

Christian formation throughout the life course

By SARAH ANN BIXLER

Christian faith does not look the same in every season of life. Each season brings particular opportunities for Christian formation, and these vary in every individual. As we in the church walk alongside one another on the lifelong journey of faith, we can be attentive to one another in different seasons of life: childhood, early- to mid-adolescence, late adolescence/early adulthood, middle adulthood and later adulthood.

These seasons are described in the book *Calling All Years Good* by Kathleen Cahalan and Bonnie Miller-McLemore. Starting with the precious season of

childhood, Miller-McLemore affirms that “children often know themselves as deeply faithful.” Jesus lifted up a child’s faith as an example for all. Children have a natural capacity for spiritual connection, and this does not depend on intellectual development. This natural capacity, however, needs to be nurtured by a spiritual community.

Children live with immediacy, paying careful attention to the present. Along with their great openness and sense of trust, they are deeply vulnerable. Children, in need of protection and care from birth, form attachments to persons who care—

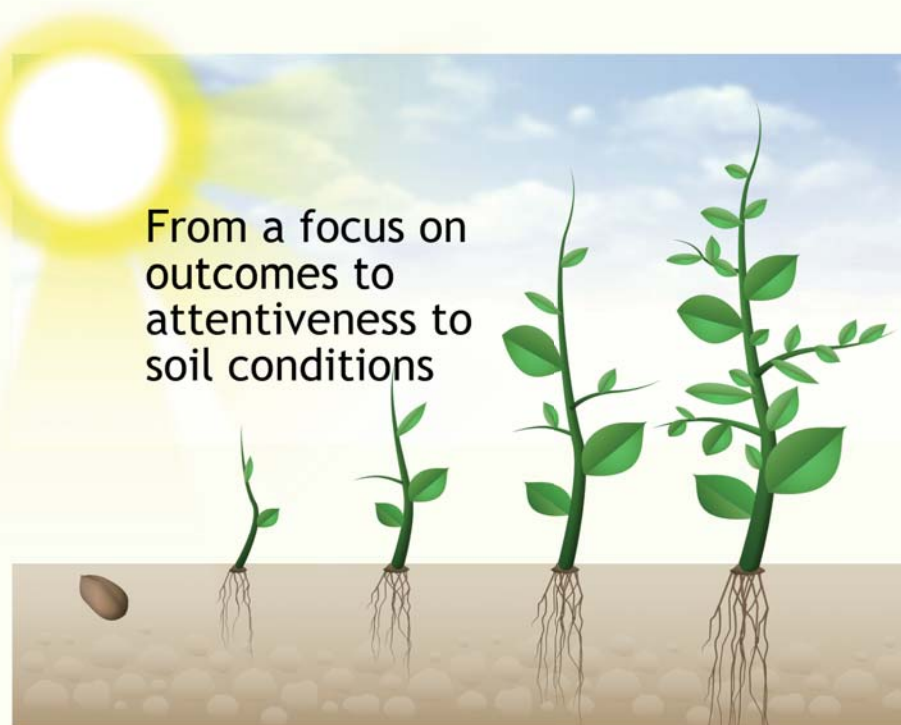
hardly care—for them. These childhood experiences impact relationships throughout life, including a relationship with God.

Adolescence is the time Western cultures have marked as starting with puberty, around age 10. This is a time of great change in the body and brain, opening new capacity for self-reflection, taking other people’s perspectives and holding different

views in tension. For persons with developmental disabilities, though not all physical and cognitive changes occur to the same extent as other teens, they too can grow in their capacity to connect with themselves, others and God. Tending these connections is especially critical in adolescence, because during this time the brain is busy pruning away neural pathways for connections and behaviors that aren’t used. If connection with God, self or others does not happen regularly in adolescence, it will be



Sarah Ann Bixler presented *Christian Formation Throughout the Life Course* at a resource session with congregational delegates at VMC Assembly in July. Photo: Jon Trotter



A slide from author Sarah Ann Bixler’s presentation at Conference Assembly. The Assembly theme of “Cultivating Good Soil” comes through in faith formation, as Bixler exhorted the audience to focus more on the soil conditions that vary among individuals and require time and attention over a focus on visible outcomes.

Christian formation continued on page 3

Spiritual formation over the life stages

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



When I was growing up, my family attended a conservative Mennonite church near Goshen, Ind. We went to church three times a week

and sometimes more. On occasion, in my teen years, I got to stay home to take care of a calving dairy cow, but otherwise church attendance was expected, as was Sunday school and MYF. During this time I also attended a Christian day school, took Bible classes, sang in choirs and attended mandatory chapels.

I don't recall when I first started to reflect on my faith journey, but between regular family devotions, school and church, I decided to follow Jesus as a 13-year-old. I still recall sitting under a shade tree talking to our pastor about my decision. I also recall my first communion; the confession made me nervous for the sins I had and may have committed.

In spite of my uncertainty about what it might mean to follow Jesus in life, I remember the enormous support I received from parents, our pastor and other adults from our church and school. My life as a child and teen was like living in a cocoon without much interaction with the wider community around me. We had no radio or newspaper until I was 14-15 years old.

All that changed when my older brother decided to join the Army and go to Vietnam. He did not pass his physical, but my growing awareness of the war, protests and riots, civil rights, driving, dating...these realities exponentially expanded my world. But ironically, it wasn't until I decided to file for conscientious objector status, and left for alternative service in Costa Rica under Conservative Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Central Committee that my faith in God took a big hit.

I soon discovered I was way out of my league spiritually. Simply getting out of my

cocoon did not mean that I could fly. I felt alone and spiritually abandoned.

After about six months, I remember praying one night and telling God that my faith journey had to become real again...or I did not know what.

Something happened to me with that prayer. That night without realizing, I began internalizing, and with growing awareness over time, Paul's words in Romans 8:39—" [That nothing] will separate us from the love of God." This interweaving of my lifestyle, Christian beliefs and conviction of God's love for me anchored my faith journey until midlife.

Despite church attendance, small group participation and considerable involvement in the life of a Mennonite church, I got burned out in midlife and disillusioned in my faith journey. I was also an exhausted professional social worker and family man. What worked for 20 years or so no longer sustained my heart, soul and relationships.

It was then my pastor encouraged me to read Morton T. Kelsey's book, *The Other Side of Silence, A Guide to Christian Meditation* (1976). It was eye opening.

Kelsey made the case that we grow little in God's love until we realize that "The test is not just whether we feel loving, it is more whether or not the other person feels loved by us" (p 67).

This reframe from "God loves me" to "I experience more of God's love only as I give God's love away" helped me find my way forward. It's been a zigzag of mistakes and spiritual growth that never ends. I have deeply appreciated involvement in our family's church community, having a loving family, learning from my students and peers at EMU, and talking with my spiritual advisor over the past 20 years.

Having grownups of faith, particularly my dad, my pastors, and my friends in my life who encouraged me to be honest about my spiritual fears, doubts and longing has been very helpful. They gave me permission to struggle and to find my way in the dark until I was found. To all of them I say thank you!

In this issue:

- 3 Christian formation throughout the life course (continued)
- 4 How we continue forming faith into adulthood
- 5 Developing faith at Mount Clinton Top ten reasons for *Sharing Our Surplus* at the Relief Sale
- 6 Thinking about faith formation in Mennonite Church USA

Conference Related Ministries

- 7 Investing in our summer staff
- 8 Faith formation in the crucible of camp
- 9 Eastern Mennonite School focuses on Sabbath Clinical Pastoral Education program to celebrate 20 years

Features

- 10 Sunday schools shape Christian faith
- 11 Editorial: Taking our faith seriously with formation ministries

USPS Statement of Ownership

13. Publication Title		14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below	
Pathways		Fall 2019	
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)		3,063	3,050
b. Paid Circulation (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
	(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 (include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)		
	(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mail including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®		
	(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)		
c. Total Paid Distribution (Sum of 13b (1), (2), (3), and (4))		0	0
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail and Outside the Mail)	(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	505	504
	(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	860	862
	(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail)		
	(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)	1,648	1,641
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (Sum of 13d (1), (2), (3) and (4))		3,013	3,007
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 13c and 13e)		3,013	3,007
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 page #3)		50	43
h. Total (Sum of 13f and g)		3,063	3,050
i. Percent Paid (13c divided by 13f times 100)		0	0

* If you are claiming electronic copies, go to line 16 on page 3. If you are not claiming electronic copies, skip to line 17 on page 3.

Pathways Fall 2019 – Volume 5, Number 2

© 2019 by Virginia Mennonite Conference. *Pathways* is published quarterly to connect congregations to the ministries of VMC. Periodical rate postage is paid at Harrisonburg, VA.

Editor & Designer: Jon Trotter

Pathways is distributed free to each household of supporting congregations. To join mailing list, contact: *Pathways* (540) 434-9727 • (800) 707-5535 info@virginiacconference.org Website: virginiacconference.org

POSTMASTER Send address changes to: *Pathways* 601 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

If connection with God, self or others does not happen regularly in adolescence, it will be more difficult to develop in adulthood.

more difficult to develop in adulthood. Formative practices in the church, therefore, are very important during adolescence.

Although adolescents are becoming more socially aware, solitude and self-reflection are very important for them. Adolescents begin to locate themselves in terms of racial, gender, sexual, national and class identities. Like children, adolescents have faithful questions. Engaging these questions in a safe community lays an important foundation for faith throughout the rest of the life course.

In late adolescence and early adulthood, from approximately age 18 through the early 30s, claiming one's identity is at the fore. This is a time of major transitions for those with enough privilege to have choices about their life, and all these transitions can lead to a sense of impermanence. For those without choices, early adulthood can bring a deepening sense of hopelessness and being stuck.

In many congregations, the ways that early adults used to be involved are no longer available to them. They have out-

grown children's and youth activities, and they may now face a choice about church attendance for the first time in their life. The Barna Group reports that 59% of early adults with a Christian background have, at some point, dropped out of going to church after having gone regularly. The transition into being an adult in the faith community can be confusing, but it helps for congregations to be attentive to individuals and their particular needs. A one-size-fits-all program will not offer what early adults need to flourish.

When we think about Christian formation, we often think of children, youth and young adults. But what about adults? Their Christian formation is ongoing. During middle adulthood, approximately age 35 until retirement, people question long-held values and beliefs, especially when they encounter change and loss in life. Middle adults naturally seek intimacy, and sadly, more than half of American marriages end within five years. Middle adults may be caring both for children and aging parents. They face competing priorities and are figuring out which dreams still seem possible in light of reality.

For American middle adults, there are often changes in employment, which may require additional schooling. Part of this may reflect their search for meaning in life, which brings some middle adults back to

the church. They often fill important roles in the community and the church, holding the most powerful positions in American society. They want to shape younger generations, based on their own commitments and regrets.

In later adulthood, adults who were employed may choose or long for retirement. They consider the legacy they will leave and what life has meant to themselves and others, sometimes with a sense that it isn't too late to do something new and meaningful. There can be a healthy sense of transition, passing on wisdom and practices to great-nieces and nephews, grandchildren and younger generations in the church.

Yet, later adulthood can be challenging with an uncertain sense of time, loss of loved ones, physical decline and financial limitations. Fearing or embracing death raises deep questions about faith. This can lead to a strong desire for reconciliation with one's self, others and God.

For persons across all times of life, intergenerational community is crucial for Christian formation. The church has often expected adults to form children in faith, but children form adults, too. The youngest children can cultivate adults' spiritual growth because they see and hear what adults fail to notice. Mennonite theologian Nancy Bedford reminds us that children can raise important questions for spiritual discernment in faith communities. When people in congregations grow together in faith across the various seasons of life, they have the greatest potential for healthy Christian formation.

Participating in God's formation of faith is an exercise in spiritual discernment, as we attend to and celebrate the particularity of each person. With all persons, it's important to not just understand expected patterns, but to pay attention and nurture growth in all people whom God has uniquely created. In this way, Christian formation can flourish throughout the life course.

For persons across all times of life, intergenerational community is crucial for Christian formation.

Pastoral transitions

(July to September 2019)

Randy Coblenz, former oversight leader and pastor in Eastern District, retired in May.

David J. Gullman, Northern District, status change from ordained to ordained for special ministry for his ongoing role as chaplain of Pleasant View Inc.

Pearl Ann Hartman succeeded Rene Hostetter as lead pastor at Big Spring Mennonite Church on August 1; Rene is continuing her ministry at Sentara RMH as a palliative care chaplain and end-of-life doula.

Phoebe Garber Hershey retired from her role as chaplain at Woodstock

Hugh L. Hollowell transferred to Gulf States Conference at the end of April 2019

Paul George Kniss, formerly in Harrisonburg District, died July 8.

Barry William Loop withdrew from Virginia Conference membership in May 2019.

Juan "Carlos" Malvaez was licensed in May for his role as co-pastor at Manantial de Vida.

Wendy Nohelia Malvaez was licensed in May for her role as co-pastor at Manantial de Vida.

Frederic A. Miller retired from his role as pastor at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church in May.

I. Keith Miller, a member at Mt. Pleasant, moved to inactive status.

Philip Jason Yoder was licensed in May for his role as lead pastor at Crest Hill Community Church.



Sarah Ann Bixler is a PhD candidate in practical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, and is an instructor of formation and practical theology at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

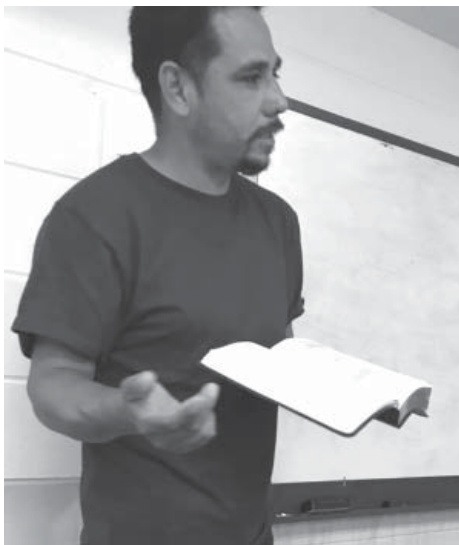
How we continue forming faith into adulthood

By **ARMANDO AND VERONICA SANCHEZ**

Translated by **Lizzette Hernandez**

One of the ways we are working in faith formation at Iglesia Enciende una Luz and at Iglesia Shalom is through discipleship in small groups. In those groups, a closer relationship is developed among believers and new members of both congregations. This allows a space where people can reflect on their own faith, ask questions and express concerns. We try to connect people with groups that are near to their homes. In addition, we do visitation in homes, hospitals and the jail.

We also encourage the most committed members to be trained more in depth in theological education, by attending to the



Pastor Armando Sanchez leads a weekly Bible study at Iglesia Enciende una Luz and Iglesia Shalom. All photos courtesy of Lizzette Hernandez



Weekly Bible studies are concluded by praying for every need mentioned at the congregational gathering.

Anabaptist Biblical Institute, to strengthen their faith and beliefs, and to learn how to share it with others.

Although faith formation is important among young people, we recognize its importance among every age group. For adult ages, we have groups that meet once a week where we designate a chapter of a specific book of the Bible to read together. Then we all meet at our weekly group gatherings and talk about the assigned reading, comment on what we learned, our questions, and how we can apply it to everyday life.

The goal is increasing our faith and building the spiritual life of each person who attends these adult meetings. In this way, an atmosphere of close fellowship, mutual trust, and commitment is created. This space helps us reflect on how to face our individual challenges, struggles, and weaknesses during the week.

These groups have produced disciples who follow Jesus, who grow and develop spiritual maturity, and who work on the gifts they have received from God and serve in the congregation.

We pray together to conclude the meeting, interceding for every need, asking the Holy Spirit to fill us with his peace and comfort as we go.

Some of the challenges that we face are the difficult work schedules of the believers who have different working hours during the week. Another challenge is to motivate believers and new believers to embrace a permanent commitment with their own personal growth.

So what have we found that really works? The congregations we are serving have been growing and we believe that faith has been increasing too, through different groups and discipleship oriented groups of two to five people.

We also believe that another factor—nurturing a close interaction with people, letting them know that we are interested in their spiritual growth, that we genuinely care for their lives when they face a test or a struggle that might set them back—has been effective. We also encourage people through phone calls and text messages.

Beside the Bible studies, we have also found Missional Discipleship Groups and the resources of Anabaptist Biblical Institute to be effective and helpful.



Armando and Veronica Sanchez are pastors of Iglesia Enciende una Luz, Harrisonburg, Va., and Iglesia Shalom, Waynesboro, Va.



A weekly Bible study is an important way that the two congregations form faith in both young people and adults. Participants talk about the assigned reading, address questions, and learn how to apply it to everyday life.

Developing faith at Mount Clinton

By JIM HERSHBERGER

Mount Clinton Mennonite Church, part of the Central District of Virginia Mennonite Conference, is located in the village of Mount Clinton, about five miles west of Harrisonburg, Va., and surrounded by corn, soybean and rye pastures that feed the dairy and poultry farms of Rockingham County.

Mount Clinton has had ups and downs in attendance over 170 years of existence. Most recently, we lost some attendees over the human sexuality challenge in our culture, and are in the process of adjusting to a smaller size while continuing our ministries in the surrounding community.

We have worked at developing Christian faith in those who attend and also have reached out to others in the surrounding community. We have strong Sunday School programs for school-age children and young adults. We also have several classes for adults. We have had a youth activities program that includes Bible studies as well as recreation opportunities for our teenagers.

We also have an outreach to persons who are incarcerated, which includes writing letters to inmates, prayer, visitation, and support for them when they re-enter the community. We form support groups to pray, read the Bible, prepare for baptism or church membership if they desire, job searches, and reintegration into the community in general. We are in the process of discussing possible partnerships with other local churches and a local chaplain supported by VM Missions to provide more support for inmates re-entering the community.

Christian faith formation for our children and youth tends to focus on basic understandings of the Bible story, God's claim on our life, what is sin, God's great salvation for us in Jesus Christ, and the challenge of following Jesus in our cultural moment. We use the Bible, our *Confession of Faith*, and stories of our Anabaptist forebears and exercises to help our youth embrace our Christian heritage and faith and build their understanding in preparation for baptism.

Faith formation in our older members follows this same pattern. But it also responds to the challenges of raising families. One of the ways to support middle aged



Mount Clinton Mennonite Church engages the work of Christian faith formation in all age groups and through various life circumstances.

members who have children is to challenge them to help with baptism preparation. This encourages parents to teach their children and not put this important parental duty only on the pastors. I also meet with single persons to support their responsibilities in life and vocation.

As pastor, I work with the older members to ensure they have the discussions with their families and their wills are in place that will help their children work together after their passing. I discuss with them what they have learned from their life in the church, as a believer, and their relationship with God.

While discussing funeral plans might seem like a difficult conversation, it is helpful to reflect with them the legacy they want to pass on to their children and church.

Mount Clinton has small groups that meet usually twice each month. They usually include a meal, sharing, prayer and Bible reading. These groups have historically played a large role in both integration into the church and also served to help believers mature in their Christian faith through Bible study, prayer and fellowship.

While we have faced decreased attendance in the last several years, this has leveled off and we have had several new families and single persons begin to attend. The challenge is to integrate new attenders and members into our small groups in a way that keeps the focus on Bible study, prayer and Christian discipleship.



Jim Hershberger is pastor of Mount Clinton Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Top ten reasons for Sharing Our Surplus at the Relief Sale

By HARVEY YODER

The Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale's Sharing Our Surplus (SOS) Campaign was launched two years ago to solicit cash donations for Mennonite Central Committee in addition to money raised through auction, food and other sales. So far the effort has raised over \$75,000, and has been designated specifically to meet the growing needs of refugees around the world.

SOS is not intended in any way to compete with any of the many other fund raising efforts at the sale, but to provide an additional opportunity for contributing, especially for the majority of attendees who do not take part in the annual auction.

Here are top ten reasons (from least to most important), for matching or exceeding liberal spending at the October 4-5 Relief Sale this year with generous financial contributions:

10. All gifts are tax deductible (when filing with itemized deductions.)
9. Giving can be by cash, credit card or by check (made out to Virginia Relief Sale, with SOS on the memo line).
8. Every penny contributed goes for refugee relief. Everence Financial provides volunteers to staff the giving table and any minor costs are absorbed by members of the SOS committee.
7. This giving adds no extra calories to our diets or creates any extra things to find room for at home—though we do encourage purchasing plenty of food and other items at this annual event!
6. SOS has helped the Virginia Relief Sale exceed record totals for MCC relief efforts.
5. SOS contributions can be made at any time (and for any amount) on the Virginia Mennonite Relief Relief Sale website, allowing people to participate even if they can't attend.
4. SOS funds will be forwarded to

Sharing Our Surplus continued on page 7

Thinking about faith formation in Mennonite Church USA

By SHANA PEACHEY BOSHART

The Renewed Commitments of our Journey Forward process¹ give us good guidance in how we will focus our faith formation efforts. As together we follow Jesus, witness to God's peace, and experience transformation, we will be formed more and more into the likeness of Christ, which is our lifelong purpose as disciples of Jesus.

Our Mennonite Church USA staff strategic plan adapts the renewed commitments into goals this way:

1. We will equip our members with resources to form them to follow Jesus faithfully regardless of the costs.
2. We will empower our members to bear witness to God's holistic peace and proclaim Christ's redemption to the world.
3. We resource our members in the spiritual disciplines that can transform us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, into a reflection of God's unending love.
4. We will practice intercultural competency, working in a manner that honors the gifts and the Imago Dei in all people.

As the formation minister³, my easy-to-memorize interpretation of what that means for how I do my work is this: I will help our congregations and conferences

- form faithful disciples
- witness to God's peace and redemption
- teach spiritual disciplines
- adapt our behaviors and practices to include everyone.

Mennonite Christians believe that through daily obedience to the teachings of Jesus, we are formed in every way into Christlikeness: our character, our understanding, our affections and our actions (soul, mind, heart and strength). This obedience usually takes the form of particular practices. Here are some of the resources from Mennonite Church USA that help you adopt faith-forming practices.

AnabaptistFaithFormation.org

This is a website that I started several years ago in collaboration with other Mennonite Church USA formation leaders. It is designed to be your one-stop hub for Anabaptist-Mennonite faith formation resources. The tabs are organized by age, which is the most common way our congregations organize faith formation ministries. You will find resources for all ages and for intergenerational settings. To find resources organized by practices, start at the "Christian Practices" tab.

Use this website to find curriculum and how-to's for any age group and most ministry settings in church life. Recommend it to your youth sponsors, Sunday School teachers (for all ages), kids club leaders, VBS leaders, and small group Bible study facilitators. Add a link to this website from your congregation's web page so your formation leaders will always have quick access to it.



The Gathering Place

This is a landing page within the mennoniteusa.org site where I host webinars for faith formation leaders. This fall, I will co-host three webinars with Michael Danner, Associate Executive Director for Church Vitality, which will be taught by Scott Peterson. The series is called "Putting Jesus on the Ballot: Anabaptism and American Politics." Scott is the leadership pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church in Glendale, Arizona, where he first taught this content in a Sunday School class. He adapted it for a seminar at MennoCon19, and again for this series of webinars for congregational leaders and other people interested in thinking together carefully



about how Christians engage government without falling into polarization or partisanship. This is an important topic for congregational leadership teams to be thinking together about right now. Check it out at thegatheringplace.us, and join us on the Tuesday evenings of September 17, October 15, and November 19.

Sunday School curriculum for children: Shine

Wouldn't it be amazing if your children's Sunday School curriculum had a Pinterest page of pins for every lesson? And wouldn't it be great if those pins were videos, songs, books that go with the lesson? What a great resource for teachers! Wouldn't it be fantastic if every Sunday there was a note to put in the bulletin (or email to parents) that gave families a short guide for reading the Bible and talking about it together? And wouldn't it be great if that note coordinated with the children's lesson text?

Shine is that curriculum! How we approach faith formation with children is critical to how they will view faith for the rest of their lives. In *Shine*, Bible stories are central. Christian community is assumed to be the context for forming faith. The inner spiritual lives of children are nurtured. *Shine* emphasizes peace-making as integral to God's good news. Find it at shinecurriculum.com



Bible Study resources

Bible study and prayer are the root Christian practices from which our formation sprouts, grows and bears fruit. Here are some Bible study resources you need to know about.

The Bible Study page of AnabaptistFaithFormation.org gives you a number of free downloads. On the left side, find one-page downloads you can print and use to lead a small group or Sunday School

through a study of any Scripture passage. Print, prepare, tuck in your Bible and you're ready to go. On the right side are resources for reading and interpreting Scripture from an Anabaptist perspective.

TheBibleProject.com makes free videos and podcasts that present and interpret the Bible as "a unified narrative that leads to Jesus and has profound wisdom for the modern world." Check out their many series of videos and also their podcast.



The videos are great teaching tools for youth and adults, and are compatible with Anabaptist thought.

Deep Faith Conference



I would like to host a gathering for faith formation leaders every year. In 2020, I will partner with Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary to combine the faith formation conference, Deep Faith, with their annual Pastors and Leaders event. Come to AMBS March 2-5 to join other pastors, lay leaders, formation leaders, youth leaders, parents, and educators as we consider

Shaping Faith in a Digital Culture. How do we form faith, recognize the gospel and nurture Christian identity, all within a digitally saturated culture? Our special guest will be Karen-Marie Yust, M.Div., Th.D., author of *Real Kids, Real Faith* and professor of Christian education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. Learn more and register at ambs.edu/pastorsandleaders.



Shana Peachey Boshart is Denominational Minister for Faith Formation, Mennonite Church USA

1 Found at mennoniteusa.org/journey-forward/

Sharing Our Surplus continued from 5

Mennonite Central Committee right after the sale, since there are no expenses to first be accounted for.

3. Generous giving to people in need results in their being helped, as well as generous givers being blessed by having invested in truly lasting "treasure in heaven."

2. Never has the need for helping displaced people been so urgent. One in nearly 100 people worldwide have been forced to leave their homes because of war, drought, persecution or other forms of violence. The average length of displacement and/or homelessness is ten years.

1. By being willing to sacrifice to help meet the urgent needs of men, women and children around the world we are truly following in the footsteps of Jesus, who "became poor for our sakes" and whose entire life was lived in the service of the God who "so loved the world"—with a gift of unimaginable generosity.



Harvey Yoder serves as the Sharing Our Surplus chair for the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale.

Investing in our summer staff

By RACHEL YODER

At Highland Retreat, we know that even the small window of time that makes up a week of summer camp can have a lasting impact on a camper's spiritual life. We also know that much of the credit for this goes to the summer staff who serve as living examples of what it means to be followers of Jesus. Of all the wonderful things that happen at camp, many of the most powerful and enduring moments involve our summer staff pouring their energy into the lives of their campers. And we deliberately seek ways to pour back into the lives of our staff, mentoring and supporting them even as they are mentoring and supporting the campers.

Some support is built into our staff structure; we have leadership staff who can offer counselors advice and instruction on what to do and how to do it, and we also recently created the position of 'staff pastor' to formalize our desire to nurture staff spiritually. The staff pastor shares devotionals geared toward staff members rather than campers, and provides one-on-one mentoring conversations that have absolutely nothing to do with job performance. Both kinds of

support are important, especially during the prolonged intensity of a full summer at camp.

Camp is packed full of both physical and spiritual activity. Yet it is also a sort



Highland summer camp counselor Rachael Brenneman with a camper. Highland seeks to mentor and support summer staff as they in turn do the same for campers. Courtesy photo

of Sabbath: a place removed from the distractions of everyday life, a time set aside for focusing on God. In the midst of the summer, there may be times when the

Highland Retreat continued on page 8



Highland Retreat counselor Andrew Stoltzfus poses with a camper. Courtesy photo

Highland Retreat continued on page 8

overwhelming feeling is sheer physical exhaustion—but after the dust has settled and counselors have caught up on their sleep, most former summer staff will point to their times at camp as some of the high points in the formation of their faith.

Camp is where they dove headfirst into ministry; where they learned skills in nurturing, leading, and teaching; where they practiced relying on and listening to God while

outside their comfort zone. These experiences can shape the entire course of their lives. And as they minister to others in all the many places God leads them, we see that the love and care we invested in them when they were summer staff continues to pay dividends far beyond the end of the summer.

Rachel Miller is the Bookkeeper at Highland Retreat, Bergton, Va.

Faith formation in the crucible of camp

By **BOB BRISCOE**

I might be biased, but when you talk about faith formation, I feel like there's absolutely no better place on earth to watch it happen than at camp. We get a front row seat as people of all ages come to focus on God and draw nearer to Him. Our mission is to provide a place for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of kids and adults through camping and retreats. Every week in staff meeting we pray, "Lord, draw the hearts of our participants into a closer walk with you!"

We see faith formation happening most of all through our Kaleidoscope Camp program. And, in that context we see it most in the lives of our summer staff. One camp leader explained it by saying, "We disciple them while they are immersed in the crucible of ministry."

Every day they have the opportunity to live out their faith in a small group setting. They lead devotions, answer questions, direct activities, help resolve conflicts, give advice, and lead campers to faith in Christ. Every day they take time alone to focus and pray, and at the end of the week we take a day to reflect on the week and learn how to keep doing this thing called, "walking with God." It's intense. And, it's awesome. The community that results is nothing short of amazing.

One counselor mom described it this way: "At camp, my daughter has developed a desire to see young people come to Christ and to grow to spiritual maturity. Every time I picked her up after a week



Campfire time at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center is a transformative time of worship and sharing for campers and staff alike. Courtesy photo

of camp, she had story after story about what God did as she engaged with different individuals through deep conversations and even really hard struggles, processing very tough life situations with them. She was amazed to watch God use her to connect with these young people with varying life situations, and see how leading them through God's word and principles could have such a transforming impact on them. She also learned the need and power of prayer as she had to rely on God for helping her through some tough conversations."

As a result of this intense time of ministry and learning, our camp counselors

often go on to become spiritual leaders in various settings. One young lady is now a discipling leader on her dorm hall in college. One married couple is departing soon for the mission field in Guatemala.

I'm humbled and excited to say that while many young people are leaving the church, we are elated to see the staffers that we train each summer becoming lifelong followers of Jesus and leaders in the church. God is using the ministry of WCRC to transform lives.

Bob Briscoe is Executive Director of Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, Toano, Va.

Eastern Mennonite School focuses on Sabbath

By ANDREA WENGER

How do we make time for rest and renewal when our world draws us into busyness of mind and body? During this school year, Eastern Mennonite School administrators, faculty, and K-12 students are exploring that question together.

“Our students deal with a ton of pressure,” says Justin King, high school principal. “Whether it’s academic, on the field or court, to get into the ‘right’ college or career path, or among friends and social circles, it’s real,” he continues. “We want to be honest about the toll that takes and think about how we make time to rest and renew our bodies, minds and souls as God calls us to do.”

In the opening fall conference for faculty and staff, Joyce Peachey Lind read an excerpt from the book, *Little House in the Big Woods*, where Laura recounts the Ingalls’ family Sunday rules: no running, shouting, laughter, or play beyond reading and paper dolls.

That kind of Sabbath practice can be torturous for young children, she noted. So what is relevant and meaningful for us today—of all ages—as we honor God’s command to make time for rest and renewal?

A former first grade EMES teacher and current seminary student, Joyce passed out mathematical flash cards and invited staff to list things they hope to add and subtract as Sabbath practices in the coming year. For herself, subtracting interaction with her cell phone for a Sunday was an exercise she found both challenging and revealing.

Sabbath is a discipline, a practice, she noted. “We won’t always succeed in the goals we set for Sabbath. But we learn a bit each time and realize what can feed and nurture us.”

“It’s easy for a Sunday to go by and be busy all day with homework and other things,” says Liam Hughes ‘21, a member of chapel planning committee. “I think it’s



A word cloud of words mentioned by EMS faculty and staff as they reflected on Sabbath in their fall conference. Courtesy photo

really good that we are talking about this as a school. It’s important to be reminded that this is something God wants us to do.”

Young community members will benefit from reminders about Sabbath practices too. Maria Archer, K-8 principal, read Psalm 46:10 when she introduced the concept during elementary Gathering. “Be still and know that I am God,” and they sang the words in a song.

Andrea Wenger is EMS Director of Advancement.

Clinical Pastoral Education program to celebrate 20 years

By EMS COMMUNICATIONS

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) at Eastern Mennonite Seminary involves a supervised practice of ministry for seminarians, pastors, chaplains and others — anyone wanting to develop their capacity to minister more effectively in their context. Many denominations require their pastors to complete a unit of CPE for ordination. Multiple units are a common requirement for certification as a chaplain. Since 1999, 290 people have been trained through the seminary’s program. They serve and minister in a variety of contexts and many states, carrying their CPE practice learnings with them wherever they work.

In honor of our 20-year anniversary, there will be a gathering and celebration in January 2020 during the annual School for Leadership Training. Kenton Derstine, associate professor of supervised ministry and a certified educator through the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, will lead a plenary session featuring a panel of

CPE alums. A workshop will be offered by Penny Driediger, the newly named CPE program director. Also an ACPE certified educator, she is an assistant professor of supervised ministry at the seminary. A banquet and program is planned for Tuesday evening. We look forward to seminary alumni, faculty, current students, chaplain mentors and friends of the CPE program gathering to celebrate our history and energize our future.

Driediger’s new role builds upon her years of experience working with the program. “I’m pleased to join CPE, which has been a transformative experience of learning and growth impacting every aspect of my life,” said Driediger, who divides her time between supervising the CPE program and working as a staff chaplain at Sentara RMH. “Intentional reflective practice on life and ministry has increased my self-awareness and ministry capacity. I am able to look at myself more honestly and accept responsibility for self as I seek to

companion others toward healing and wholeness.”

For many others as well, participation in CPE is a transformative educational activity. The educational process invites a disciplined practice of reflection upon the practice of ministry through a case study method of learning. This requires students to reflect theologically as well as draw upon the resources of the behavioral sciences. These case studies range widely. One may focus questions how to respond to those in the midst of some crisis to ministry to those ageing who question their purpose in life.

EMS offers CPE in multiple formats. Students can take a full-time summer unit from late May to early August, or an extended unit, which is a part-time assignment across the two semesters of the school year. The CPE program at EMS is also unique in its flexible internship opportunities. For more information, visit emu.edu/seminary/cpe/

Sunday schools shape Christian faith

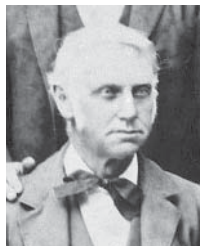
By ELWOOD YODER

The Sunday school movement in Virginia Mennonite Conference had an uncertain beginning 150 years ago. In 1869, seventeen Virginia ministers barely got the two-thirds majority needed to pass a resolution allowing Sunday schools. Only one of the three bishops in that 1869 Conference meeting supported Sunday schools.

Fortunately that supporting bishop presided over Emanuel Suter's church. The Sunday school initiative in Virginia Conference may have begun around Suter's kitchen table, by a letter written two years before the 1869 resolution. It's not an overstatement to point to Emanuel Suter's 1867 letter to *Herald of Truth* as the real beginning of Sunday schools in VMC.

Suter wrote his dynamic letter on a Sunday morning from his home west of Harrisonburg. He had six children aged ten and under running around while he penned

his thoughts. In a stirring letter to Mennonite readers across the United States, Suter called on believers to use their gifts for God's kingdom. That's exactly what Suter did in the last four decades of the 1800s. Though not ordained, Suter had the wisdom, leadership skills, and



Emanuel Suter (1833-1902) helped establish Sunday schools in VMC. Virginia Grove Weaver photo

organizational abilities to lead the Sunday school movement in Virginia Conference. Until his passing in 1902, he worked tirelessly to establish Sunday schools, likely remembering those children underfoot at his kitchen table.

Those opposed believed that: Sunday schools might allow non-Mennonites to teach their children; Sunday schools would allow women to teach publicly; it was just following the fashions of the day; the Bible did not mention Sunday schools. About 15% of Middle District Mennonites left the Conference in 1901, partially over the Sunday school issue.



Paul Glanzer, with Layne Fawley, taught Sunday school at Zion Mennonite Church to disabled adults, 1985-2005. Wayne Showalter photo

By the mid-twentieth century, Sunday schools had grown and thrived in many Conference congregations. At Weavers Mennonite Church, for instance, the average attendance for Sunday school in 1961 stood at 268. Sunday schools met the needs of Bible teaching and faith formation.

Minister Paul Glanzer and his wife Isabel, along with their disabled son Jerry Glanzer, came to

Joy Yoder, Sunday school teacher at Zion Mennonite Church for the past thirty years, with her second and third grade class, February 3, 2019. Elwood Yoder photo



Marie Blosser's Sunday school class at Weavers Mennonite Church, 1932. Gail Trissel photo

the Zion Mennonite Church in 1985. For about twenty years Paul taught a Sunday school for his son Jerry and others like him. A van load attended Paul's class from Pleasant View, Inc., in Broadway. Paul helped the disabled adults sing, pray, and learn about God from his teaching.

Today, 150 years later, Sunday schools are still vital in the lives of many Virginia Conference churches. It takes dedicated leaders and teachers to conduct a Sunday school program. Laura Suter Wenger (1873-1959), for instance, daughter of Emanuel and Elizabeth Suter, taught Sunday school for forty-five years.

I recently saw a photo taken from the back of a Sunday school class at Lindale Mennonite Church. A lay member of the congregation led a large group of children in prayer. The attentive children had their heads bowed and were learning how to pray. This writer's three-year-old grandson sat in the front row, with his head bowed in prayer. For those of us who care about teaching Scripture to children, Sunday school continues to be a great place to shape Christian faith.



Elwood Yoder teaches Bible and Social Studies at Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, Va.



Taking our faith seriously with formation ministries

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



In September, my wife Eunice and I will travel to Pennsylvania to celebrate our forty-fifth class reunion. We were classmates at Christopher Dock Mennonite High School.

I attended from fall 1970 through spring 1974. (VMC members Willis Hunsberger, Knoxville, Tenn., Barbara Weirich, Ted and Sue Swartz, and Rosemary Landis, all of Harrisonburg, Va., are also members of the class of 1974.)

Lee Yoder, principal, and Elam Peachey, assistant principal, provided leadership to the school during those years of our faith formation in that Mennonite setting. Christopher Dock was a place to explore my faith and emerge with a commitment to serve the church in ministry.

At that time, the school was a ministry of Franconia Mennonite Conference. My congregation at the time, Franconia Mennonite Church, provided educational assistance to families through the Brotherhood Plan. The Brotherhood Plan was communal mutual aid for families in the congregation who desired a faith-informed education, regardless of their economic standing.

Many families sent their children to Christopher Dock because the congregation provided financial support. I remember the gratitude expressed by one individual at our congregation's annual meeting.

He expressed his support of the congregation funding for families to send their children to a Mennonite school, and recalled the burden of taking out loans to send his children to the Mennonite school. Even though he no longer had children at the school, he advocated the congregational vision of a Brotherhood Plan as truly a community mission for forming faith of our youth.

I realized the immense value of our Mennonite congregation and communal approach [so that] all families could have their children receive a faith-based education.

In another period of my life, while attending Princeton Theological Seminary, I discovered the contrast of our community's mutual aid approach to Christian education—with an approach that sought to provide assistance to those of academic promise.

A professor invited me to attend his church in Newark, New Jersey. I attended, and following the worship service, he gave me a tour of the academy associated with this 1,600 member congregation (which eventually grew to 3,600 members).

During the tour, he reported that the academy only admitted those students who showed academic promise, who had the ability to thrive in college, and make a difference in the community. Traveling home, I was troubled by this gifted leaders' congregational approach. I realized the immense value of our Mennonite congregation and communal approach which provided opportunity for all families to have their children receive a faith-based education.

Faith formation across the course of our entire life is a communal task carried out by our local congregation and ministries of the larger church. I am grateful for

the “always task” of teaching faith to children, youth, and adults in our local congregations in worship, Sunday school, and various creative ministries.

I am thankful for ministries like Highland Retreat and Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, and their focused ministry of calling forth faith in youth and young adults in a retreat setting.

I am deeply gratified by the ministries of Eastern Mennonite School, Eastern Mennonite University, and Eastern Mennonite Seminary, as young adults and

adults pursue knowledge, experiences, and wisdom through educational processes informed by our faith traditions to “lead together” in a world of uncertainty.

Being part of a community of faith that seeks to embody the way of Christ is a lifelong journey...at each crossroads there are difficult choices to make. But we do not need to make those choices alone.

I am thankful for the ministry of Pleasant View, Inc., for its commitment to walk alongside families with special needs. Pleasant View provides hope, care, and faith-informed compassion to children and adults with special needs.

I am appreciative of Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community because it provides a faith-informed communal vision. Its leaders seek to create an environment that “strive[s] to be a community of hope, meaning and growth where people can age well and live fully.”

Our Conference also has an asset in Virginia Mennonite Missions, which for the last one hundred years has formed faith by equipping individuals, leaders, and congregations to share new life in Jesus Christ with neighbors near and far.

Being part of a community of faith that seeks to embody the way of Christ is a lifelong journey. It is a journey that recognizes that at each crossroads there are difficult choices to make. But we do not need to make those choices alone.

The local assembly of believers, the ministries of the church in our conference, and Mennonite Church USA, all strive to provide faith-informed resources and services to strengthen our community life and witness.

In these times of global, national, and religious turmoil, I give witness to the goodness that is present in the vision and purpose of our faith community and its ministries to form and sustain our faith throughout our life course and the special needs that emerge along the journey.

Clyde G. Kratz is Executive Conference Minister of Virginia Mennonite Conference.



Pathways
Virginia Mennonite Conference
601 Parkwood Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2498

Fall is a busy time for many of our Conference Endorsed Ministries! Check out these events:

EMU **HOMECOMING AND FAMILY WEEKEND**
October 11-13
For more info and to register go to emu.edu/homecoming

A banner for Eastern Mennonite University's Homecoming and Family Weekend. The background shows a large crowd of people gathered on a campus lawn. The text is overlaid in white and orange.

Eastern Mennonite School **Homecoming • Oct. 18-20**
easternmennonite.org/alumni/homecoming/

*volleyball soccer tailgate
worship touring choir music
reunions for classes with 4 & 9
Saturday breakfast for all celebrating
reminiscing building tours*

A collage of three photos: a group of students in colorful costumes, two men in hats smiling, and a group of women in professional attire.

PLAN TO JOIN OUR HARVEST celebration
FRIDAY, NOV. 1, 6 P.M.
easternmennonite.org/support/harvest-celebration/

A banner for Eastern Mennonite School's Homecoming. It features the school's logo, the event dates, a website link, and a list of activities. A collage of photos is on the right, and a "Harvest Celebration" notice is on the bottom left.

VM Missions **CENTENNIAL Celebration** 100.vmmissions.org

A collage of three photos: a family portrait, a man pointing at a wall with a woman sitting on the ground, and a man in a blue "STAFF" shirt holding a child's hand.

A banner for VM Missions' Centennial Celebration. It features the logo, the event name, and the website. A collage of three photos is on the right.