethical in their business dealings, and knowledgeable in the psychology of motivating people to work together to an end. They don't seek out sand dam possibilities, but instead they respond to requests that come to them. They then send engineers to establish a feasible location on a river, and a specialist in organizing residents of that location goes door to door to get commitments. In our case, 68 households had signed up. At least one household member showed up, so that more than 70 people joined to carry rocks, build forms, shovel sand, haul water, and do all the tasks of building a concrete dam with no mechanization other than a wheel barrow and hammer.

MCC supports UDO by routing funds from donors like PVMC to them to cover costs of lumber and cement. The labor is free. Funds from MCC are indeed well-placed with UDO.



Ervie is a member of Park View Mennonite Church.

Prayers for the workers and ministries

APRIL 2014

of Virginia Mennonite Missions

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>“By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” Galatians 5:22-23 (NRSV)</p>	<p>1 This evening in Perspectives (H'burg) class, Carl Stauffer teaches “Christian Community Development” exploring the dynamic balance of evangelism and social action. Pray that all will benefit from Carl's insights.</p>	<p>2 Thank God for the safe arrival of Sophia, daughter of Rafael & Solange Tartari, born March 7. Paulo is the big brother. They are currently in Brazil and will soon return to Lezhë, Albania, where they give leadership to the church and visit a rural location for Bible study.</p>	<p>3 Give thanks for the first ecumenical youth Bible study that David Stutzman helped lead in Germany. It was a collaborative effort between the youth leaders of the Protestant, Catholic, and Mennonite churches. Pray for more of these events in the future.</p>	<p>4 Today, Loren & Earlene Horst return from living and serving in Trinidad for two months. Thank God for their availability, and may the Mennonite Church of Trinidad & Tobago grow in faith and numbers.</p>	<p>5 On March 17, Grace & Yugo Prasetyo had a baby boy. Jeremiah Diaz, in Southeast Asia. Thank God for the safe arrival of Jeremiah, and pray that this family will experience health and peace as they grow together.</p>	
<p>6 Nancy Marshall, pastor of Jesus' Deaf Church in Orange Walk, Belize asks us to pray that as she visits and ministers to the Deaf people who are not attending the church, she will have the right words to share God's love and grace with them.</p>	<p>7 Rodney & Eve Knepp in Top Hill, Jamaica, work diligently to foster strong relationships between the Maranatha School for the Deaf and the community. This brings cooperation and understanding in both groups. Thank God for this.</p>	<p>8 This evening in Perspectives (H'burg) class, Ed Grudier teaches “The Spontaneous Multiplication of Churches: viewing churches as organic living things resulting in rapidly multiplying movements, bearing fruit of social transformation.”</p>	<p>9 Pray for Lisa Mast as she teaches at Lezha Academic Center in Lezhë, Albania. May God provide all her needs and give her patience and energy for her tasks.</p>	<p>10 VMM transender Cindy Moyer serves as a school counselor at LAC, Lezhë, Albania. As she meets with students who have various challenges, may she share the light and love of Christ to each one.</p>	<p>12 Adam & Jeanette Strode and baby daughter Lucille arrived in Bangkok, Thailand. They will be in full-time language and culture study to prepare for a missional community-based ministry in this large city. Ask God for special blessings at this time.</p>	
<p>13 Let us join in celebrating Jesus, our humble King, who reigns in our hearts, not as a political figure. Hosanna!</p>	<p>14 VMM/MMN worker David Sherk assists the Quito Mennonite Church in their ministry to Colombian refugees in Quito, Ecuador. Many days are extremely challenging. Ask God to give him all the insight and strength he needs.</p>	<p>15 This evening in Perspectives (H'burg) class, Karen M. teaches “Pioneer Church Planting,” how the breakthrough of the Gospel in an unreached people requires that the Gospel be ‘de-Westernized.’ Pray for open minds and hearts in the students.</p>	<p>16 Hold Klementina Shahini up in prayer as she directs the Lezha Academic Center in Lezhë, Albania. There are rewards and challenges in this role; may she experience God's direction in every situation.</p>	<p>17 Brook Hostetter teaches at PROMESA, a bilingual Christian school in Cusco, Peru. Ask God to give her students attentive minds so that they can learn all she has to teach them.</p>	<p>19 In Orange Walk, Belize, Chelsea Kobylarz interprets spoken words into sign language for Morine, a 6-year-old deaf student. Chelsea's animation helps to convey the meaning to Morine. Thank God for Chelsea's availability for this task.</p>	
<p>20 Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph for his foes, He arose a victor from the dark domain and He lives forever with his saints to reign, He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!</p>	<p>21 In Bangkok, Thailand, Steve Horst & Bethany Tobin relate to the young adults around them, and show God's love and grace to all. Thank God for them today.</p>	<p>22 This evening is the last Perspectives (H'burg) class, with Glenn Kauffman teaching “World Christian Discipleship.” Thank God for working in each participant's life during the course and ask Him for His clear call as they move forward.</p>	<p>23 <i>Partners in Mission</i> participant Jordan Shetler teaches social studies at LAC, Lezhë, Albania, and relates to the local church. Thank God for his commitment to serve, and ask God to give him patience and stamina for every day.</p>	<p>24 Jacob & Hosanna relate to youth and young adults in various settings and answer questions, give guidance, and explain truths. Ask God to direct every interaction in this South Asian context.</p>	<p>26 Pray for Steve & Laura Campbell and their daughters as they interact with a variety of people in Podgorica, Montenegro, as they experience daily life. Who will be in their path today?</p>	
<p>27 In these first weeks of living in Termoli, Italy, Shawn & Laura Green and two sons have met many people and have interacted with believers and non-believers. Ask God to give them all they need to shine the light of His love to all.</p>	<p>28 David & Rebekka Stutzman are thankful for how church planting has become more of a priority in the Verband (German) conference. Recently, the board decided to create a church planting committee and have asked the Stutzmans to be on it.</p>	<p>29 Richard & Elsie Bowman teach and tutor students at Lezha Academic Center, Albania. May their interactions with the students and other staff members be life-giving and sustaining. Thank God for their willingness to serve.</p>	<p>30 VMM/EMM workers Mark & Sarah Schoenhals balance ministry and family life each day. They find both roles gratifying and rewarding, and recognize God's gifts of patience, wisdom and perseverance with thankfulness.</p>	<p>25 In Carbonara, Italy, Chris & Melody Riddle build relationships through social interaction and English classes. Their lives speak of the love of Christ, and others observe and desire to know more. Pray that God will guide and bless them.</p>	<p>26 Pray for Steve & Laura Campbell and their daughters as they interact with a variety of people in Podgorica, Montenegro, as they experience daily life. Who will be in their path today?</p>	

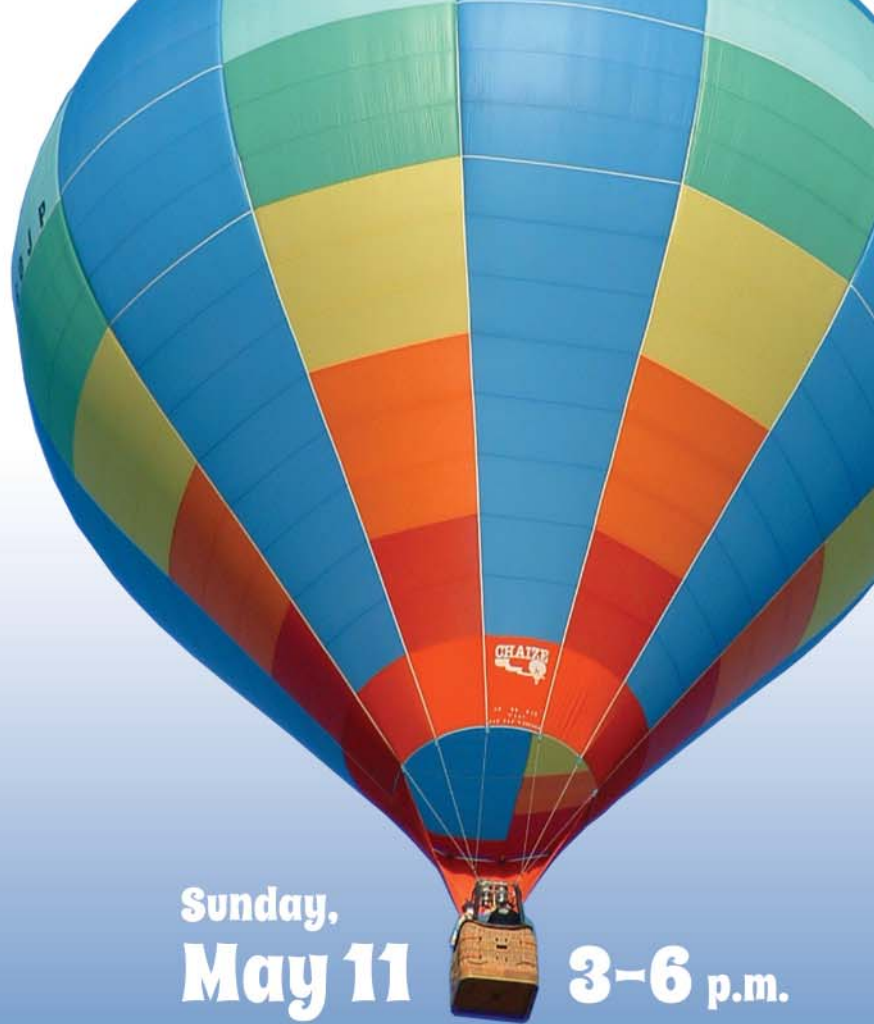
Prayer calendar sponsored by:

Bergey's Tire
TIRE EXCELLENCE SINCE 1924

190 Charles Street
Harrisonburg, VA 22802
Phone 540-442-8473
www.bergeys.com



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



around
the world
in a big
balloon!

Family Missions Festival

celebrating the people and ministries of
Virginia Mennonite Missions

- Learn about the ministries of VMM and our workers at displays
- Enjoy ethnic foods and games from VMM's areas of ministry
- Tethered balloon rides
- Members of the Walking Roots Band perform bluegrass-fused eclecticism
- Radio-controlled planes
- Bounce House
- Food available for purchase: bicycle ice cream, kettle corn, Strite's Donuts

Sunday,
May 11 3-6 p.m.
Eastern Mennonite School gym
801 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg

Generously sponsored by

