



Stephens City Mennonite Church meets for outdoor worship on June 21, 2020 (Father's Day). See article on page 5.
Photo courtesy of Merle Christner

Congregations respond with resilience

Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations share how they have navigated ministry in uncertain times. Stories in this issue by:

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Stephens City • Waynesboro • Weavers

Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

An important and timely Assembly theme in these uncertain days

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Our summer Assembly was held on July 18, 2020, with a focus theme of “Living As Those Made Alive In Christ.” Our theme was of ut-

most importance in the time we are living. Over the last number of months, we have lived into the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. This medical crisis places us on high alert concerning our distance and interactions with other people. With the necessity of physical distancing, meeting-houses, businesses, educational institutions, and not-for-profit organizations have closed their facilities. This has profoundly impacted many persons and organizations economically. In the midst of these challenges, there is also a public reckoning on how African Americans and Black immigrants (and other communities of color) have been unjustly impacted by systemic racism, reflected in social policies and economic injustices.

One of the highlights for many people was the worship time and missional stories. Seth Crissman, Dr. Ben Bergey, and Joel Ross organized and coordinated the various musical pieces. There were four missional story presentations, one of which was by pastor Alfonso Alvarado. He introduced our delegates to the newest congregation, Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah, which meets in Lacey Spring, Va. Each presenter made a video that was incorporated into our program. Dr. Jerry Holsopple provided the creative video presentations by integrating the various video clips, creating a masterpiece for our Assembly. Without the professional assistance of Jerry, Seth, Ben, and Joel, our virtual Assembly would not have the spiritual depth and inspirational appeal that many persons experienced.

Ron Byler, Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee, gave two dynamic presentations highlighting MCC’s

past and present work in relief and service. He reported on a number of ways that the Virginia Mennonite Conference constituency has participated in MCC’s mission. He also noted the current challenge of scaling back MCC work due to the declines in revenue from Gift and Thrift stores and the limitations the pandemic has placed upon relief sale events.

Delegates received the Strategic Planning Report from Conference Council, with David Brubaker providing an overview of the report development process. The report is available for our constituency to review on our website at virginiacommunity.org/resources/. In the February 2021 Winter Delegate Session, the delegates will be invited to approve the action plan.

Alicia Manning, a member of C3 Hampton, provided an overview of the challenges in Virginia Mennonite Conference that non-White leaders experience. Non-White leaders provided a written letter to Conference Council seeking changes to the structure of our Conference. Joe Longacher, Interim Chair of the Faith and Life Commission, and representing Conference Council, provided a plan of response to the call for change from these non-White leaders. These documents are available at virginiacommunity.org/resources/.

Richard Early was elected moderator of Virginia Mennonite Conference by the delegates. In the Zoom chat during the meeting, a number of delegates voiced concerns about another aging white male serving in a primary leadership role of the Conference. Richard will have the opportunity to lead our Conference during a time of transition as the Conference seeks inclusion of both non-White leaders and women leaders. Richard will be introduced in our next issue of *Pathways*.

The virtual assembly had 121 persons participating, although not everyone was a delegate.

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

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Even as the pandemic changes our lives and ministries, VMC still equips the church.

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The exchange in the time of COVID-19

By CHRIS SCOTT

In this time of church doors being closed, we have the opportunity to live into our professed Anabaptist theology that the church was never about the building. We are the church. Like the old song, “I am the church. You are the church. We are the church together.”

At our church, the exchange, in Winchester, Va., we have tried to follow our calling in specific and intentional ways. We have worked at reimagining what community might look like in our changing times. While nowhere near perfect, we are working at finding our way. Seeing our group at work has inspired me and brought hope.

I have seen Jesus in the face of others. I’ve seen Jesus at work through our group. Through Viqui and Erin leading music, as well as through well-timed texts of encouragement and suggestions that no one else sees.

I’ve seen Jesus in Britt and Kat, and their eagerness and insistence in doing tangible and physical acts of service to others. Their willingness to help others has brought light and love. They have been a blessing to those they’ve helped.

At the exchange, we work to foster connection and be of service to the outside community. On our Facebook timeline, we posted some questions asking if anyone needs help getting groceries, medicine, or other supplies. Britt and Kat, two newer exchange attenders, took it upon themselves to run errands for folks who couldn’t get the things they need otherwise. Traditionally, this has been the role of Christians—to run into situations others are avoiding, to care for the sick and the marginalized. These two women are embodying the heart of Christian virtues.

We have also developed a system of checking in with various people during the week. We connect with a wide swathe of people from both inside and outside of our community.

Each week since the “stay-at-home” order, we have made what we call Community Bags. The bags have been different each week. We have put in notes, muffins, and Easter eggs. One week we even made an old-fashioned mix-tape of songs that



Pastor Chris Scott delivers a Community Bag. Photo courtesy of Chris Scott

both encouraged and comforted. We also put note cards and stamped envelopes in the bags one week along with a copy of the church directory. Each person was to write two notes of encouragement and mail them.

One week we printed up a large copy of the exchange’s logo. We then cut it up into enough puzzle pieces for each recipient to get one. The goal was to have each person keep their piece until we can eventually gather together in person again. In the meantime, they can know that they are connected and a vital part of the overall picture.

Community Bags give us an opportunity to connect with a variety of folks, inside and outside the congregation. We have heard back from so many of the recipients about how much they appreciate and look forward to the bags. Normally we simply knock on the door, put down the bags and run, but we have been able to have conversations through glass storm doors and across lawns. Posts with the bags have gone viral on social media as well.

As many other churches have done, we have used the Zoom application for gathering. We used Facebook Live one week, but it did not allow for the interaction that is key to our DNA. Zoom is a much better

fit as a platform that allows for immediate feedback and conversation. It can be messy and chaotic at times, but it has been beautiful and life-giving. We have continued our practice of weekly communion over Zoom. That has been meaningful and helps to guide our focus on hope and suffering.

We have held our worship gatherings on Zoom. Additionally, we have held game nights on the app. We even planned a community dinner over Zoom. We want to do anything that we can to help people know that they are connected and loved.

COVID-19 has changed the rhythms and practices of the exchange. We have adapted both the ways that we are community together and the ways we approach the wider Winchester community. We are living into the new reality. The exchange is working at being the church in our time and place.



Chris Scott is Pastor of the exchange, Winchester, Va.

The church ‘did not close’

By RONA HEMMINGER

Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home; ...and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. John 16:32

It all started with an elbow bump—*not* my type of hugging and a difficult thing for our older Waynesboro Mennonite Church congregation to grasp while inside a church building—a place where many people long for that physical touch! But, we soon learned there are new ways of showing that caring affection, which is desperately needed between people.

It soon became abundantly clear during this time that our church did not close. It simply scattered as we found new ways into each other’s lives. “Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.” Acts 8:4. And just because our doors were locked didn’t mean the church was unoccupied. A local mother cat found her way inside our building to give birth to her kittens. Her family enjoyed sheltering-in-place while our congregants were busy finding new ways to be there for each other and spread the gospel.

Yes, we understood and followed the directives of staying home, social distancing, and wearing masks. We missed each other, though, so it was time to step up our game to make personal contacts. Therefore, we had visits in our driveways through car windows, sent cards, and made phone calls like never before. It was time to keep tabs on one another. To learn who needed help and who could do the helping, our pastor made sure to keep personal communications with everyone and our deacons stepped up to implement a special kind of interaction by constantly checking in on the people on their care list, which included everyone in the congregation.

We were fortunate to have technical support to get Zoom up and running from the very first Sunday the churches were asked to stop congregating. This was such a blessing as many other churches didn’t have the knowledge and capabilities to make this happen. Our Zoom services were amazing!

Neither age or distance kept us apart.

Even our oldest members learned how to navigate the internet to keep connected, and for those without computer access, a phone link was available to join the service. We had attendees from all over the world and special music was provided each week. When the service was over, no one was in a hurry to leave, so we found a Zoom chat time was a fun way to keep up with one another about our daily lives. Some weeks, this informal conversation went on for quite a while as we enjoyed connecting with one another—no matter the method.

Of course, deaths and illnesses (besides COVID-19) didn’t stop just because everything else did. Our fellowship lost a long-time member and the janitor to our building during this time. Caring hearts went out of their way to show love and support with a Zoom service for our members to offer condolences. It might not have been the usual setting, but the family and church community were cared for.

Looking to the future, a ReOpening Committee (ROC) was created to make safe plans for reopening and maintaining our online service so that those who cannot return can continue to be cared for.

We do know that God is in all things and that we can learn from everything. We might not like the way things are in this world right now, but we know how much we need each other; our church family.

We learned that where there is a will, there is a way. We learned that mature people can learn new ways of doing things as all persons have things to teach others. We learned that fear and isolation can be traumatic but that a maintained connection can make the difference. And if we combine everything we have learned from this pandemic, we will be a stronger, more effective community of believers. Let our lessons be well learned.

A version of 3 John 13-14 by Clair Good, Pastor of Waynesboro Mennonite Church—*“I have so much more I could say to you, but I do not want to do so via the internet on Zoom. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face, though we be socially distanced. Peace to you. We send you our greetings. Greet the friends there by name.”*

■ Rona Hemminger is a member of Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.

Big Spring: still the arms and hands of Jesus

By PEARL HARTMAN

Big Spring Mennonite Church is alive and together, even if we have to be together by Zoom. We have said we are so grateful for Zoom and we are so tired of Zoom. But the Holy Spirit has been with us through all of our virtual gatherings and it has been good. By being a smaller congregation, our sharing of joys and concerns continues as if we were together in the sanctuary.

We have learned that we like to be together—in person! With many in the congregation in the high-risk category it has seemed prudent to not meet in person yet. But we do hold our smaller prayer group with everyone wearing masks and sitting six feet apart.

While we like being with each other in person, attendance has been much better than when we meet on Sunday at church. We have been able to include even our member in an assisted living center via telephone, thanks to the outreach of another church member.

Music has been a source of richness and challenge. Some enjoy hearing the hymns of the *Mennonite Hour*, others are lifted up by recordings in the public domain. We learned the best way to do congregational reading is to have one person read the congregational part and everyone else follow along muted during the Call to Worship. We do wonder if we can continue to have Zoom be a part of our services when we are together again. Sometimes rural internet isn’t always reliable for such things.

With the usual outlets of service and community events closed, we have found other ways to support each other through sickness, fear and worry. Members have helped each other with projects and visited on the front porch. One member

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More than a Sunday morning gathering

By CAROL TOBIN

Early Church has never been defined primarily by our Sunday morning gathering. We have been known for the high value we have placed on being a glimmer of God's presence when we worship and relate at Our Community Place (OCP), and for lots of non-Sunday face-to-face interactions.

Before the coronavirus hit, we had already begun the deep and painful grappling regarding our need for a place other than OCP for Sunday worship. But COVID-19 has made it abundantly clear that we will not be able to interact in that space as we have in the past.

We are thankful that we are well into the process of securing a new worship location and, just as significantly, that a faithful cadre of Early Church folks have continued to take responsibility for Sunday lunch, continuing to be present among this particularly vulnerable group of people.

As soon as restrictions began to be mandated, we tried to think creatively about the opportunity afforded all of us to be actively involved in nurturing spiritual health within our community. Our first innovations occurred around Holy Week, including home-based reenactments of Palm Sunday and a progressive Resurrection Day proclamation, in which we played joyful heralds, carrying the good news from one home to the next.

Leaders began putting more energy into our beautifully crafted weekly newsletter, blessing us with artwork, songs, and a plethora of lectionary-based resources, pertinent reflections and stories.

Although there are huge challenges in being isolated, families with young children have been grateful for the freedom to discover their own family discipleship rhythms. Families with older children began using the Discovery Bible Study structure, experiencing surprisingly dynamic times of engaging with scriptures, with every member contributing. One cluster of families began using DBS for a meaningful Sunday morning Zoom connection.

For many of the Early Church women, grieving the limitations of face-to-face opportunities, and tired of Zoom, a physi-



A Sunday baptism service at Wildwood Park, Bridgewater, Va. (From left to right) Symone Bolden, Devin Stipe, Paul Huseri, and Ken Wettig. Photo courtesy of Carol Tobin

cally-distanced camp out on a community member's farm was a highlight. Another recent highlight was an all-church gathering at Wildwood Park in Bridgewater, Va., on Father's Day, likely our only gathering of the summer. It was a glorious testimony to us all that God's movement has not been restricted!

A JMU physics student from Richmond had had a life-changing encounter with God in January when he met members of the Early Church community on campus, holding signs and inviting conversations about faith. Since then, the discipleship process has continued. He was baptized at the Wildwood Park and received into membership, with both parents present to affirm his commitments.

On the same day, two others were also received into membership: a delightful young woman whose journey with us began when she was simply looking for a meal at OCP, and a French-speaking Muslim-background Congolese man whose broken life is being turned around by Jesus.

Given the realities of our cultural moment, it does not escape our notice that all three are persons are black. In welcoming these three, Ken Wettig said what needed to be said—in acknowledgement of and repentance for the church's complicity in racism and failure to be a reflection of God's

heart for all. We simply praise God for what God is doing in our midst.



Carol Tobin is an Elder at Early Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

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offered the idea of "round robin" home visits, where we visit around at different homes to help with a sense of isolation and disconnect. We gave a prayer shawl and handmade mask to our member in the assisted living center as a way to let him feel the arms of the church surrounding him.

One Sunday a member needed medical care. Others were there to provide support and transportation. It gave us all comfort to know that nothing would keep us from being the arms and hands of Jesus, no matter what impact COVID-19 will have on our lives. As we exercise discernment and courage, we try to listen for God's still, quiet voice that speaks to us through the storm and to hear each other's voice too.

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

We are still a community

Park View Mennonite Church grapples with losses but finds undiminished connections

By SALOMA MILLER FURLONG

We have made a significant discovery at Park View Mennonite Church. Even though we cannot gather physically in the space where we love to worship, pray, and sing together, our sense of community has not diminished.

On March 13, we made the difficult decision not to gather physically for worship. Since then we have found several ways to gather virtually. Our worship services are live-streamed on Sunday mornings from the sanctuary with ten or fewer people gathered there. We gather via Zoom for virtual coffee hour following worship as do several Sunday School groups. Pastors and staff, Council, and Elders all meet in this manner.

Church-wide emails from pastors and staff help to keep everyone connected. These include prayer requests, weekly updates, and a newly-formed newsletter, "From across the Fence." Many, especially those who live in the Park View neighborhood, engage in spontaneous porch-side-walk visits. Small groups are beginning to gather outdoors to visit from a distance. We have done two neighborhood walks to check in with our "Kids Club" families.

Pastor Moriah finished her three-month sabbatical in Australia and started back to work, but is stuck in Australia since borders have been closed and international flights grounded. Thanks to our online and at-home mode of working, she is able to engage in and help lead our worship, do pastoral contacts, and stay engaged with her work from the other side of the world. It's not ideal, of course, and we look forward to her physical return.

Harrisonburg and the surrounding area is a hotspot for the coronavirus. Several parishioners and family members have tested positive for it. We are relieved and grateful that all have recovered or are recovering.

Our hearts grieve for our significant losses since COVID-19 has become a reality. Carmi Parrish died in her home only days before we closed the church building. Her memorial service was held via Zoom. This virtual gathering did not diminish the sharing of deep sadness for our loss.

On May 17, a beloved teacher, professor, husband, father, grandfather, and long-time church member, Jay B. Landis, left this world. His friendly smile and genuine interest in those around him will be greatly missed by all. His funeral service was live-streamed from the church, and then the family gathered for a graveside farewell. Many mourners expressed their depth of feelings by leaving memories on a website created by his grandson.

We are deeply grieved by the death of Sherwyn Smeltzer, who was killed in a tragic traffic accident on I-81, near the Tennessee border on May 23. He and his wife Deirdre were helping to move their daughter to a new location and job in Tennessee. The web of Sherwyn's familial and collegial relationships is immense. He served as a church Elder, working closely with the pastors for several years. There are no words to describe the shock and sadness of our loss.

It is through our hardships that we are learning how to be creative in connecting with others. The outpouring of support for our grieving families, the caring through acts of compassion and kindness, the generosity, and the desire to connect with one another in meaningful ways are as strong as ever. We have learned that we are still a community! We are immensely grateful for this.



Saloma Miller Furlong is Office Manager of Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Springdale congregation adapts WARM program

By ALAN SHENK

The apostle Paul comments in II Corinthians 12:10 that "When I am weak, then I am strong." God's strength often seems most apparent when we ourselves are weak.

Each year, usually in mid-March, Springdale Mennonite Church, located on the outskirts of Waynesboro, Va., hosts the local overnight homeless shelter WARM (Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry) for one week. This means providing an evening meal, a breakfast and packed lunches for each day. We also provide overnight staffing and van transportation to and from Waynesboro each evening and morning. A majority of the congregation gets involved through hosting, cooking, cleaning, donating food, etc.

As we anticipated the arrival of guests to our shelter on March 16, we realized that COVID-19 had also arrived in our community. Church services were cancelled on March 15. What were the implications for WARM? The public library, where many of the guests spent their daytime hours, was also forced to close. We couldn't just leave our 22 guests out on the street. What about the safety of our members? Our well thought-out plans were quickly unraveling.

The decision was made to quarantine the guests at church day and night. Some of our older volunteers wisely decided to stay at home. A few of our teachers and college students stepped in to help out in their place. Other WARM volunteers in the community stepped forward to provide supervision during the day. The churches who had originally committed to hosting the shelter for the following three weeks determined that they were unable to host the shelter. The leadership at Springdale agreed to allow our church building to be home for the shelter for those weeks. Many churches and restaurants stepped forward to provide meals.

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Many of the homeless guests recognized the generosity of Springdale and the WARM organization and wanted to give back as they were able. Several guests took over the responsibility of cleaning the church each day. When a load of mulch arrived for the church flower beds, several stepped up to spread the mulch. At least six guests volunteered to help plant onions in the church garden. One older guest who loved the Lord offered to sing a few songs to be incorporated into our Zoom worship services.

Not all was rosy in the camp. Some of the guests dealt with addictions and could not survive 24/7 at the church. They felt compelled to move on. With the virus on the loose, job searching practically came to a standstill. Some of the guests developed friendships, but some guests found each other irritating. In a few extreme cases, guests became disruptive and were asked to leave by WARM staff.

By mid-April federal funding had arrived to provide housing for the guests at a

motel in Waynesboro. What began as a routine seven-day event with WARM turned into a four-week adventure that saw Springdale become home to a group of homeless guests. Easter Sunday marked the last day of hosting the shelter at Springdale. How could we celebrate Easter as a congregation at a distance? How could we show appreciation for our guests?

One Springdale tradition is to take a wooden cross that commemorates the death of Jesus and cover it with fresh flowers on Easter morning, symbolizing the new life that we experience through the resurrection of Jesus. That Sunday, April 12, Springdale celebrated Easter, not in fancy outfits or with decorated Easter baskets, but by having several of our homeless guests, struggling with poor health and addictions, struggling with broken relationships, struggling with an uncertain future, place those flowers on the cross on our behalf as we watched on Zoom. It was both humbling and uplifting to see God present



Community members in the WARM program decorate the Easter cross with flowers at Springdale Mennonite Church. Courtesy of Alan Shenk

in that moment, bringing hope to us at Springdale and hope to our many homeless friends. May God's hope and strength sustain us through the continued uncertainty that 2020 brings.

■ Alan Shenk is a member of Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.

Pastoral care with Duo, a meaningful connection

By PHIL KANAGY

In this issue of *Pathways* we are to share “stories of coping, thriving, innovation, danger, struggle, hardship, new ways of working, new focuses....” Yes—to all of the above.

It's amazing how the same experience—and experiment—can contain all of those components at the same time. Like every other congregation, we at Weavers Mennonite Church are also experimenting with virtual worship (Facebook live-streaming), virtual committee meetings (Zoom), and ways of providing pastoral care for congregants when we cannot be physically present with them. Nothing can replace in-person contact, but virtual contact is better than nothing.

That was abundantly clear when one of our congregational members needed to be hospitalized with COVID-19. He had underlying health conditions, which of course made him more vulnerable to the worst effects of COVID. Because no visitors were allowed in the hospital, no one could physically go and see him there. His condition

worsened, and we soon learned that he was not expected to live. Desperate to make contact with the patient, I called the hospital chaplain's office. The chaplain who answered the phone quickly arranged with the patient's nurse on the COVID floor to make a Duo call (a video chat platform) with myself and the patient.

It was heartbreaking to see and hear the suffering of the patient, but heartwarming to give and receive love from him, pray with him, and just be with him. It was sacred space, even though it was a virtual visit.

The nurse holding the phone for the patient was so kind and helpful...like an angel being there for such a time as this. I wondered what fears she may have already faced of putting her own family at risk of exposure by working with COVID patients? But she graciously made possible a very meaningful connection and conversation between the patient and myself. Four days later the patient died, due to complications from the virus.

While ministry and pastoral care have needed to change in so many ways due to the pandemic, it's still about making connections and entering sacred spaces—space that the Spirit of God has already entered, and in which those present may encounter a gracious God.

So, while many things are changing, many things are the same. The tools we use for ministry need to be adapted, or perhaps swapped out for new ones that can cope with current realities, but the reasons, purpose, and intentions of this new chest of tools are the same as before—to enable people to encounter the living Christ. May God continue to enable and empower us to the same ends we've always asked him for.



Phil Kanagy is Lead Pastor of Weavers Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

The same unity of purpose at Stephens City

By MERLE CHRISTNER

Stephens City Mennonite Church is one among many small, aging, congregations in Northern District. Our members are geographically scattered, but share a unity of purpose in loving our neighbors, seeking to assist those in need, and a love of music. During the pandemic, many of those dynamics have shifted.

Using Zoom has enabled several persons to attend services who have been unable to be present in person due to health or distance issues, and attendance has been more regular. We have grown closer. Thus far, we are not aware of any of our members who have contracted COVID-19 and are grateful. A small Hispanic church of another denomination who meets in our building has experienced some cases and we have tried to be supportive to them.

Zoom has also enabled us to add three couples from Western Maryland and Pennsylvania who were former interdenomi-

national connections of Pastor Merle and Evie Christner. So our overall attendance numbers have increased! One of those attendees shared that a caregiver who was present in their home during our service times has been touched and indicated she felt she needed to allow God back into her life. We are not always aware of who we are reaching.

Most of our community service has involved schools in some way, so that has been curtailed, and we have cancelled our summer “Peace Camp” for children. We have begun supplying some meals for a Winchester organization (CCAP) to distribute to those in need, primarily homeless persons. We are also very aware that a new subdivision continues to be built next to our church and are brainstorming ways to welcome those new neighbors.

Our love of music and singing together is our greatest loss and sadness during this

time. Several members sing with other choir groups and have other musical involvements which have been put on hold. While we listen and sing in our homes, there is just not a good online substitute.

Going forward, there will no doubt be changes in our church life. We are exploring how to begin to safely meet again in person, beginning with an outdoor worship celebration in our church pavilion. We expect an expanded electronic presence in doing more meetings online and finding ways to make our worship service available to those who cannot attend in person. We also expect God to show up in more surprising ways—as we keep our focus not on what we have lost—but on following Jesus.



Merle Christner is Pastor of Stephens City Mennonite Church, Stephens City, Va.

First Mennonite Church responds to the protests

By RYAN AHLGRIM

Since our congregation is located in the capital of the Confederacy, and large protests for police reform and eliminating racism are a daily occurrence here, the leadership of First Mennonite Church posted the following statement on our website and Facebook page, and sent it to the congregation:

“This is an historic moment for Richmond, and perhaps for our nation. First Mennonite Church of Richmond stands with those across the country who are crying out for a fundamental change in the relationship between the police and our communities of color. We are deeply offended at the death of George Floyd and the policies and attitudes that led to his death and the many recent deaths of other unarmed or innocent African Americans, whether at the hands of the police or civilians under the guise of policing their community. We cannot support a social dynamic in which

an entire race of Americans grows up to be afraid for their lives every time they see the blue flashing lights of the police.

“We are moved by the spontaneous and widespread protests, including those here in Richmond. We abhor all vandalism and violence committed by individual protesters, just as we are appalled at police tactics that fired tear gas at peaceful protesters who were breaking no laws and exercising their constitutional right to free speech and assembly. We are grateful for police who have knelt with or entered into a constructive dialogue with the protesters and de-escalated hostility, demonstrating a constructive relationship with an aggrieved community. We congratulate city and state leaders who have pledged important reforms.

“We respect the rule of law and are grateful to all of those who have dedicated their lives to its implementation. We are

hopeful that we are seeing the dawning of a more fair, friendly, and restorative way for the rule of law to be carried out here in Richmond and across our nation.”

About thirty church members met for a Zoom meeting recently to brainstorm ways for us to get involved. Ideas included giving funds to local minority businesses that were vandalized, supporting a scholarship fund for students who attend a historically black college, creating a weekly or monthly anti-racism learning group, developing a resource list for the congregation, and partnering in an anti-racism project under the leadership of a local black congregation.

The work is only just beginning.



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

Life in exile at Lindale Mennonite Church

By OWEN BURKHOLDER

There is a commercial for a life insurance company that begins by showing some idyllic scene where everything is going well; and then something surprising and unexpected changes the whole scenario. Their tagline is “Life comes at you fast.” Indeed, we could use that tagline for 2020!

Church leadership and the congregation were preparing to have Pastor Deb Horst take a three month sabbatical beginning in April. She had some health challenges, therefore the elders moved her sabbatical up to March 1. When we entered the time of closure for the pandemic, we were short our only full-time staff person. Many intriguing things occurred in the ensuing weeks.

We had just scheduled a baptismal exploration group that included five young people. Instead of getting to hand out the study materials, we mailed them and began meeting by Zoom. And so began a first-ever virtual baptism preparation class in the history of Lindale church. The baptism itself was scheduled for mid-June, but that has been postponed until we can do it in a gathered setting.

We did do a virtual child dedication service where two families made their commitments and then led in a special song, with persons from multiple locations joining in.

All of these “off-site” experiences were made possible by the gracious contributions of some tech-savvy people. Some of us older people did the best we could, but are so grateful for the skills of others.

The most challenging thing about congregational life during this time has been dealing with death. We’ve had several people experience the loss of loved ones who have not been able to participate in the hugging and crying together that we use to share our grief.

The most traumatic event for Lindale was the sudden death of Steve Leaman. His wife Doris was gracious in inviting their Sunday school class to join at the graveside service while remaining in their cars. When the time comes, we will want to honor

those who passed from us with the warmth of touch and community worship.

We have done all of our worship experiences by video and will continue to do so until July 6. These are posted on lindale.org/sermons. Council of Ministries has created a task force to explore, with careful consideration, the timing and options for returning to in-person worship gatherings.

Vacation Bible School has been a huge activity at Lindale. We planned four video sessions for the four Sundays of July and have distributed packets to every child so families can follow along with activities related to the lessons.

The Lindale Child Care Program has been carefully working for some weeks now providing care for the children of essential workers. We are learning from them as we anticipate gathering again.

We have been grateful for the consultation with Northern District leaders as we navigate through this time. We are also grateful to report that financial contributions have remained strong.

The elders have participated with the pastoral staff in calling all of the households in our directory to see how folks are doing. Many report being cared for by Sunday school classes and other small group



Lindale Mennonite Church held a drive through graduation service to honor this spring's graduates. Courtesy of Lindale Mennonite Church

connections. Many classes and groups, including the youth groups, have been meeting virtually. Pastor Deb is recording a weekly devotional for the MYF.

The spirit of cooperation and participation during this time has been remarkable. Thanks be to God!



Owen Burkholder is Interim Pastor of Lindale Mennonite Church, Linville, Va.



Gemeinschaft Home celebrates 35 years, launches campaign

By JOAN KAUFFMAN

Gemeinschaft Home is a community non-profit offering therapeutic services to nonviolent offenders who have been released or diverted from incarceration in support of a transition to healthy community living. This year we are celebrating our 35th anniversary providing residential and non-residential programming for men and women in the local area and throughout Virginia.

Recent calls to “defund the police” means supporting community agencies like Gemeinschaft Home whose mission is to reverse the negative effects of a racist and unfair criminal justice system that punishes and criminalizes individuals who struggle with mental health problems, drug and alcohol addictions, homelessness, and unemployment.

By supporting Gemeinschaft Home, you make a significant impact on the lives of real people in need throughout our community. Help us provide a helping hand, instead of a jail sentence. Help formerly incarcerated individuals find housing, sustainable employment, and receive treatment for issues that lead to criminal behavior. Help us to build a better, safer community.

At the end of 2019, our Board of Directors recognized five “needs” that require additional funding, and we launched the 2020 Vision for the Future Campaign, to raise \$220,000 by the end of 2020 to support these projects. We have already raised over \$70,000 of our goal, and we need your help to reach it. **Why a \$220,000 campaign?**

COMMUNITY NEED: Currently, our residential program serves men only,

and there is no residential reentry programming in the local area for women exiting incarceration. We seek to establish a women’s program, offering services tailored for pregnant women and mothers, as well as mental health and substance abuse support.

1. Our goal: \$100,000 start-up money to establish a Gemeinschaft Home women’s facility.

GEMEINSCHAFT HOME NEEDS:

2. Our goal: \$70,000. We seek to establish a new position, an on-site counselor/social worker, to provide individual counseling sessions for participants in the residential programs. We currently refer individuals to outside resources for such services, but we wish to provide residents easier access with an in-house counselor.

3. Our goal: \$20,000. We seek to update our HVAC system for the administrative offices, program spaces, and the residential areas of the men’s program.

FULLY-FUNDED PROJECTS (GOALS MET):

4. \$20,000. We have already constructed an exercise facility in the residential program for participants to work out, to maintain good health, and to relieve tension in a positive way,

5. \$10,000. We now have raised enough money for a therapeutic garden for solitude, reflection, and a place to cultivate herbs and vegetables for use in the residential programs.

Thank you for your support.

■ Joan Kauffman is Board Chair of Gemeinschaft Home, Harrisonburg, Va.

Virginia Relief Sale: How will it happen this year?

By JIM BISHOP

The global pandemic has dealt nearly everyone the ole one-two punch in our corporate (masked) faces. We may feel at times like we’re down for the count, but not out. This feeling extends to long-scheduled public events that have needed to be canceled, postponed, or re-invented in different shapes or forms.

The annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale is a local case in point. The 54th annual relief sale, scheduled for Oct. 2-3, 2020, at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, is determined to go on, but how? That’s a work in careful progress.

Last fall’s sale raised nearly \$400,000 for the worldwide relief, development and peacebuilding programs of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), Akron, Pa. The first Virginia sale was held Sept. 30, 1967, on the Paul Wenger farm south of Waynesboro, with net proceeds of \$6,393 sent to MCC.

“Much of the success of the relief sale each year must be credited to the nearly one thousand volunteers who work like a well-oiled machine to pull off such an event,” said Dave Rush of Harrisonburg, in his 11th year as relief sale chair.

“Activities this year will look quite different than in the past due to COVID restrictions and social distancing recommendations,” Rush stated. “Organizers want to proceed with caution to protect volunteers and everyone else who supports the sale.”

The auction of handmade quilts, wall hangings, knotted comforters and afghans, artwork, and wooden handcrafted items, will be online only. Auction items will be on display at the fairgrounds for persons to view at specified times two days prior to the sale, and then they can place bids online starting Saturday

Relief Sale continued on page 11

morning through a link to the sale website.

Planners are exploring the idea of drive-through dinners available for popular food items – beef barbeque and BBQ chicken, Laotian and Latino dishes, Mississippi catfish, Brunswick stew, homemade potato chips and apple butter. Baked goods will likely be on sale at the fairgrounds at specified times, but individual congregations are being encouraged to hold their own bake sales.

Every year, area churches and businesses collect coins and currency in large water jugs for the “My Coins Count” project, with funds divided between MCC and local causes. (Last year’s effort raised \$24,804). This year, congregations are being encouraged to have a “drop-off evening” when people can drive by their church and deposit their donations.

The annual “Run for Relief” 5K Walk-Run is hoping to take place in some form on Saturday morning, October 3, at the fairgrounds or possibly virtually through an app.

Despite the planning uncertainties, local pastor and family counselor Harvey Yoder isn’t taking things lying down. In fact, he’s already walking every day—with a goal of 100 miles between now and the sale date—on behalf of MCC’s refugee relief efforts.

Yoder’s SOS (Sharing Our Surplus) Committee is sponsoring a special “Hundreds for Hundreds” walk at 6:00 p.m. on Aug. 23. This two-mile walk will begin and end at Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg. MCC representatives will be present with information on refugee and other needs and to collect contributions by cash, check or credit card. Walkers will be encouraged to wear masks and practice social distancing during the event. Learn more at harvyoder.blogspot.com.

Learn more about the Relief Sale at vareliefsale.com



Jim Bishop is a freelance writer based in Harrisonburg, Va.

Four responses to the SOS “Hundreds for Hundreds” campaign

By HARVEY YODER

In celebration of Mennonite Central Committee’s 100th anniversary, the Virginia Relief Sale’s SOS Committee (Sharing Our Surplus) is launching a “Hundreds for Hundreds” campaign to raise much needed donations for MCC worldwide refugee relief.

Most of our efforts this year will be focused on promoting generous online giving. We are also planning a two-mile “Hundreds For Hundreds” SOS Walk in Harrisonburg on Sunday, August 23 at 6:00 p.m. as a family-friendly fundraiser. Those who prefer not to do a public walk can get sponsors for a virtual walk at a time and place of their choosing.

MCC was formed in 1920 to provide desperately needed relief for Mennonites in famine and war-ravaged Ukraine. Over a three-year period, it raised \$1.3 million in food aid and purchased 50 tractors and plows to replace draft horses that had been destroyed or confiscated during the recent war. Today that would represent over \$33 million worth of aid.

Today people all over the world are suffering the effects of similar wars and famines, combined with such disasters as locust plagues, floods and now a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. An estimated 265 million people will experience severe food shortages this year, twice the number that faced starvation-level poverty a year ago. And among the populations most affected are the over 70 million refugees around the world.

Meanwhile, MCC income has dropped by some \$5 million this year. The “Hundreds for Hundreds” campaign can help make up for this shortfall.

Here are four possible responses:

1) No Giving. Just ignore the crisis, keep it “out of sight and out of mind.”

Upside: Low stress, minimal worry.

Downside: An indifference that can result in the heart becoming, like that of Seuss’s Grinch, “two sizes too small.

2) Token Giving. Give just enough to help SOS keep raising 10% of the Relief Sale’s annual receipts.

Upside: An easier conscience, and a feeling of at least doing something to

benefit needy refugees.

Downside: Only a minimal awareness of the suffering of those facing massive hardship and starvation.

3) Generous Giving. Write a big check based on a genuine concern for millions in dire circumstances, but without diminishing ones financial status or standard of living.

Upside: MCC and other charities minister to many more people and offer much more relief aid.

Downside: The gap between the very well-to-do and the very poor remains largely unchanged.

4) Pentecostal/Jubilee-Style Giving. Follow Jesus’ call to “sell what you have,” radically downscaling all personal wealth, with an eye toward creating greater justice and equality worldwide.

Upside: Helps create a world in which there are “no needy persons among them,” while adding greatly to ones stock in the internationally-based “Company of Heaven.”

Downside: According to the teachings and life of Jesus, who “became poor for our sakes,” * there is no downside, and the rewards are eternal and immeasurable.

So as we make our choices, consider the prayer by seven-year-old Ben Zimmerly Jantzi: “God, please help the poor get rich and the rich get poor, so they know what it feels like. And then, God, let everyone switch back to medium and let everyone have the same amount of food and money.”

* Radical re-investing may not mean becoming poor in terms of wealth used in the production of essential goods and services. That is, some may be entrusted with the stewardship (management) of farms, factories or other business enterprises worth millions. What Jesus asks is that we radically downsize and re-invest the kinds of personal and consumer wealth that is subject to loss by theft, economic downturns, depreciation and deterioration—simply because it is a wiser choice that results in better returns.

This article was originally posted by the author at <http://harvyoder.blogspot.com>.



Living Life to the Fullest

A Retreat for Mature Age People



*October 6-8,
2020*

A retreat at



Living Fully - Being Prepared

Teresa Boshart Yoder
Managing Director, Everence



Living Fully - Facing Grief and Disappointments

Steve Landis
Residential Living Chaplain, VMRC



Living Fully - and Realistically

Beryl Jantzi
Director of Stewardship Education, Everence

- **Each session will have a Bible study** led by Harold Miller, pastor of Trissels Mennonite Church
- **Worship leaders** will be Skip and Carol Tobin and Josh Brown
- **Wednesday evening: "Telling God Stories"** - invited persons will share stories, with opportunity for conversation afterwards
- **Free time** with access to nature trails, games, shopping, Colonial Williamsburg, etc.

Contact WCRC

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