



Waynesboro Mennonite Church member Toni Hoy cooks for WARM, the Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry. She organized hosting the week of WARM in the congregation.

Photo courtesy of Clair Good

Hospitality: Ministry in the neighborhood

By CLAIR GOOD

Recently I enjoyed a fun and dynamic time with my three-year-old granddaughter. She was adamant that I “look” at the plethora of things she wanted to show me. I don’t speak Spanish and she doesn’t speak English. Her mother was born in D.R. Congo, grew up in Kenya and the US, but now serves with MCC in Nicaragua. It was pure joy to sit, play and

laugh together. Though our languages were different, we communicated deeply. I have come to understand that listening to each other, even when we don’t fully understand, while receiving and offering hospitality, is the language of connectedness and transformation. Just like my granddaughter, some things don’t seem to change with time or culture.

The language of love is exhibited in hospitality and the willingness to relate to people who are different than ourselves, even though we may not fully understand each other’s culture and “language.” Today, people communicate differently about church and issues than in the past.

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Ministry in the Neighborhood

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



A congregation that I attended after graduation from high school was clearly focused on reaching people in the church's neighborhood. The vibrant congregation, Ambler Mennonite Church, found ways of reaching out to neighbors in the northern suburbs of Philadelphia, Pa. Christmas caroling was one of the most memorable.

We traveled by standing in the back of a grain truck as a group. When we arrived at one of the selected homes, the pastor or a representative from the church went to the front door with a plate of homemade cookies. Then the carolers began to sing. By the end of the evening, we were outwardly cold and ready to enjoy hot chocolate and cookies in the basement of the meetinghouse. But we were warmed inside by the experience of sharing the good news of Christmas. The neighborhood was our mission field.

Sadly, I fear that we have largely moved into a time of congregational life based on personal benefits. We belong to a local congregation that has music that suits our tastes, a preacher that recites what we believe in a style with which we are comfortable, a Sunday school class with our peer group, an ascetically pleasing building, financial assistance for Mennonite education for our children. But what happened to our missional ethos – the desire to be in relationship with people as a witness of God's goodness in Jesus Christ and discovering that, in walking with people, we become transformed also?

Many congregations engage in a Christmas project. At this time of year, many mission agencies invite our participation, and congregations enjoy responding to needs that come their way. They collect items and attach cards of goodwill, but often these mission projects are directed away from the neighborhood. Not that there is anything wrong with meeting

an international need or something out of the community, but I wonder if this type of ministry is somehow safer because there is more emotional detachment when you don't know the recipients. Donors feel the satisfaction of giving and meeting a need, but I imagine there would be more emotional investment if the people who receive the gift live next door and we hear their stories and situations.

Neighborhood ministry requires courage and wisdom. It requires courage to learn about another person: their story – their needs – may interrupt our patterned life. This person or persons may raise questions about our beliefs and understandings, requiring us to rethink our own frameworks of faith.

Wisdom is also required to recognize that my faith frameworks may not work in this situation. We need wisdom to know which stories to tell about Jesus' life and ministry, about his disciples and the experiences of the people healed and transformed by power, forgiveness, and love. Hopefully, this sharing will lead to a person wanting more, and experiencing transformation. It may take wisdom to recover from failed attempts to get it right, or realize that our answers do not meet the question being asked.

Mission in the neighborhood is not for the faint of heart. Neighbors observe our coming and going, our living and responses to life, and our conflicts and failed attempts at resolution. Yet, it is when we are about ready to give up that God most often shows up, restores our sense of purpose, and reminds us that God works in spite of us.

In this season of Christmas, risk it all. Share your life with a neighbor. See what God does with your initiative. In this issue of *Pathways*, we highlight several congregations engaged in neighborhood ministry. We hope to stimulate your imagination about meaningful outreach to consider in your community.

Blessings in this New Year as you recapture a passion for mission in your neighborhood.

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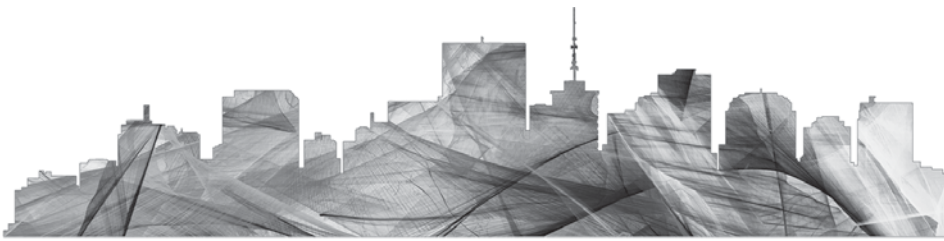
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■ Clyde G. Kratz is Executive Conference Minister of Virginia Mennonite Conference.



Treating the wounds of Richmond

By RYAN AHLGRIM

On a Saturday morning in mid-October, a truck arrived at First Mennonite Church of Richmond and unloaded enough sleeping pads and blankets for us to accommodate up to thirty homeless women or men. In the late afternoon, our guests arrived on a bus, and for the next seven days our congregation mobilized to supply sleeping space, showers, laundry, toiletries, breakfasts, sack lunches, and dinners at the church.

The following Saturday morning the bus transported them to another church; and we began loading the bedding on the truck and cleaning up our facility. We have been doing this every year for the past thirty-three years.

Two summers ago, our Outreach Commission wanted a renewed focus and strategy for congregational ministry to our community. The chairperson arranged for representatives of various local ministries to speak at our church each Sunday during the Sunday school hour. After hearing from about a dozen organizations, the congregation then selected two or three ministries with whom we would explore a partnership.

We also identified the following community needs as our primary focus: homelessness, poverty, immigration, conflict resolution, and racial justice. We are still in the process of developing relationships with various organizations and expanding our ministries. The following is a sampling of ministries that we are involved in within our immediate community:

Food collection. Every Sunday we collect food and supplies for Lamb's Basket, a local food pantry and distribution center.

Support for a local elementary school.

We collect clothing and winter wear for an elementary school in our neighborhood that has a large population of at-risk children. In addition, some of our members volunteer as mentors for children who are struggling academically or socially in school.

Meals. One Tuesday morning a month, we host a light breakfast open to the neighborhood, as well as anyone in the congregation who can drop by. A few times a year we cook a large supper for families that are striving to stabilize their lives and coming together for training and support. Once a year we host a dinner for local first responders, and another dinner for families with children with disabilities. In addition, our church serves as one of the hosts for the annual National Night Out—a time to bring the neighborhood together for food, games, and getting acquainted with local resources.

Refugee support. Beginning three years ago, with the support of Church World Services, our congregation became sponsors for a refugee family from Afghanistan. We helped the family line up English language classes, medical care, and employment. We also provided regular transportation; and after the father got his driver's license, we purchased a car for the family. We maintain a close relationship with the family. We have also offered a wide range of help for refugees from Sri Lanka and provided transportation for attending church.

Restorative justice. One of our members is the director of the Virginia Center for Restorative Justice, and a couple of members

First Mennonite Church identified the following community needs as its primary focus:

- *homelessness*
- *poverty*
- *immigration*
- *conflict resolution*
- *racial justice*

volunteer as discussion leaders at prisons and community meetings, or as mediators for resolving juvenile criminal offenses.

Deep Water. In order to work at poverty and racial justice, we are developing a new ministry that we hope to launch in early 2020. Deep Water is an experimental community of Christian worship that will be led by an interracial worship team and worship band. A series of weekly evening services will focus on issues of poverty and race relations, and offerings will go to local organizations addressing those concerns. The services will feature creative music and meals incorporating the celebration of communion. Although hosted in our facility and underwritten by our church, Deep Water will be nondenominational so as to reach as broad an audience as possible.

In the next couple of years, I expect our outreach ministries to the community to continue evolving as we seek to match our resources and passions with our community's greatest needs.



Ryan Ahlgrim is pastor of First Mennonite Church, Richmond, Va.

Hospitality continued from cover

Waynesboro Mennonite Church (WMC) is a mature congregation. Some may be concerned about our long-term viability because of our age demographic. We are building with what we have. Our church tag line is “Imperfect People Reflecting God’s Love.” A missional foundation was laid by WMC founder pastor Roy Kizer and reinforced by pastors following him.

The Waynesboro congregation has a gift of hospitality. As part of my pastoral discernment process, my wife, Beth and I attended a Sunday morning service at WMC as strangers. We wanted to see what the church was really like. Would it be like many other churches where you feel like a stranger, even though the sign outside says *Everyone Welcome*?

The music, service and sermon were great, but we were most impressed by the hospitality. We were greeted warmly by almost everyone in the congregation.

I was curious how the church family would respond to the untimely and uncomfortable death from suicide of a church

parking lot and field behind the church full of cars as the church family and community came together to support each other as we mourned together.

A common response to why [people] attend is, “We like the music, but the hospitality is awesome. We feel like we are at home and accepted as we are.”

I am convinced this is the kind of hospitality we need to be an effective spiritual presence in a community. Since becoming pastor a few months ago, I have watched as visitors are welcomed and embraced as part of our extended church family. When asked why new members are attending, a common response is, “We like the music, but the hospitality is awesome. We feel like we are at home and accepted as we are.”

Waynesboro Mennonite has some of the best fellowship meals. We love to eat together. Yes we have good Mennonite cooking, but the fellowship around the tables is refreshing and builds community. A person was looking for a church for some time. After attending WMC the first time, he said, “I have found my church home. I was welcomed as part of the family.”

Recently we did a funeral for a church member. After the funeral some of the extended family members began attending. Soon they were bringing other family members, who, like themselves, experienced this contagious spiritual hospitality and have found a home at WMC.

For a number of years, Waynesboro Mennonite has been hosting Kids Club. A group of us form a walking school bus to collect the children. This process opens the door for conversation with family and

friends on the streets around our church. Again, our contagious spiritual hospitality seems to be working for us.

During a recent week, WMC hosted the Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry (WARM) shelter by offering our building and hospitality to our homeless friends in our community. This is where we shine. Our mature members don’t need to have lots of energy to serve food. They don’t preach at our friends and guests. We do what we do best. We sit, listen, laugh, and talk with our friends. We respond to their needs. Our contagious spiritual hospitality impacts those we interact with, and God opens the door for ministry.

WMC hosts the Iglesia Christiana Shalom church plant, led by Armando and Veronica Sanchez. We don’t speak the same language, but the contagious spiritual hospitality goes in both directions as we endeavor to partner to reach our community with Christ’s love.

Waynesboro Mennonite is mature and many of our members don’t have the energy they once had. Yet they are using the gifts that God has given them.

We sit next to the new person. We greet them and welcome them. We listen to their stories even when they are quite different from our own. Throughout the Old and New Testament, we find that God evaluated the spirituality of a community by their hospitality—or lack thereof. Waynesboro Mennonite Church is building on the gift we have. Just like my granddaughter, the language of transformation and community outreach is best accomplished by receiving and giving hospitality in love. We think our contagious spiritual hospitality will reach our community. We are growing.



Clair Good is pastor of Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.



Pastor Clair Good cooks pancakes for WARM. Waynesboro Mennonite Church hosts the shelter one week a year.

Photo courtesy of Clair Good

family member. I decided to attend to be supportive to the grieving family. Because of the dynamics, I expected only a few people to attend the service. I wept as I pulled into the parking lot and saw the whole

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. —1 Peter 4:8-10

Big Spring serves Page County neighbors

By PEARL HARTMAN

Big Spring Mennonite Church is deeply involved in many ways in Page County, Virginia. Our regular Wednesday noon prayer group prays for the needs and hopes of our community.

We are reaching beyond those gathered for worship by attending quarterly events at the assisted-living facility of one of our members, and volunteering at a local agency, Page One, which helps with needs in the county.

Relationships are key to connecting with others beyond ourselves. Family members and neighbors are considered part of our life together and, because we live in a small community, there are many ready-made connections.

We celebrate Christgiving, an event to honor both Thanksgiving and Christmas, by providing a large meal and music to warm our hearts. A different music group leads each year.

The residents from the Assisted Living home thoroughly enjoy the home-cooked meal made by church members on a dark winter night, as do others who are lonely and wanting to find a place to belong.

We also enjoy being out in the community and in nature. Once a year, we go

up on Skyline Drive for our Sunday morning worship. This past summer we went on a free admittance day to the park. After our meal, we happily packed up to make space for a Muslim group wanting to set up for their picnic.

In August, we hand out water to the runners in the Luray Triathlon, handing out water. Road clean-up also takes us outside and blesses our neighbors, too.

The needs in Page County are significant. With a higher unemployment rate than any of the surrounding counties and fewer job options, we are aware that many families live on the edge of hunger and have to make hard choices with the income they do have. "Feed the Lambs" is a joint effort of local churches to provide a meal to elementary school children who may not have enough to eat over the week-end. Big Spring Mennonite Church packs 28 bags of food every two weeks to be delivered to Springfield Elementary School, two doors down from our church. For Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter, we pack an additional bag so they too can celebrate without going hungry.

Our most comprehensive way of reaching beyond the wall of our church is the



Big Spring Mennonite Church hosts an annual yard and bake sale in May as a fundraiser and an outreach to the community. Photo: Big Spring Mennonite Church via Facebook

Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale. From helping with take-down and set up, planning for and handing out supplies for food booths and the main meals, to making pies and comforters, to running in the 5K, we have 33% of our congregation actively involved in the Relief Sale.

There are many opportunities to serve Christ in our community. We make our building available to the local elementary school for Bible programs held off-site. Though we are a small congregation, we serve with joy where we can to bring the light of Christ and will continue to do so as long as we have strength to do it. Connecting with the school, meeting the needs of those who lack resources, and praying for our neighbors keep us vibrant and alive in our walk with Jesus.

Pearl Hartman is pastor of Big Spring Mennonite Church, Luray, Va.

Pastoral transitions (Fall-Winter 2019)

James Åkerson, appointed oversight leader of Charlottesville Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg District, October 25. (A CMC pastor is the Harrisonburg District Minister.)

Alfonso Alvarado, licensed for the role of church planter at Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah, Northern District, October 21.

Joe Bontrager, retired pastor, transferred credentials from Allegheny Conference to VMC.

Spencer Bradford, former pastor at Durham Mennonite Church, ordained for special ministries, September 17. He is executive director of Durham Congregations in Action.

Andrew R.W.B. Fairfield, pastor of Christiansburg Mennonite Fellowship, ordained November 19.

David Gingerich was licensed for the role of associate pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, October 13.

Clair E. Good transferred from Atlantic Coast Conference to VMC on October 23; he is lead pastor at Waynesboro Mennonite Church.

Anna Janzen returned to active status on September 21; she is associate pastor at Huntington Mennonite Church, Eastern District.

Mark Kimmet was ordained September 21; he is lead pastor at 3:16 Christian Community Church, TCK District.

Mark Landis, former pastor in Northern District, died December 12.

J. Michael (Mike) Metzler, former pastor at Zion Mennonite Church and church planter, moved to "active without charge," July 31. **Ervin and Bonnie Stutzman** serve as Zion interim pastors.

Veva Mumaw transferred from Indiana-Michigan Conference to VMC on November 11; she is the director of admissions and church relations at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

Dayna Olson-Getty moved to special ministry status on November 19; she is an editor with MennoMedia, where she has served since August 2019.

Ben Risser is "active without charge" since completing his role as pastor of Ridgeway Mennonite Church. **John Stoltzfus** (transferred to VMC from Franconia Conference on October 24) and **Don Yoder** are co-interim pastors at Ridgeway.

Robert Wenger became lead pastor of Zion Hill Mennonite Church on November 19; succeeding **Lowell Haarer**, who retired in August.

Ken Wettig was licensed for his role as co-pastor at Early Church, November 7.

Paul "P.T." Yoder, former pastor in Harrisonburg District and VMissions president (1985-1990), died December 16.

A small congregation reaches out in a big way

By MARK KIMMET

3:16 Christian Community Church is a relatively small group that has made it our mission to be a big part of our surrounding community.

We are located in a suburban setting on the edge of Hickory, N.C. We began our creative reputation by purchasing a building in 2016 that was never meant to be a church, and ‘redeeming’ what used to be an office building into the gathering place for our fellowship. We rooted ourselves in the surrounding community, not in a gaudy church structure, but in a humble, common place. The steps we took to ‘repurpose’ an existing structure is positively noted by those who live near it.

I will highlight three efforts that our church is making to reach those outside our church walls.

The first is through outdoor summer cookouts. The idea grew out of a presentation I heard Art McPhee give about his experiences with church efforts in Florida. This is a creative way to invite the surrounding community to a time of food and fellowship. The goal is to engage those who would, for various reasons, never enter through the doors of a church. But attitudes can change when they see those that make up the church in an everyday atmosphere of friendliness and fellowship.

This summer was our third year putting on these cookouts and, in a time when most of us drive by countless churches to get to our own, it is such a wonderful sight to see individuals in the community walking with food in hand to the outdoor cook-



Donna Ward, a member of 3:16 Christian Community Church, plants vegetables in the church's community garden. Courtesy of Mark Kimmet

out at their church next door. Does anyone walk to church anymore? The community around 3:16 CCC does!

The second effort I would like to highlight is our Community Garden. This was our first year and it was a complete experiment. We had vacant land and I have a weakness for heirloom tomatoes, so it just made sense to turn it into a useful extension of our church outreach. While it was a lot of work (any new idea is), it accomplished exactly what was intended—community involvement and interaction.

When it became known that this garden was for everyone in the community as a witness to the mission of the church and the edible provision of God, it became an instant

success. We learned a lot and are excited for next year's efforts at bringing the community to the church in a display of love and good tomatoes!

The third effort is working with local Baptist churches in the community to provide coordinated efforts to help and reach those who are struggling. In the past we have partnered with these churches in “A Love Your Community” event that provided a free dental examination to those in need. We are also working with them for a combined Thanksgiving event.

It is encouraging to see the trust and cooperation these other denominations are giving to our church, extending the right hand of fellowship as followers of Christ. It is an important way of strengthening our community with the teamwork of various denominational leaders, all seeking to help the same people.

We look forward to the new and creative ways we can share the love of God that is in Jesus Christ to our surrounding community, knowing that what keeps people out of the church is many times a fear of the church. Many times the love we can show to those in our community drives out that fear and we see the shame and pain of sin being cleansed by the shed blood of Christ, one person at a time.



Mark Kimmet is pastor of 3:16 Christian Community Church, Hickory, N.C.

NewBridges supports a community of neighbors

By ALICIA HORST

Mennonite churches wanting to serve the more recent immigrant communities to the Shenandoah Valley launched NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center in 2000. We are located in downtown Harrisonburg and connect with hundreds of individuals and families in our

region who have questions ranging from where to find English classes to where one can locate affordable healthcare. Our staff works directly with people who are navigating significant medical expenses and have successfully assisted patients with financial assistance awards of

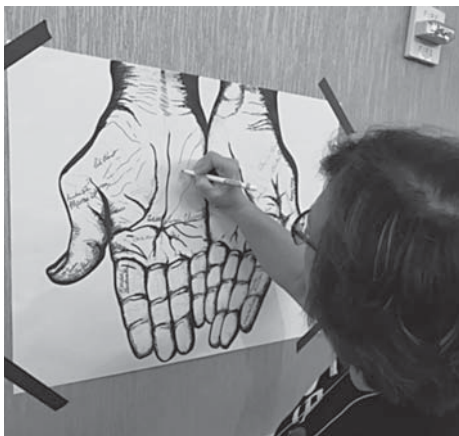
more than \$560,000. Our Immigration Legal Program has assisted over 120 people with screenings and representations this year. Those who are eligible have been able to apply for an Employment Authorization

NewBridges continued on next page

Rooted in Christ as God's beloved daughters

By MARIAN BUCKWALTER

When did you last splotch colors of paint on your hand, then stamp your handprint on paper? This was the beginning of a beautiful piece of art at Women's Retreat as we reflected on being Rooted in Christ. Each session we added something more to the picture—roots growing deep, branches high and wide, colorful fruit. At the end of the retreat we wrote our names on a drawing of hands open and outstretched to us. Beloved daughters, we are held in God's hands. God knows us by name.



Each woman placed her name in the palm of God's hand, which many found to be a moving experience. Courtesy of Deb Pardini

Just before retreat I'd had a monologue with God. "Why do you keep bringing certain situations into my life? I don't know how to handle them. I'm not patient enough. I'm not assertive enough. I'm not skilled in this area. You should find someone else!"

That evening, in our first session, speaker Deb Horst, associate pastor at Lindale Mennonite Church, shared a similar story. Her response when God called her to pastoral ministry was a whole list of "I'm Not's." God stopped her and said, "But I AM!"

Her story hit me in my gut. My earlier monologue had to become a conversation.

I had to start listening to God in this matter. As I took time to sit and listen, I heard God say, "I have chosen you for this. I have gifted you. Besides, it's not about you; it's about ME!"

I asked God for three things: God's peace to fill me; the ability to listen well; and the courage to speak honestly and openly. Uncomfortable situations keep coming. I still resist sometimes, but God nudges me to embrace them, and faithfully provides what I asked for.

These yearly retreats help keep me and many other women rooted, growing, and fruitful in Christ. Time away—to connect and reflect, to pray and play—refreshes us, so we are better able to be a neigh-



Deb Horst (right) demonstrates the importance and value of "sistering" in our relationships with (from left) Hannah Shultz, Rachel Yoder, and Katie Liskey. Courtesy of Deb Pardini

bor to people close at hand, or far away. The annual events of Mennonite Women of Virginia—Women's Retreat, the Women Encouraging Women day, and the Prayer Breakfast are now in English and Spanish. They offer opportunities to hear what God is doing in many parts of the world, and to give to many parts of the world.

Come join in the fun! Our next event, Women Encouraging Women, will be held on February 20 at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

Marian Buckwalter is Chair of Mennonite Women of Virginia.

NewBridges continued from page 6

Document, Permanent Residency, or Citizenship, depending on their particular situation.

Our team of five staff members supports people who choose our office because we maintain a confidential space. We also visit schools and other community spaces to present general information that may be relevant for students and families.

The Spirit's work of compassion and hospitality guides our daily work of presence and accompaniment. We are grateful for the many churches who establish genuine relationships with people living in their neighborhoods and connect families with community resources.

I regularly think about what citizenship means in this country and what it means in a faith that highly values the authority and presence of God at work in the world above

human allegiance to governments and geographical boundaries. How deeply we care for humans, created in God's image, in the midst of the complexity of human constructs is one of the fundamental challenges of our faith. Join us in supporting our community of neighbors.

Alicia Horst is Executive Director of NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center, Harrisonburg, Va.

Engaging the community by embracing anti-bias education

By MELODY M. PANNELL

Immanuel Mennonite Church founded the Roberta Webb Child Care Center (RWCCC), and it was established as its own entity on November 14, 1994.

In celebration of our twenty-fifth anniversary, we are embracing and reflecting on the values, character and legacy of our namesake, Mrs. Roberta Anna Morgan Webb (1889-1990). She engaged the community with a high level of intentionality and cultural relevance. Webb resided in the northeast community of Harrisonburg, Va., just a few streets over from the current Center's location on 400 Kelley Street.

Webb established the first nursery in Harrisonburg in February 1938. She became the first African-American member of Broad Street Mennonite Church in 1943. "Sister Webb" was noted as a Mennonite woman pioneer, and recognized in her community as a teacher, preacher and social justice advocate. She spoke up against injustices and advocated for those who were marginalized in the church and the community. She cared deeply about the social disparities of the children in her neighborhood and their families.



The demographics of our children at RWCCC continue to represent a vast diversity of cultural, racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Our mission is "to serve ethnically diverse families by providing quality and affordable child care."

We are an extension of the church—a community ministry serving the local neighborhood where all children are welcomed and families are empowered to reach their highest potential. This means that we have to be intentional about engag-

ing the community by embracing anti-bias education and overcoming cultural barriers that impede positive development of our children and families.

In the bestselling book, *Anti-Bias Education For Young Children and Ourselves*, authors Louise Derman-Sparks and Julie Olsen Edwards write that "anti-bias work is essentially optimistic work about the future for our children."

"Embracing Anti-Bias Education" is also the November 2019 issue theme for *The Journal of the National Association for the Education of Young Children*. Editor Lisa Hansel writes that "[it] gives us a framework for identifying and living our values. It invites us to honor all children's humanity and to think deeply about what maximizing each child's potential requires."

Throughout our anniversary year, we are committed to interacting with this idea and engaging the community as we minister the love of Jesus Christ in a holistic and empowering manner. We are optimistic about the work of the Roberta Webb Child Care Center now and into the future.

Melody M. Pannell is Director of Development of Roberta Web Child Care Center, Harrisonburg, Va.

VMRC community engagement reflects heritage

By MAUREEN PEARSON

Core values create a foundation for an organization's mission and purpose. Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community embraces its heritage, one of its core values: *We are Christ-centered, rooted in our Anabaptist heritage of stewardship, service, justice and compassion.*

"As part of VMRC's vision to be a destination for those who want to age well in vibrant, authentic community, we offer purposeful service and volunteer opportunities for residents and employees," said Judith Trumbo, president and CEO of VMRC. "This coupled with our commitment to funding compassion care for those who deplete their resources is what underframes VMRC as a community of hope, meaning and growth. We are committed to increasing our compassion endowment, serving our community in meaningful ways and

offering employees opportunities for ongoing growth."

VMRC partners with local nonprofits for staff and residents to serve in the local community by:

- Delivering meals to seniors in our neighborhood through Meals on Wheels
- Participating in United Way's Day of Caring involving residents along with staff when possible
- Offering GrandBigs opportunities for residents to be a "Big" to an elementary student in conjunction with Big Sisters Big Brothers of Rockingham County
- Engaging with local middle school students from immigrant and refugees families through a pen pal exchange. This allows students to practice their glish language skills. More than 20 VMRC residents and students partici-

pated in the 2019-2020 school year—the second year of the program.

- Providing 48,852 hours of service valued at \$1.2 million to VMRC.
- Volunteering more than 7,800 hours of service to 50 different area nonprofits

"We give organizations who approach us about potential partnership ideas a questionnaire so that we can glean from the start what some of their goals, timelines, group size, ideas, etc. are—and to determine if we have the capacity to take on a specific request, and most importantly, whether it aligns with VMRC's vision," said Emily Young, manager of VMRC's Volunteer Services. "We seek to promote wellbeing in all of its dimensions and desire to develop positive partnerships with local organizations and schools."

Maureen Pearson is Director of Public Relations and Outreach at VMRC, Harrisonburg, Va.

Pleasant View works in and enriches our communities

By PAM MILLER

Pleasant View's vision is: *All people will have the opportunity to live in and enrich their communities.* One way we work toward our vision is through our Supported Employment program, which helps individuals in our community with barriers to employment find jobs. With job coach assistance, individuals navigate the internet and scour newspapers in search of jobs, write and submit employment applications, prepare for interviews, and receive on-the-job training.

Each person we support has different assistance needs, skills, and employment



David works at Sharp Shopper.
Courtesy of Pam Miller



In 2019, Pleasant View, Inc. hired five new employees, including Steve (pictured above), to help with record disposal. Courtesy of Pam Miller

goals. David, who works at Sharp Shopper, only needs periodic support and can call on his job coach when needed. We also help individuals like Nathan who works at Wendy's with one-on-one supports.

Job coaches also work with area employers in job development and employment planning. Area employers are encouraged to examine work place needs, and introduced to the idea of job carving.

Job carving is the act of analyzing work duties performed in a given job and identifying specific tasks that might be assigned to an employee with severe disabilities. Tropical Smoothie has carved a job for Christy, who performs meal preparation duties by peeling bananas once a week. For years, area

Domino's Pizza restaurants have hired people with disabilities to fold pizza boxes.

This year we analyzed work duties at Pleasant View and found that we could hire individuals who have disabilities to help us with our records management duties. In 2019, we have hired five new employees to help with record disposal. Each person is an employee of Pleasant View,

receives at least minimum wage for their work, and livens up the office upon arrival.

Pleasant View's mission is to support individuals who have disabilities in living out their goals for meaningful work, relationships, and spiritual development. When people with disabilities are included in our workforce, the community benefits from their enthusiasm for work and unique perspectives. We are committed to finding creative employment solutions and working with community employers to find jobs for the highly-motivated individuals we support.

Pam Miller is Development Director at Pleasant View, Inc., Broadway, Va.

Words that heal: EMU-VMRC connect through bibliotherapy

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

If you think being read to is only good for children, think again. This semester, Eastern Mennonite University students are reading with residents at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community. The practice, called bibliotherapy, is not only mutually enjoyable but promotes good mental health and healing through connection to story.

Professor Marti Eads began the program at the start of the fall 2019 semester. Each EMU student is paired with a VMRC resident for weekly one-on-one meetings to dip into literature. But the partners also trade personal stories, wisdom and connection. "They are enjoying their new friendships and learning a great deal about in-

tergenerational friendship, communication in spite of disability, pain management, and hope," said Eads.

Interns meet with Eads and also reflect in journal entries. A few excerpts, shared with permission, record how the relationships develop and how the experience benefits both participants.

Upset after a poor performance on an exam, one intern shared her frustrations with her client. In a journal entry later, she wrote, "She made me feel a lot better about it. That interaction right there is why I am truly enjoying this bibliotherapy.

"Yes, the main objective is that this is used therapeutically for the patient. And I



(Left) Ruth and Anali; (center) Lila Mae and Claire; (right) Melissa and Lois. Photos courtesy of VMRC

do believe that this is occurring. Maybe it's just because we are getting to know each other better and are more comfortable with the arrangement, but I really think she is truly enjoying the experience and is bringing a positive impact in her life.

"But I think that an even larger effect is the one this experience is having on me. Every week, I look forward to this one hour

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Grape Kool-Aid and sugar cookies

By ELWOOD YODER

One of Brenda (Carr) Fairweather's memories of growing up at the Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church is the refreshments served to children at Vacation Bible School. During Brenda's childhood at Chicago Avenue during the 1960s, there were a couple of hundred kids swelling the ranks of a mission-minded Mennonite congregation in the heart of Harrisonburg. At break time, Brenda remembers that teachers and staff served her Kool-Aid and cookies.

Chicago Avenue grew out of the impulse of Eastern Mennonite School students in the 1930s, the resources of Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions in the 1940s, and the steady stream of young couples from Virginia Conference Churches who migrated to the Harrisonburg Church.

Students from the EMS high school and junior college launched a ministry into Har-

Mennonite Church and another church on Chicago Avenue.

By 1948 the Mission Board stepped aside as the church on Chicago Avenue became self-supporting. The bishops of Northern and Middle Districts both wanted the Chicago Avenue church to be in their districts, and folks from both Districts attended the new church. When Northern District bishops gave way, Chicago Avenue became a Middle District congregation.

The missions impulse went beyond the small meetinghouse on the corner of Green St. and Chicago Avenue. In the late 1940s, Ridgeway Mennonite Church, also in Harrisonburg, came to life with folks from Chicago Avenue. In the early 1950s, others from Chicago Avenue helped establish Mt. Vernon Mennonite Church in Grottoes, Rockingham County.

Young couples from conference churches migrated quickly to Chicago Avenue in the late 1940s and 50s. Among others, these included Winston and Phyllis Weaver, Charles and Eula Burkholder, Warren and Virginia Burkholder,

John and Maude Lantz, and Harold and Athalyn Driver. The city church provided an opportunity to evangelize the unchurched and had more relaxed standards on dress expectations.

Chicago Avenue Pastor Harold Eshleman performed the wedding of Donna and Nelson Suter in June 1955. Married at age seventeen, Donna had five children, and she credits pastor Harold and key women in the congregation for giving her coun-



Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church in an undated photo. Pastor Harold Eshleman is at left. Kenneth Eshleman photo

sel and support. Chicago Avenue had active outreach ministries, like Sewing Circle and Vacation Bible School, but folks within the congregation, like Donna Suter, were also ministered to in life-giving ways.

In 1972, bursting at the seams, Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church built a new meetinghouse several miles away and became Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Others, mainly from Eastern Mennonite College, kept the doors open on Chicago Avenue and organized Community Mennonite Church. Another denomination uses the church building today, but fond memories of grape Kool-Aid and sugar cookies still survive.



Chicago Ave Mennonite Church Sewing Circle in 1951. Kenneth Eshleman photo

risonburg in 1936. Students at the school wondered why Mennonites were sending missionaries to Africa, but not reaching out to black children in Harrisonburg. Though services remained segregated, the school sent students and faculty to teach Sunday school to Harrisonburg children.

After meeting in a rented building on Gay Street for several years, and with numbers increasing, in 1939 the Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions purchased a building on Chicago Avenue. Out of the student-led work in the city, the Mission Board helped fund the start of Broad Street



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



The former Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., taken in November 2019, at Green St. and Chicago Ave. Elwood Yoder photo

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block of time that is fully immersed in itself—no strings attached to any other part of my life[...] Bibliotherapy on Thursdays has become so much more than volunteer hours, patient contact hours—it has become an integral part of my week.”

After striking out with an initial selection and a few awkward sessions getting to know one another, another intern connected with her client through a character

who had experienced the tragic death of her child. Later, she reflected: Is “the key to aging gracefully” learning to accept the fullness of life’s emotion, in all its joys and sorrows?”

The program is modeled after Clemson University’s bibliotherapy program, which was the subject of a 2019 Suter Science Seminar with Dr. Windsor Westbrook Sherrill, professor of public health sciences and associate vice president for health research at Clemson. Sherrill attended Wake Forest

University and studied abroad in England with Eads.

Eads has helped to connect EMU students with VMRC residents before. She taught a spring 2018 global literature course in which 20-somethings and seniors delved into novels and discussed the theme of love and friendship.

Lauren Jefferson is Editor-In-Chief within the Marketing and Communications Department of Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Va.

Walker family home, begun at Assembly, is completed

By CLYDE G. KRATZ

With much gratitude in my heart, I traveled to Clendenin, W.Va., to participate in the house dedication for Daniel, Darla, Daniel Davis, and Rebecca Walker on Saturday, December 14.

The Walker family became homeless when flooding destroyed their area in June 2016. For more than three years, they lived in Darla’s mother’s house nearby. The home dedication was filled with joy as we remembered the difficult journey the Walkers have navigated over the last three and half years. Having absorbed the loss of their residence, the Walkers navigated FEMA reimbursement policies and became a disaster relief organization beneficiary. It has been an emotional roller coaster of frustration, disbelief, despair, hope and exuberance; a cycle of highs and lows. But on this day, there was tremendous joy as the home was dedicated, and Daniel and Darla received the keys from Sam Miller and Rodney Burkholder, the Project Coordinators.

This Partnership Home Project began in February 2019 with Virginia Mennonite Conference delegates’ affirmation to move forward. Larry Stone, representative of Mennonite Disaster Service, invited our participation in the project. The delegates’ eagerness to move forward launched an initiative to secure project directors, volunteers, and funding. On July 19, Kevin King, Executive Director of MDS, gave an overview of the MDS mission. During this event, Beryl Jantzi, Southern District Minister, invited delegates and worshippers to participate. The evening offering included cash and pledges exceeding \$7,000. Congregations and individuals contributed to-



At the house dedication on December 14 were Sheldon Wenger, MDS Old Order Coordinator; Wilda Wenger; Miranda Nabers, Disaster Case Manager for the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church; Sam Miller, Project Coordinator; Daniel, Darla, and Daniel Davis Walker; Dale Lehman, contractor; Rich Rhodes, MDS Shen. Valley Unit Chair; Rodney Burkholder, Project Coordinator, and Clyde G. Kratz, Executive Conference Minister. Photo by Joyce Burkholder

ward the project goal of \$40,000. With joy, I report that the goal has been met. Thank you for your generosity!

During the home dedication, Project Coordinators Sam Miller and Rodney Burkholder reported on the work process and challenges that they faced in completing the house. Over 100 volunteers contributed more than 1,000 hours of labor. Dale Lehman, the contractor that organized the framing of the house on the basketball



The completed house in Clendenin, W.Va. Photo: Clyde Kratz

court of Lindale Mennonite Church on July 19, was also recognized for his leadership role. Gratitude was expressed to Miranda Nabers for connecting the Walker family to MDS. A number of MDS units supported by our congregations made significant financial contributions including the Shenandoah Valley MDS Unit, and the Eastern Virginia MDS Unit.

A letter written by Marian Buckwalter, President of Mennonite Women of Virginia was shared with the Walkers. I am grateful for the wall hanging and comforters the Mennonite Women of Virginia provided during our Conference Assembly in July.

Because of our Conference constituency and others, the Walkers experienced God showing up in their life. Thank you for being the hands and feet that God used to provide housing for the Walker family.

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



Pathways
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FINANCIAL UPDATE

If VMC received **\$35 per church member**, our expenses would be fully covered. We receive an average of just **\$17 per member** from Conference congregations, so we depend on individual giving (25% of our income) to supplement what we receive from congregations.

We need \$35,000 in individual gifts by February 29. Please give now, and thanks!

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