

Signs of Life creates space for worship in Deaf culture

By **KELLI YODER**

MaryBeth and Chris Moore expected God would call them to use their training as nurses to go to impoverished places.

So they were surprised in 2000 when they felt convicted to adopt Mynor, an 8-year-old from Guatemala who is deaf.

“It was one of those things where if we hadn’t adopted him, it would have been directly disobeying God,” MaryBeth said.

Mynor was their first step into the Deaf community and the reason they began to learn American Sign Language. Since then, they’ve adopted Mario, another deaf son from Guatemala. They also relocated, changed careers and found themselves in a routine that revolves around activities for the Deaf community.

And in 2006 they followed another calling to begin a youth group for deaf students that grew into Signs of Life Fellowship for the Deaf.

The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind is located in Staunton. It attracts a high population of deaf people to the city. Still, Signs of Life is the only indepen-



Signs of Life Fellowship gathers together. Photo courtesy of MaryBeth Moore

dent deaf church in the Staunton area that meets regularly for Sunday worship. It’s one of four Deaf churches within Mennonite Church USA.

Besides the Moores, only one of the 30-40 people who attend Signs of Life regularly came from the Mennonite tradition. Many don’t come from church backgrounds at all. And the Moores have discovered the needs in the deaf community to be great.

“There are so many holes in their understanding of the Bible,” MaryBeth said. “They miss out on so many things.”

The Moores were commissioned to assist with deaf ministries at Community Fellowship in 2008 by Springdale Mennonite Church in Waynesboro. Thomas and Knopps joined them, along with two other couples—Harry and Lacey Wood and Jack and Jennifer Johnson—in helping Signs of Life get started.

The five members of the leadership team do their best to make Signs of Life accessible to the Deaf community. That means casual sermons, signing praise music lyrics together, children’s stories from videos made by established deaf ministries, and a facilitated discussion about the material afterward. Plus they host Bible studies, youth group and holiday parties

and organize trips to various deaf-friendly events.

After each service there’s a potluck fellowship meal. The Moores realized early on that people were more likely to come back if there were regular meals. Hosting holiday parties, birthday parties and baby or bridal showers have also drawn people in.

Initially, Signs of Life was worked into the budget of Community Fellowship and Springdale Mennonite. In 2010 they started collecting their own tithes and have managed to be self-sufficient since then.

They even raised funds to take a mission trip through Virginia Mennonite Missions to Jamaica this June, where they conducted a Bible school for students at the Maranatha School for the Deaf.

“We want to have more connections with Anabaptist deaf ministries,” MaryBeth said.

Earlier this year, they began the process of becoming part of MC USA’s Virginia Conference and are a church in formation.



Thomas Knopp, left, talks to Harry Wood. They were both part of the group who founded Signs of Life, an all-ASL church in formation in Virginia Mennonite Conference. Photo by Kelli Yoder/MW/R



Kelli is a reporter and writer for *Mennonite World Review*. Article reprinted with permission.

Make disciples of all nations!

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Jesus' final words to his disciples' recorded in Matthew 28:18-20 was granting them authority to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them, and teach them the ways

of God. Traditionally, this text is understood as the Great Commission. It stands as a witness to the resurrected Christ. The purposes of God begun in Jesus' ministry are carried on by the disciples. This text is one of the twelve scripture texts that I am selecting for my own leadership formation.

On the farm house front porch of my great uncle Jonas L. Kratz, I learned in my young adult years that "Christianity is always one generation from extinction." It was impressed upon me by this Bible teacher that my role was to tell other people about my faith in order to be a witness of God's love. Equally, important was the emphasis upon the community of faith that was supposed to train and nurture followers of Jesus. The collective witness of the community of faith was as important as the making of disciples.

In the beginning of this New Year as we envision the future, I want to encourage us to make as our number one priority the making of disciples. How you go about this endeavor is really left to your creativity and the Spirit of Christ that guides your life. This challenge enables us to call youth and young adults to embrace the way of Christ. It gives us opportunity to be a witness of Christ's empowering love in the grocery store, at work, and at the ball game! It enables us to reach across ethnic barriers as well as religious differences, because we are always engaged in the way of Christ. We may even discover that in our witness to others, we become a different type of disciple!

Let us not lose hope in this time of turbulence and uncertainty. But let us, like Jesus' first disciples, proclaim the reign of God where ever we go. May God's overwhelming presence be our source of comfort and joy as we call people to a new type of faith experience – being a follower of Jesus for the twenty-first century!

Clyde G. Kratz
Executive Conference Minister
Virginia Mennonite Conference

Hernandez named local coordinator of IBA

Lizzette Hernandez will serve as the new coordinator of the local



Spanish-language Anabaptist Biblical Institute (IBA), a program under the auspices of Mennonite Education Agency that offers diplomas in Theological Studies to Latino church leaders.

Lizzette, a third-year Master of Divinity student at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, has been teaching in the IBA program for the past two years.

"As coordinator, I want to strengthen the classes we already offer and eventually explore the possibility of opening a new class," Lizzette notes.

IBA has been in Harrisonburg since 2006. Six students have received diplomas, and over 40 have been enrolled in classes. Two classes are currently offered to a total of 22 students from five local Latino congregations (Mennonite and otherwise). Lizzette's appointment follows the departure of former director Byron Pellecer.

Lizzette, a retired physician, and her husband Mario are active members of Iglesia Discipular Anabautista (IDA).

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Financial Focus	
Virginia Mennonite Conference	Sept. 1, 2013 to Nov. 30, 2013
budget	\$64,099
expenses	\$52,851
income	\$38,075
investments	\$0
net	-\$14,776
Virginia Mennonite Missions	Sept. 1, 2013 to Nov. 30, 2013
Mission Fund	Special Projects
total revenue	total revenue
expenses	expenses
\$104,111	\$159,850
\$304,694	\$319,511

Powhatan Mennonite Church celebrates 50 years

By PAT HERTZLER

November 2-3 was an exciting milestone for Powhatan Mennonite Church, as we celebrated 50 years as a congregation and also dedicated our new addition, the Community Life Center. Our theme was “Remembering God’s Faithfulness: Reflecting on the Past and Looking Forward to the Future.” The weekend was filled with friends who came from far and near, good food, a concert by New Horizons on Saturday evening and a special worship service on Sunday morning. A 50-year time capsule was buried a few weeks later.

In June 1960, Bob and Marie Hertzler moved their dairy operation from the Mennonite colony in Newport News to Powhatan. They longed for a church fellowship and

it wasn’t long until other Mennonites began moving into the area. Three years later on March 31, 1963, a group of 29 people met in a home for the first Sunday School. At first they gathered in homes but desired a church house.

The first building was built and dedicated in 1965 with Lewis Burkholder serving as pastor. Through the years the congregation grew, and a second building phase with a new sanctuary and additional classroom space was completed in 1982.

Now, 50 years later, Tim Kennell is pastor. His wife, Beverly, is the daughter of the first pastor. The church once again has expanded, this time adding an atrium, portico and multipurpose room with a gym, new kitchen and additional classroom space.

There is still another building phase in the near future which includes extending the front wall of the sanctuary and remodeling the Sunday



The Powhatan Mennonite Church building with the new addition dedicated over the celebration weekend.



The service of celebration and dedication for the 50th anniversary and Community Life Center. Photos provided by author

School wing of the original building.

Much has happened in these fifty years: prayers have been answered, souls saved, and babies born; death has visited, love has joined hearts together and a few have been torn apart; some have moved, new people have come, the church has grown and expanded, leadership has changed and the first generation of founders have become great-grandparents. Two of the original four families are still serving in our midst. We are the church of tomorrow. Great is thy faithfulness.



Pat is a writer and member of Powhatan Mennonite Church.

MHI becomes ministry of Virginia Mennonite Missions

By GLORIA DIENER

Five years ago, Mennonite Hispanic Initiative (MHI) was formed for the purpose of developing Anabaptist Latino ministry within Virginia Conference.

In recent months MHI has become nested within Virginia Mennonite Missions, joining common goals of the two organizations into a single focus. VMM seeks to nurture a missional movement within the conference; MHI has sought to provide ministry settings for Hispanic leaders in Harrisonburg and surrounding areas.

Marvin Lorenzana, director of MHI since its inception, was a third-year student at Eastern Mennonite Seminary when he realized that not enough Latino leaders were being developed within VMC to serve

the growing Hispanic community in the surrounding area.

As a result, MHI was established: to respond to the need for educated, mission-minded, and VMC-connected Latino leaders. EMS offered several scholarships to provide potential leaders with higher theological education from an Anabaptist perspective. At the same time, a local chapter of the Anabaptist Biblical Institute (IBA—see article on page 2) was established to offer a foundational theological education and ministerial training to Latino leaders.

Consequently, a core community of trained Latino church leaders has emerged, providing leadership for the churches

associated with MHI. Since 2009, two Latino churches have been planted and another has joined the conference through connections with MHI.

Skip Tobin, USA Ministries Director for VMM, is excited about the new collaboration. “These folks are learning to live the mandate Jeremiah gave to the exiles of his time: ‘Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,’ he notes, “and here they are, among us, ‘learning to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land!’”



Gloria serves on the board of Mennonite Hispanic Initiative.

New staff members appointed in Global Ministries, Advancement

By VMM STAFF

Virginia Mennonite Missions welcomes new staff members Lynn Suter, as Director of Operations and International Ministries, and Sherah-Leigh Gerber, as Advancement Director.

Suter's position has two key areas of responsibility: To assist the President by providing oversight to the internal operations of VMM and leadership in enhancing those operations (30%), and to lead the Global Ministries Team in forming, sending and supporting missional leaders to make disciples in the way of Christ in partnership with the global church (70%).

Lynn brings a unique set of gifts and experiences to this role. She is a committed follower of Jesus and an active member of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, serving in roles such as youth sponsor, worship leader, Sunday school teacher, pastoral council member and pastoral search chair.

Lynn and her husband, Eldie, served as missionaries in Nepal for three years (1995-1997) under Mennonite Board of Missions and United Missions to Nepal. She also served as team leader of their



Lynn Suter Provided photo

international mission team. More recently, Lynn has been MST chair for Steve Horst and Bethany Tobin, as well as vice chair for New Bridges Im-

migrant Resource Center.

In her professional career, Lynn has practiced business law for 20 years, most recently at Lenhart Obenshain. She has extensive experience working with both businesses and nonprofit organizations, including helping the Board of Lezha Academic Center become a legal nonprofit entity.

Sherah-Leigh Gerber will lead the Advancement Team (a three-quarter-time position) in communicating God's work through VMM and enhancing the base of faith and finances for VMM's ministries.

She combines passionate faith in Christ with considerable gifts in the areas of team management, event planning and



Sherah-Leigh Gerber Provided photo

communications. An active member of Kidron Mennonite Church, she has shared her gifts through worship planning, preaching,

teaching Sunday school, young adult ministry and women's ministry. She and her husband, BJ, have also engaged in local mission efforts in their community through an intercultural small group.

Sherah-Leigh has served in a variety of professional ministry roles, including Staff Assistant for Virginia Mennonite Conference, Interim Director of Youth Ministries and Interim Director of Worship and Equipping at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, and, most recently, as Coordinator of Volunteers for Ohio Mennonite Conference. She has also been a freelance writer, producing a high school stewardship curriculum as well as youth Sunday school material.

Thank you for giving to Penny Power

By GLORIA L. LEHMAN

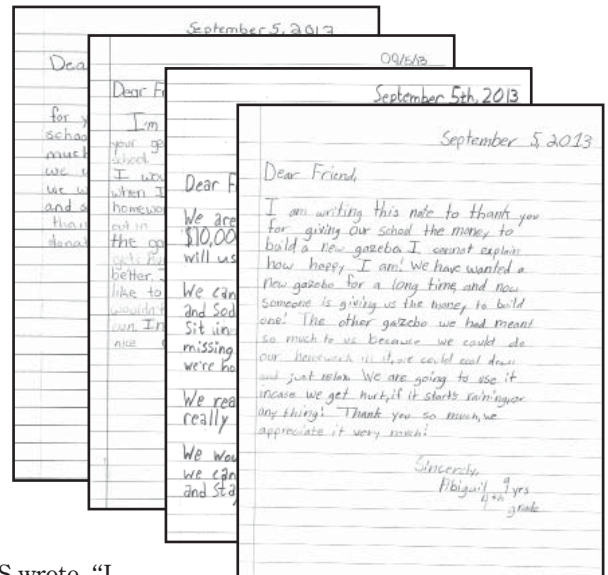
Early Saturday morning at the Virginia Relief Sale, volunteers from Park View Federal Credit Union dumped large blue jugs of coins and bills into a wheelbarrow and then into buckets. The coins went into the counting machine, and soon totals for congregations were finalized. With some funds coming in right after the sale, the total for Penny Power 2013 came to \$27,076. To see your congregation's total, go to vmmissions.org/support/penny-power/

Half of these funds will be used by VMM for assistance to displaced persons in various places. Thank you very much for your enthusiastic support of Penny Power!

In 2012, VMM's portion of the money was given to West Liberty (Ky.) Mennonite Church, to assist with rebuilding after the horrific tornado that wrecked the community in the spring. Recently, VMM received thank you letters from that community.

Rebecca Stoltzfus, treasurer of West Liberty Mennonite Church writes, "A big thank you for the monies given from Penny Power 2012. West Liberty Elementary School will replace their large gazebo that is being built with \$10,000 and \$5,000 was given to Old Mill Park to help replace the playground equipment which benefits the whole county."

One of the students at WLES wrote, "I am writing this note to thank you for giving our school the money to build a new gazebo. I cannot explain how happy I am! We have wanted a new gazebo for a long time, and now someone is giving us the money to build one! The other gazebo we had meant so much to us because we could do our homework in it...or just relax. Thank you



so much we appreciate it very much!"

Collecting the coins and bills make some dreams become reality!



Gloria is Director of Public Relations for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Sharing the light of Christ in Kosovo

By MARTIN RHODES

Burnt and abandoned houses dot the countryside of Kosovo as we drive west and north on the highway. These houses and the bullet-pocked businesses lining the highway are scars of war and the accompanying hostilities that are recent in the history and consciousness of Kosovars. As we continue on our drive through the country from the capital of Pristina to the rural town of Istog, I begin to notice that many of these homes which were ravaged during the war are being rebuilt and re-inhabited. Slowly, the scars of war are being healed.

Later in the day, I sit comfortably in a darkening room with my travelling companions, our missionary friends Vince and LaVonne Ramella, and two Muslim men and their families. These men and their families are prominent citizens in the town of Istog and people of peace to those of us sojourning through their land. As the light of day turns to dusk, we drink coffee and discuss

family, community, work, and other important and mundane things of life. As we sit and are served wonderful coffee by Vince Ramella, I am reminded that the work of the Kingdom of God is the slow work of relationship-building and peace-making. Over the next few days we will continue to sit together and enjoy hospitality, and to be and share the good news.

As supper is prepared by LaVonne Ramella and her host—one Kosovan, the other American, one Muslim, the other Christian—I am reminded of the words from the prophet Isaiah: *Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you* (60:1-2). These words of the prophet to the people of Israel are equally pertinent to VMissions' workers in Kosovo as they live out the good news that our Lord Jesus Christ lived and died to bring new light and



A dwelling burned during the Balkan War, in Istog, Kosovo. Photo: Martin Rhodes

life to a land once covered in darkness. For Vince and LaVonne Ramella and their children Sid, Bradie and Justin, and for all of us who share the good news, I pray for the light of Christ to shine in and through us to a dark world.



Martin is Short-term Missions Coach, directing the *Partners* and *tranSend* programs for Virginia Mennonite Missions.



Top: Janet and Floyd Blosser bring greetings from Virginia to the Italian Mennonite Church Conference. Below: Participants enjoy worship during a session. Photos courtesy of Floyd Blosser



“The harvest is plentiful, but...”

By JANET BLOSSER

On November 1-3, Floyd and I attended the Italian Mennonite Church Conference held at Centro Agape in Palermo, Italy. It is always a joy to return to our Italian family, re-connecting with old friends and meeting new ones.

The past year has been particularly difficult because of the untimely deaths of three persons in the congregations in Sicily, including the pastor of the Capaci congregation where we served as missionaries.

On Friday evening, the worship team of Centro Agape, the mother church, presented a concert. On Saturday evening, the worship team from Shalom (Brancaccio) led the worship. Speaker Jonathan Gilmore gave three presentations from Matthew 9:35-38, the passage that describes Jesus going through all the cities and towns, teaching in the synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.

The three sessions were: 1) Jesus, the great worker (9:35), 2) Looking for workers (9:36), and 3) Get to work (9:37-38).

Jesus is our example—He went. The crowd is waiting to hear the good news. We must be full of compassion and make disciples. We're workers, not directors.

Working with the Conference theme, “The harvest is plentiful, but...,” at different times, each congregation had ten minutes to share an overview of their past year and what was happening in their congregation. Six pastors shared (four from Sicily and two from Puglia/Molise). Special prayer was given for Sergio Crocivera, one of the elders at Centro Agape who now heads up the work at Capaci since the death of Pastor Francesco Sapienza. The conference was a great time of re-connecting with brothers and sisters. We are blessed to see God at work in calling them to extend their borders. The harvest truly is plentiful.



Janet is Italy Field Director for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Myron Blosser named 2013 Outstanding Biology Teacher for Virginia; second ‘Outstanding’ award

By MARY GOLDEN-HUGHES

Eastern Mennonite School Biology teacher and science department chair, Myron Blosser, recently received the 2013 Outstanding Biology Teacher Award from The National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT).

This honor, given annually since 1961, identifies a teacher from each of the United States, Puerto Rico, and Canada who has made valuable contributions to the profession and to students. Criteria for the award include teaching ability, experience, creativity, initiative, teaching strengths, and collaboration in the school and the community. This is the second time Blosser has won the award, having previously been recognized in 1998.

Blosser was honored at the Outstanding Biology Teacher Awards (OBTA) honors luncheon hosted by the NABT in Atlanta. Prior to the national event, he was also recognized as the State of Virginia OBTA winner as part of the Virginia Association of Biology Teachers Annual Conference in Portsmouth in September and at the Virginia Association of Science Teachers professional development institute in Norfolk in November.

Blosser, a 1979 graduate of Eastern Mennonite High School, has been teaching for 30 years and at Eastern Mennonite School since 2002. He is also the recipient of the Genzyme-Invitrogen

Myron Blosser teaches his biology class the proper usage of a microscope.

Photo by Lindsey Kolb/EMU

Educator Award and the AP Biology Boxley McDonald’s Achievement Award.

Blosser is a beloved teacher at EMS, known for “extending the classroom” (as he refers to his teaching style) as he seeks to enrich his students’ classroom and laboratory experiences with hands-on experiential learning opportunities. These opportunities have included hosting an annual Biotechnology Symposium, which brings together hundreds of Virginia high school science students for a day of high level academic symposia, key note speakers, hands-on laboratory experience and often lively debate in scientific topics and research.

Blosser also encourages and mentors independent research opportunities for EMS upperclassmen and leads enriching experiential learning trips, including the acclaimed semiannual cross country summer “Discovery” trip which tackles pressing questions and issues facing scientists, while modeling working teamwork and

interdependence as students navigate, camp out and explore our country.

According to Kathy Frame of the Virginia Association of Biology Teachers and director of the Virginia Outstanding Biology Teacher Award Program, “Outstanding biology teachers like Myron Blosser deserve to be acknowledged and awarded, not only within the immediate community and school, but across the state of Virginia.”

Blosser’s response to the award speaks to his professionalism and endless, committed drive to “do science” better. He responds, “It’s very meaningful to be recognized by your peers. It’s affirmation that you are doing something right and that gives me energy to continue.”



Mary is the Director of Advancement at Eastern Mennonite School.





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

Announcements

Feast on "Christianity's Bread" at a Winter Bible School on three Sunday evenings (Jan 12, 19, 26; 6:30-8 p.m.) at Trissels Mennonite Church. The sessions will celebrate how practicing our faith moves us toward fulfilling the most basic human hopes and longings: to give dignity and respect to everyone we meet, and to be good neighbors. Open to all; led by Harold Miller. Contact (540) 896-7289 or harold@trisselsmc.org with questions.

VMC's Winter Delegate Session will be held at Lindale Mennonite Church on Saturday, February 1, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Delegates should plan to arrive early for coffee, fellowship, and check-in. Delegates, plan now to attend, and watch for a postcard reminder notifying you when the agenda and complete details are available on VMC's website, virginiaconference.org

Grace Mennonite Fellowship invites you to an African meal in the fellowship hall, 209 Lacey Spring Rd., Harrisonburg, Friday, February 7, 5:30-7:30 p.m. Donations will benefit Rivers & Angie Williams' short-term mission trip to Liberia/Ghana in May 2014. The team, led by Arnold & Gerri Polk, presents a short program at 6:30. For reservations, contact Angie at (540) 434-0312 or Gerri, agpolk1@cox.net by January 31.

"Love & Respect," a marriage retreat, will be Feb. 21-23 at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center. This weekend getaway will provide lots of time to really connect with your spouse. In this video conference, Dr. Emerson and Sarah Eggerichs present a dynamic seminar designed to help couples everywhere achieve the relationship they've always dreamed of. For more information or to register, go to www.wcrc.info.

Register for the **Spring Quilting Retreat**, March 5-9 at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center. This will be a fun time of quilting, fellowship and worship. Come for the entire time or just the weekend! For more information or to register, go to www.wcrc.info.

Join us for **Men's Retreat** at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, March 21-23. It will be a time of meaningful worship, inspired teaching, and great fellowship that is sure to re-charge your spiritual batteries. Speakers Duane Yoder and Luke Hartman will share how their relationship has evolved to brothers in a spiritual friendship of intentional accountability and mutuality. For more information or to register, go to www.wcrc.info.

POSITION AVAILABLE

Mount Clinton Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., seeks a half-time Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults. Lee Martin is the lead pastor of this Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation, which has an average Sunday worship attendance of around 110. Anticipated starting date: after Feb. 1. Applicants should be committed to Anabaptist theology and practice and should be a member in good standing of MC USA. Prior to January 14 contact Richard Bowman, overseer, for more information at rebowmanmail@gmail.com or (540) 434-0892. After January 15, contact Lee Martin: leemartin58@verizon.net or (540) 867-9593.

UPCOMING PARTNERS TRIP

Join a Partners team to East Asia, July 7-22, 2014. In this two-week trip, a team will partner with a local church to provide an English Bible day-camp for local children. The church has identified this outreach opportunity to children and families in their area, and requested local missionaries send a team that will teach songs and Bible verses, and spend time with children. The church will provide lodging and communal meals. This is also an opportunity to build relationships with Christians from Asia 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.



Commissioning
for
Aaron M. Kauffman
as President of
Virginia Mennonite Missions

Sunday, January 12
6:00 p.m.
Zion Mennonite Church
3260 Zion Church Road
Broadway, Va.

Light refreshments will follow.

All are invited!