

## Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly

# Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

**Mennonite Central Committee  
featured as agency celebrates  
centennial year with presentations  
by Ron Byler, Executive Director**

By **RON BYLER**

**G**reetings from Mennonite Central Committee! I am Ron Byler, executive director of MCC U.S., and I want to thank you for all that you are doing to help keep MCC's ministries through the churches strong and vibrant around the world. You have played a key role in MCC's story through these years.

As we celebrate 100 years of relief in the name of Christ, we chose this text from 2 Corinthians 5: *God reconciles us to himself through Christ...God gave us the ministry of reconciliation*, to remind us of what God has done for us through Jesus, and what we are called to do through him.

Along with that is another passage from Colossians 3:12-17, the theme of the 2020 Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*



Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly featured two keynote video presentations by Ron Byler, MCC Executive Director. Watch the videos at [virginiacommunity.org/events/conference-assembly-2020/](http://virginiacommunity.org/events/conference-assembly-2020/) Photo from video

### Ukraine 100-year celebration

MCC's centennial year really began about a year ago when we took our two national boards, MCC Canada and MCC U.S. to Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine, where MCC began 100 years ago. We visited the former Jacob Dyck lumber yard in Khortitsa, the likely site of the first Mennonite feeding station of the American Mennonite Relief effort on March 16, 1922.

It took three tries for Mennonites to get food into Ukraine. War, epidemics and famine devastated Ukraine. "Dear Brethren, help us, we are perishing," Mennonites wrote. "The famine is raging more and more, and suffering is increasing daily. Every day, we must behold starving."

We told the stories of how this ministry of the churches in North America began. A.J. Miller recounts the sight that greeted him at the train station in 1922. "The moment the train halted it was besieged by living skeletons, not with a rush, did they come, but slowly, weakly, too starved to

hurry, too famished to demand...piteously muttering the one sentence that was being wailed despairingly by millions in Russia. "Bread, in God's name, bread!"

We reenacted what those meals must have been like. By June 1922, 25,000 people were served each day in dozens of villages in Ukraine consisting of bread, cocoa twice weekly, beans once or twice weekly and the rest of the time, rice or corn-grits cooked with sugar and milk.

One survivor wrote, "We would have died, we would have starved to death, but then the Mennonites came, sent us people and sent us food. In this way, we stayed alive." Writes A.J. Miller: "Bread! Just bread. It came almost miraculously from far away America, from friends they had never seen or known, from someone who wished them well. It was love reaching out its strong hands across the waters and plains, across oceans and continents."

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# Racial justice and equality

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



The Conference Council of Virginia Mennonite Conference is forging ahead with a leadership initiative on racial justice and equality.

This leadership initiative emerged following the death of George Floyd and the subsequent and ongoing cultural awakening to the realities of systemic racism in American society and the church.

Alicia Manning, a member of C3 (formerly Calvary Community Church) led a facilitated conversation with non-White leaders to learn firsthand the challenges they face within our Conference. Elroy Miller, Moderator, Joe Longacher, Interim Chair of the Faith and Life Commission, and Clyde Kratz, Executive Conference Minister, were present in this conversation as listeners. As a result of this meeting, a letter was drafted to Conference Council highlighting significant concerns within our Conference that impact non-White brothers and sisters.

The apostle Paul writing to the Church at Ephesus recognized in Jesus that God was at work breaking down the walls of hostility between Jew and Gentile:

*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built*

*together spiritually into a dwelling place for God (Ephesians 2:11-22).*

Today, we are not fighting the battles of difference between Jew and Gentile, but we are being confronted by a similar problem, two different groups seeking to forge a new humanity whereby all people in the community find a safe space to thrive, flourish, and experience all that God intended for them. Virginia Mennonite Conference is seeking to forge a new way of being that honors all people, regardless of ethnicity in the household of God.

To move forward with this very necessary and timely agenda, Conference Council developed a response to the letter from non-White leaders and presented a direction to the Delegate Assembly on July 18, 2020, as a significant leadership strategy to be achieved. The letter to the delegates is as follows:

“The murder of George Floyd in Minnesota and similar racist acts have made us inescapably aware of the suffering, disadvantages, and oppression experienced by non-White citizens, which have always been there, but which the White establishment has chosen to ignore or overlook. Black Lives Matter and White Supremacy are more than slogans: They are realities we have overlooked for centuries. The findings of the Kerner Commission 52 years ago were clear, but no changes were made: “Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one White---separate and unequal. What White Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget---is that White society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, White institutions maintain it, and White society condones it.” Non-White persons have experienced racism through being treated as second class citizens, or non-citizens, in all areas of American life including education, housing, medical care, employment opportunities, and criminal justice. They are denied many freedoms White people take for granted, including freedom from fear.

Virginia Mennonite Conference, historically organized and led by Whites, is

not free of blame. Despite a number of efforts as an organization, and some laudable individual attitudes and actions, we have too often been blind, insensitive, static and slow to act, thus contributing to racism through our policies, practices, and unwitting comments and actions. We have also been guilty of sins of omission---missed opportunities to say or do the right thing. We have failed to live out God’s vision of racial reconciliation in our life together and in our witness to the world. We must name and repent of the ways we have knowingly and unknowingly contributed to racism.

As leaders of Virginia Mennonite Conference who want to embody the Gospel vision of reconciliation, our hope needs to move beyond vision to specific anti-racist actions. We therefore pledge to work both institutionally and as individuals to right

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## Pathways

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wrongs, commit to equality, and fulfill the Biblical mandate expressed in the words of the hymn based on Amos 5:24, “Let justice roll like a river, and wash all oppression away”. Our actions build upon and implement Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan in the process of being adopted by the Conference, which reads in part, “To hear the voices and welcome the leadership of people of color...”

The following actions were passed unanimously by Conference Council at its meeting on July 6, 2020. We were guided in our decision-making by input from a group of non-White leaders who had shared their concerns and suggestions during a meeting with three VMC leaders on June 19, 2020.

**We are appointing a multi-racial Task Force, majority non-White, whose work will be facilitated by a consultant/expert experienced in racial sensitivity, racial consciousness, and anti-racism and inclusion. This group shall be tasked with the following:**

1. Assess VMC’s history concerning race relationships and provide a written report of their findings to Conference Council and the Delegate Assembly. There are stories of positive and negative actions by leaders and members concerning race relationships. These need to be heard. This may be where deep listening occurs by a group of

people, but these stories can also be recorded and shared with our constituency.

2. Make specific recommendations to Conference Council to eliminate racist language from Conference documents and policies at all levels of the organization.
3. Provide advocacy to include non-White members on Conference planning committees on personnel selection for all committee appointments.
4. Make recommendations concerning governance practice within VMC to incorporate non-White leaders.
5. Facilitate training programs in racial sensitivity, racial consciousness, and anti-racism and inclusion for Conference Staff, Conference Council members, and members of the Congregational Life and Faith and Life Commissions.
6. Require all key leaders of Conference, Conference Staff, and credentialed leaders to take the Intercultural Cultural Development Inventory - <http://mennoniteusa.org/what-we-do/undoing-racism/intercultural-development-inventory/>
7. Facilitate the development of a mandatory training program for all creden-

tialed leaders in racial sensitivity, racial consciousness, and anti-racism and inclusion.

8. Ask each congregation to provide training on racial sensitivity, racial consciousness, anti-racism, and inclusion, using materials and training programs recommended by the Task Force.

A target date of September 30, 2020, is set to receive specific plans to carry out these activities.”

This leadership initiative is the beginning of our work on race relationships and equality. It is my desire to see this work begin and sustained over the next two years. I recognize that the work of race relationships is more than a two-year project, but this first step is our beginning point for significantly reforming our Conference to become more equitable to non-White participants in our Conference.

I remain open to hear from our constituency ways that can enhance our life together on matters of race relationships as this journey begins and is sustained throughout this next season of our life together.

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

## Pastoral transitions in Virginia Mennonite Conference

The Credentials Committee of the Faith and Life Commission of Virginia Mennonite Conference was engaged this past fiscal year (September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020) in processing numerous ministerial requests for new credentials, or a change of ministerial status.

The Credentials Committee members met the third Tuesday of the month except for December, March and July. The committee members who served sometime during this past year are: James Akerson (Chair), Pearl Hartman, Dawn Monger, Craig Maven, and David Lehman.

This report identifies the ministerial credentials granted to individuals this past year, including new ordinations, transfers, retirements, withdrawals, and deaths.

### New ministerial credentials:

- **Kinley Simmers**, license moved to special ministries— itinerate preaching
- **D.J. Mitchell**, special ministries license for chaplain/recovery ministry
- **Alfonso Alvarado**, license for leadership at Monte Moriah, Lacey Spring, Va.
- **Ken Wettig**, license for pastoral ministry at Early Church, Harrisonburg, Va.
- **Pablo Hernandez**, license for pastoral ministry at Iglesia Esperanza de Vida, Harrisonburg, Va.
- **LaShonda Russell**, license for youth ministry at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va.

- **26 individuals** had their ministerial license renewed (Sept. 1, 2020-2021)

### New ordinations:

- **Mark Kimmet**, serving at 3:16 Christian Church, Hickory, N.C.
- **Andrew R.W.B. Fairfield**, serving at Christiansburg Mennonite Church, Christiansburg, Va.
- **Sarah Ann Bixler**, serving at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in the Teaching Cluster.

**Pastoral transitions continued on back page**



### MCC centennial continued from cover

And this ministry continues with the Mennonite Brethren churches in Ukraine today. Maxim Oliferovski is the pastor of one of the churches and partners with MCC in their New Hope Center. The New Hope Center works with families in crisis and children from broken homes. Maxim started a new church for these families, God's Family Church, so that, as he says, "God can do his work of healing broken hearts."

Another partner is the Zaporizhzhia Baptist Union, which distributes material aid to vulnerable people in the region, including IDPs and others lacking resources, including ex-prisoners. Vadym Proshak, a pastor and director of the Union, said, "We want people to have a chance in life and we couldn't do what we do without MCC's help." In their warehouse, we saw cans of meat, comforters and hygiene kits. One recipient family is Anna and her three daughters. They are internally displaced people, and they receive rent assistance and canned meat through MCC. Anna shared how she portions out the meat, so it lasts longer.

Another organization, New Life Charitable Foundation in Nikopol, is one of our longest, strongest partners in Ukraine. New Life works to improve the living conditions of people who are HIV-infected, ex-prisoners, homeless people, tuberculosis patients, displaced persons, and others who are disenfranchised. One internally displaced couple were people of means (she was a government official and he is an engineer) now living in temporary housing with New Life's support. New Life helps provide rent assistance, food packages and hygiene kits to the thousands of internally displaced people in the region. We helped celebrate Pyoter's (Peter's) birthday! This couple has a severely disabled daughter

and they really did not want to leave their home in the conflict zone, but one day, their house was hit by shelling three times and they had to retreat to the basement. When they came back out, they were greeted by the sky because their roof was completely blown away.

### MCC work in Nepal

Last November, I was in Nepal to visit with MCC's partners there. Nepal is a beautiful country. But five years ago, an earthquake hit, and hundreds of thousands of people were left homeless. MCC was able to respond by helping to rebuild houses. MCC raised more than \$3 million for earthquake recovery to respond with immediate emergency relief for 4,000 families, and to work at longer-term home reconstruction. We are just finishing up a five-year reconstruction program of 200 houses in the village of Nallu.

We met Shanti and Krishna. They told me, "When the earthquake came, we ran to find a place to hide. Our house collapsed and it was a day or so before help came. When we asked Krishna how his family managed to survive after the earthquake, he said in Nepali, MCC was part of arma parma, everyone helping each other, a part of the traditional way.

### MCC India staff and partners

Two years ago, I joined MCC India's 75th anniversary celebration. Bishop Shant Kunjam of Mennonite Church India told the gathering that MCC was born of the same impulse of the early Anabaptists to share their food with the hungry. Dr. John Oommen, deputy medical director of the Christian hospital in Odisha, said that the people present were not only celebrating MCC, but they were also celebrating their part in the mission of God in the world. He told

Mennonite Central Committee first relief program provided food relief to Ukraine, a country ravaged by war and famine, in 1922.

the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and said that MCC, through these 75 years, is serving and washing the feet of the world.

We heard from many beneficiaries of MCC programs. Many years ago, this young woman was in an orphanage and was sponsored by MCC to attend school and get an education. Today, she is a legal rights advocate and lawyer working in the area of human trafficking.

I visited an MCC project in West Bengal, where MCC was working with its partner in two villages on a flood relief project (Economic Rural Development Society). And that project has led to others in education, microfinance, health and sanitation, access to water and housing.

In the Sunderban, a very remote part of India southeast of Kolkata and where a cyclone hit recently, I visited with women who proudly displayed their certificates for training in sewing. Their new skills will help them earn money to feed their children and send them to school.

### Peacebuilding and Development in South Korea

The MCC South Korea office is in Chuncheon, just 30 miles from the North Korea border. Following the Korean War in 1950-53, Korea—North or South—would have looked very different from today. After the war, Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world; one-third of all homes were destroyed, and so were almost half of the factories. Beginning in 1952, MCC set up feeding stations and distributed clothing and bedding in Taegu, the very southern part of South Korea. MCC provided milk and rice to 5,000 people each day. The Mennonite Vocational School taught and trained hundreds of orphans for jobs in post-war South Korea.

More than 75 MCCers from North America served in South Korea from 1951 to 1971. Because there was very rapid economic growth in South Korea in those years, MCC was able to leave the country just 20 years later. In the 1990s, South Koreans who were studying the Bible on their own decided that Anabaptism best described who they were as Christians and



Chuncheon, South Korea, just 30 miles from the North Korea border, is where the MCC office is located.

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Jesus Village Church, and later, Jesus Heart Church, were formed. These congregations are home to our MCCers today.

MCC's small staff here coordinate peace education activities in the northeast Asia region, provide a reconciliatory presence within the two Koreas and administer exchange opportunities for young adults.

One of MCC's partners is the Korean Peacebuilding Institute (KOPI). Jae Young Lee directs a 15-member staff who teaches restorative justice and peace building skills in the public schools, to the local police and elsewhere. Jae Young says he could not do what he does without the training he received with MCC's help at the EMU Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. He also partners with MCC and others in an annual two-week long Northeast Asia Regional Peacebuilding Institute for peace activists, practitioners and educators.

I sat with Jae Young and his father, Hyung Gon Lee, a farm manager for the Mennonite Vocational School in Taegu, South Korea, which was established by MCC relief volunteers. We talk about the possibility for peace between North Korea and South Korea. Jae Young says that what MCC did in Korea 70 years ago still touches people like him who are working in that same spirit of peace today. He and his father both believe that Korea can be one again and the work MCC does in peacebuilding is a bridge to the future, peace between North and South Korea. Developing neighbor relationships with a country our own considers the enemy; those are the primary reasons MCC has an office in South Korea.

Did you know that one fourth of MCC's canned meat goes to North Korea? We have

also provided assistance for three pediatric hospitals in that country. MCC provides food and material support for TB/hepatitis patients. One key additional part of MCC's



Jae Young (right), leader of the Korean Peacebuilding Institute, and his father Hyung Gon Lee, farm manager for Mennonite Vocational School in Taegu, talk with Ron Byler about working in the spirit of peace and how it may transform both Koreas in the future.

ministry in this region is the annual Christian Forum for Reconciliation in Northeast Asia bringing together 100 Christian leaders each year from China, Japan and Korea.

**MCC's work in the D.R. Congo**

Several years ago, political conflict, and largescale violence and killing, in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo forced millions of people from their homes. Through Mennonite World Conference, MCC worked with the Mennonite conferences in Congo and with mission agencies in North America to respond with compassion and kindness in the name of Christ. MCC is responding to the needs of thousands of displaced families in this region through food assistance, yes, but

also, helping displaced communities with interim farming, education for the children and trauma healing support.

Pastor Komuesa, the leader of one of the Congolese Mennonite denominations told us, "This crisis happened in the midst of our churches...The MCC response has had a big impact. The people see that it's the church that is helping, and it has helped our church to grow...No other church in the region has been able to respond like the Mennonite church and has this brought us closer to our people."

**The U.S./Mexico border**

For two weeks earlier this year, I traveled the U.S. Mexico border, from San Diego to Brownsville. I visited MCC's partners and others who are responding to the needs of displaced people, people migrating, asylum seekers, who desperately need help. I visited the tent city in Matamoros, Mexico, across the border from Brownsville, Texas, MCC assists in the camp with food and other supplies through two partners.

I met Josue, the free store manager, and when he saw my MCC t-shirt, he said, "Soy Menonita!" (I am Mennonite). Turns out, his father is a Mennonite pastor

**MCC centennial** continued on page 6

in Honduras, Josue and his family fled the country after his aunt and uncle were murdered in front of their children, and his father was harassed by the gangs because he was inviting the young boys to church. When I met Josue, he and his family had been in the tent city for 7 months, waiting for an asylum hearing, and now, since the corona virus, it has been 10 months and they are still waiting. I exchange text messages with Josue and he is getting increasingly desperate. MCC's partners continue to care for people in the tent city.

### Other locations

MCC's program around the world changed in response to the virus. In southern Malawi, MCC's food distribution now includes a hand washing component and we distribute soap, along with maize, beans, and oil to 400 families.

In Cambodia, MCC worked with 11 local churches to distribute food relief to help poorer families safely survive a three-week COVID-19 lockdown. Cambodian border closures have resulted in food shortages and dramatic price increases even as the garment, construction, and tourism businesses laid off workers. MCC implemented COVID-19 prevention best practices and provided local experience for partner organizations as they developed their own COVID-19 responses.

In Lebanon, MCC's partner (Popular Aid for Relief and Development) is distributing COVID-19 hygiene kits to residents in a low-income neighborhood, mostly Palestinian and Syrian refugees. The hygiene kits are especially needed because most people live in close quarters where social distancing is difficult, and healthcare is limited or not provided to refugees.

### VMC has played a key role

Through these 100 years, Virginia Conference Mennonites have played a key role in several areas. The first mobile meat cannery was set up in Harrisonburg, Virginia, in 1946. It was built at the request of the Mennonite Church the year before and was given to MCC in 1952. Today, in a typical year, almost 30,000 volunteers in 30 sites can 750,000 cans of meat, which MCC ships to people in need in countries like North Korea, Haiti, and Ethiopia.

Several years ago, Cal Redekop and Paul Peachey were recognized for their work in starting MCC's PAX program,

which eventually influenced the formation of the U.S. Peace Corps. The MCC Pax program was an alternative service option for conscientious objectors drafted into U.S. military service from 1951 to 1975. About 1,200 young men eventually served in 40 countries around the world.

During World War II, Virginia Mennonites were instrumental in the Civilian Public Service camps in Grottoes and Luray. The woman in the middle of this photo is Mary Emma Showalter who joined CPS camp four in Grottoes voluntarily. She says the camp was the door that opened her professional life and she later became known for publishing the Mennonite Community Cookbook.

Last year, you raised \$300,000 through the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale, the highest amount for this sale ever, for MCC's relief and development efforts around the world. And did you know that the money you raise here through My Coins Count in Virginia benefits both MCC and Virginia Mennonite Missions?

### Centennial and COVID-19

The Great Winter Warm up was an awesome public beginning to our centennial year on January 18. I was able to participate in two events in eastern Pennsylvania of the more than 100 across North America. Our goal was to complete 6,500 comforters, and despite the bad weather in some locations, we completed more than 9,500!

In January, MCC also celebrated its centennial in Nigeria. Justina Ngwobia, an MCC advisory committee member said that MCC is like Psalm 19: They are no words . . . Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. MCC has empowered us...What you have done speaks volumes. (You) Make sure people who have no voice can be heard."

We also had an MCC centennial event in February at Tabor College in Kansas, where that first delegation of Mennonites from the Ukraine visited 100 years ago.

Then came March and COVID-19. The coronavirus changed a lot of our plans for celebrating 100 years of ministry, but it hasn't changed our mission of sharing God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ or our ministry of responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice.

The Kansas Relief Sale had to cancel its public event, but that didn't stop the volun-

teers from supporting MCC. To date, they have raised more than \$500,000 through selling restored vehicles, organizing a virtual walk, holding a drive by meal for 700 people and encouraging local churches to find their own creative ways to raise money for MCC!

MCC supporters continue to be generous, but of course, our income is down considerably because the thrift shop network was closed for months and relief sales were cancelled. We have had to reduce our international program by 25%. That is saddening, of course, but we continue to believe that God is calling us to respond to the needs of the world with compassion and kindness. MCC staff and supporters have responded to the challenges in remarkable ways. Each of MCC's four regions are using MCC's canned meat to respond to local hunger needs during COVID.

### The next 100 years

Where will MCC's journey of compassion and kindness with the Anabaptist churches take us in the next 100 years? Whatever we do in word or deed, we will do it in the name of Christ. We will work with the church and other partners to respond to the needs of vulnerable people, especially those who have been uprooted and displaced. We will continue to encourage Anabaptist groups to work together to be a part of God's mission in the world and to engage young adults in ministries of compassion. We will increasingly see peacebuilding as a lens for all our relief and development work and we will work for just relationships with all people, including here in the United States. We will take responsibility for our role in caring for God's creation. And we will walk with people and communities whose futures are affected by shifting weather patterns and climate change.

Inspired by our vision of communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation, MCC's board recently adopted these new directions so that MCC's relief, development and peacebuilding ministries in the name of Christ may deepen and expand. "All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

■ *Ron Byler is Executive Director of Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa.*

# A modest proposal for refugee relief

By CLAIRE DE BRUN

We know that refugees are people who are fleeing for safety, especially to a different country, but we may not know that more people than ever before have been displaced because of war or conflict, hatred, prejudice, greed, poverty, or natural disasters, to name a few reasons. The UN Refugee Agency, estimates that 25.9 million people (more than half of whom are children) are displaced from their homes and countries (2019). This is the most compelling issue of our day.

Refugees spend an average of ten years living in a refugee camp or center. Life in a camp can mean suffering from fear, hunger, thirst, extreme heat or cold, poor or no sanitation, sickness, lack of medical care, no schooling, uncertainty, despair, loss of family, loss of country, loss of innocence, purpose, and faith.

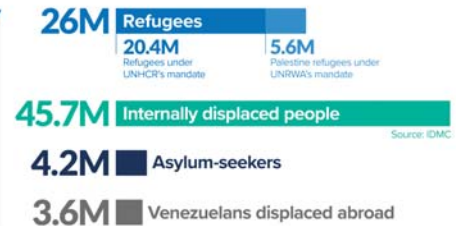
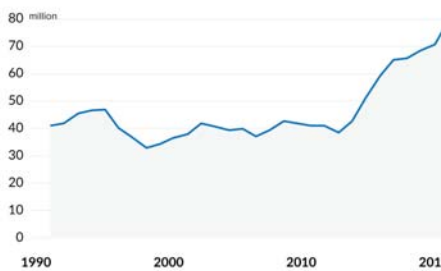
Imagine that in an agonizing minute, everything you know and have is left behind as you flee from your home. You take what you can carry and you walk many miles for many days fearing attack or death, going to a place far away where nobody knows you, your story, or even your language. You are broken, alone, disconnected, disoriented, and traumatized. And you are one of tens of millions across the globe who are experiencing these unimaginable events.

Why does this refugee crisis often feel invisible? It's not because it is not real, but because it feels far away. When refugees are in our midst, or we are confronted with their reality, it makes us uncomfortable to see such human suffering. We can feel overwhelmed and paralyzed with an inability to respond. Even if we do not see the suffering of these people in front of us personally, Mennonite Central Committee can give us the eyes to see, the hearts to feel, and the hands to respond with donations for relief through multiple global relief efforts.

One of the ways that we can help is by contributing to the SOS (Share Our Surplus) campaign. The purpose of SOS is to raise awareness of the worldwide refugee crisis and to raise money for MCC's refugee relief work in the name of Christ. This ad-hoc committee of the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale Committee was conceived

**79.5 MILLION** forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019

Source: UNHCR / 18 June 2020



by Harvey Yoder, a pastor, counselor, and activist in Harrisonburg, Va.

This is the 100th anniversary of MCC, an extraordinary organization. There are not many denominations who have access to this kind of organization and infrastructure, with programs and people across the globe who are dedicated to serving needs with a message of peace, hope, and help. MCC has been doing this for 100 years with an incredible confluence of biblical teaching and response to God's call for justice, peace, healing, and reconciliation.

Abraham was given the great and serious responsibility to lead God's people to be a blessing to all the nations, that is, to all people. In the New Testament, Jesus reinforces that call and commissions his disciples and followers to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is within this new covenant relationship that we operate and have our being and purpose, acting as people of God who care for and about others. We can do this globally through the work of MCC.

MCC relies on donations from people like you and me to support and enable the work to continue. This means we need to give financially to fulfill the mission. COVID-19 has negatively impacted one of the biggest fund raising measures for MCC, the Relief Sales that happen in many states and in Canada. We may not love talking about money, but at this critical time in the world, money is what is needed to send workers and aid to help refugees confront the enormous and painful obstacles before them. We are called, commissioned, and invited to be difference makers in a world of turmoil, injustice, and suffering. Who will be the hands and feet of Jesus, if not us?

Refugees may be suffering in record numbers due to many reasons such conflict and injustice. The root causes are legion and seemingly inexorable and the problem

is getting worse, not better. But there is a way that is better and will help. It is life-giving, uplifting, peaceful, and healing. MCC has a ready plan to respond to this crisis. Donating funds to MCC through SOS brings relief to refugees in many forms. It may provide basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. It also builds relationships across generations and people groups, concerned with the whole person. It is not simply transactional; it is relational. It's about saving lives and relieving human suffering. The impact and capacity is dynamic, kinetic, and energizing. SOS, which sends all of the money it raises to MCC, also designates all of it specifically to refugee relief efforts.

SOS recently hosted a sponsored "Hundreds for Hundreds" walk to raise money for MCC and to honor their centennial anniversary. Our next fundraising campaign will encourage people to organize into groups of individual people and/organizations, and contribute one thousand dollars. It is the SOS One Thousand Challenge Campaign.

How will it work? For example, if 10 people each give a hundred dollars that would equal a thousand dollars. Or, 20 people could give fifty dollars per person and so on. It is also fine to just donate what you can on your own. Anything is something when some have nothing. Envision the possibilities at this time when MCC has suffered a great loss of contribution revenue.

Let's honor our calling to lead by serving, heal by loving, and bless by sacrificing for people who have lost their country, home, family, identity, hope, and way. The cries from refugees are deafening; let's show them that we hear and we care. Let's also respond, becoming the hands and feet of Christ in this collective effort.

■ *Claire de Brun serves on the SOS committee of the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale.*

# Meet Richard Early, new VMC Moderator



By RICHARD EARLY

**M**y journey began on Easter Sunday, April 5, 1953. I was born in Lancashire, England, at Burtonwood Air Force Base, where my father was stationed during the Korean War. In 1955, we moved back to my dad's grandparents' house in Pleasant Valley, Virginia. Abe and Cora Early were members of Pleasant Run Church of the Brethren and represent eight generations of German Baptist/Dunkard lineage. After my father's graduation from Madison College in 1958, the family moved again to Portsmouth, Va., where my father taught at Woodrow Wilson High School.

Any chance of connecting again with the Church of the Brethren ended when we started attending Central Methodist Church nearby. Shortly thereafter, I was baptized as an infant, of which I have no recollection. My mother got very involved in the choir and my dad was elected to be on the Church Board. My brother, Michael, sister JoAnna and I became active in Sunday School. The choir director said that I, at 10 years old, had a great singing voice and recommended I take voice lessons. A neighbor down the street gave voice lessons, so my mom signed me up. I was so embarrassed that my friends would find out that I went around the block from my house to avoid being seen! But I did it.

My career was short-lived. A year later, when I was supposed to sing a solo, I froze and forgot the words to "Fairest Lord Jesus," and started singing "Onward Christian Soldiers!" I say all this to point out that in those early days of my life, the church was very important to me. It was a central part of our family structure. I especially loved my third grade Sunday School teacher who taught me so much about Jesus and the Bible.

## Richard's Background

- Married to Kay Griffin for 44 years
- Six adult children: Judy (49, from Uruguay), Anna May (43), Rachel (40), Rebekah (42), Josiah(42), Jacob (34); 10 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.
- Have a Bachelor of Science Degree in Political Science/International Relations from Madison College; a Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary; a Doctorate of Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary. Also attended Eastern Mennonite Seminary.
- Pastored for 43 years:
  - Charlottesville Mennonite Church, Charlottesville, Va.
  - Zion Mennonite Church, Souderton, Pa.
  - Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va.
  - Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va.
- Served 9 years on the General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church.
- Involved for 6 years with the joint Mennonite Church-General Conference Mennonite Church Integration Exploration Committee.
- Enjoy raising sheep, woodworking, gardening, and being with others in service and mission outreach – in Uruguay, Philippines, Honduras, and Appalachian Service Projects.
- Member of Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va.

Life changed radically for me in 1964, when my father secured a government job in Maryland and our family moved to Vienna, VA. We visited several churches the first month, but none seemed to fit for my parents, so we stopped attending. At first, I missed my friends at the former church, until I made new connections with my peers. A whole new mindset opened up for me. Now I was moving through the teen years and exploring new experiences, like girls, alcohol, drugs, and sports. God was gone from my mind, if He ever existed. Life was good, I thought at the time.

In the fall of 1971, I started attending Madison College along with three of my best friends from James Madison High School. The first few months were great: fraternity parties, soccer games, great classes and yes, those freaky Jesus people, trying to save me from going to Hell. What I did not realize at the time was God's Spirit was starting to work on me – it was around Christmas. Something was missing in my life that I had when I was a child. I became friends with one of those Jesus people, "Bible" Billy Yates. We



talked about everything, including religion, but he never pushed Christ down my throat. He showed it with his desire to connect and belong without forcing me to believe I needed Jesus as my Savior and Lord. God was preparing me for that through Billy's patient and loving spirit. Art McPhee would call it friendship evangelism.

On February 6, 1972, Billy invited me to go hear J.C. Wenger speak at Chicago Avenue Mennonite Church. "Who is J.C. Wenger," I asked Billy. "I don't know who he is except he is a Mennonite," Billy responded. "What's a Mennonite?" I asked. His response was, "I don't know. I am a Methodist. Let's just go and see."

We went. That night, J.C. Wenger (in his plain suit) spoke on "six ways to interpret the Scriptures." It was informative, but there was something about him that kept saying to me he has what you don't have. Billy and I left the meeting, and I was feeling convicted, but not converted. We went later that night to an Inter Varsity meeting in Gifford Hall at Madison College. And that is when my life was forever changed.

Two former gang members with the Tom Skinner Association spoke on what it meant to be black and a follower of Jesus Christ. As they spoke, the Holy Spirit of God was saying, "I am here to give you a purpose for your life, like they have gotten from Me. I started crying and said to myself, "I am tired of running from you God, if I am going to do this, it's got to be one hundred percent." The speakers prayed with me and I gave my life to Jesus Christ. After the meeting, they stayed the whole night with me in my dorm room. They would become my friends over the next years of my journey.

How did I become a Mennonite? A month after this, I received a phone call from John Yoder from Eastern Mennonite College, asking if I was interested in helping start an outreach ministry called Liberty Street Liberation Center in downtown

Harrisonburg. "God, what are you doing to me—those Mennonites again! Come on!" I accepted the call and got involved.

Fast forwarding, I connected with John and Beulah Hess Yoder. They invited me to their home several times to eat with them. I asked a lot of questions about what Mennonites believed. They gave me a book entitled *The Anabaptist Vision* by William Estep. I took the book home and read it until 3 a.m. Before I went to sleep, I said "God, not only have I found a purpose for living, but I have a history and a set of beliefs that I can own."

I started attending Broad St. Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg and joined my first truly integrated congregation in July 1972. I also got very involved in a Bible study with Madison students that met in the home of conservative Bishop Lloyd Kniss and his wife Elizabeth. The involvement with that group and the teachings of "Papa Kniss" was monumental in my spiritual growth and my learning of the Mennonite church. I may not be a "blueblood," but at 67 years old, I have become and always will be an Anabaptist!

#### **My hopes:**

When I was asked what I hope to work at in my role as Virginia Mennonite Conference Moderator, three overall goals emerged.

**1. Building Stronger Connections:** In listening to a number of persons in the Conference, it seems there is a desire for greater connectedness. One church leader put it this way: "The polarization that is evident in our country at the moment is also reflected in our own Virginia Conference." My response is yes, that is true—it has always been there, and it should be a positive witness. I believe that diversity is a gift from God, if God is in it. Our unity and diversity are both defined by being the body of Christ. People are much more than their theology, party affiliation, race, gender, edu-

cation, and age. They are each God's children, created for fellowship, who deserve love, respect, and a place at the table as an invited brother or sister. Ray Kuykendall, a former member at Zion Mennonite Church in Broadway, once told me, "You never know a person until you put your feet under their table and eat together." Jesus was always at ease in fellowship, eating and drinking at anyone's table. Let us find ways, even with masks, to be together, especially with someone different than we are.

**2. Reaching Our Objectives with the Five Strategic Planning Goals:** I believe that our success in achieving our goals will be more about the journey together than the final destination. Our Conference has its fair share of strong personalities, all of whom, myself included, have their perceptions. This means that we tend to own what we look for or experience, whether it be problems or solutions. My hope is, in spite of ourselves, we can together commit to a way of thinking and doing that involves growth and positive changes. My personal commitment to you is to be open in all my responsibilities, to listen, to understand, and to learn from you.

**3. The Next Moderator Should Be a Person of Color and/or a Young Woman:** When I was a young pastor at Charlottesville Mennonite Church, I was never asked to serve on a broader conference board or committee. I thought it was because of my age, but someone informed me it was because I did not grow up or marry into the Mennonite Church. I never let it bother me. Today I would call it "Menno Privilege." I welcome and will encourage diverse leadership. We must also desire to work as hard for the same diversity in our own congregations. This will be the greater challenge.

■ *Richard Early is the Virginia Mennonite Conference Moderator.*

**Even as the pandemic has changed our lives and ministries, VMC is still equipping the church.**

**Please consider a gift to Virginia Mennonite Conference.**

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### Pastoral transitions continued from page 3

#### **Transfers of Ministerial Credentials from another MC USA Conference:**

- **Clair Good**, for pastoral ministry at Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Waynesboro VA from Atlantic Coast Conference
- **Beth Good**, for administrative ministry at Eastern Mennonite University from Atlantic Coast Conference
- **Rene Hostetter**, transferred to Allegheny Mennonite Conference.
- **John Stoltzfus**, for pastoral ministry from Mosaic Mennonite Conference
- **Kathy Yoder**, retired status from Mosaic Mennonite Conference

#### **Transfers of Ministerial Credentials to another MC USA Conference:**

- The following persons associated with Community Mennonite Church were transferred to Allegheny Mennonite Conference:

**Mary Jo Bowman**  
**Sharon Wyse Miller**  
**Brain Martin Burkholder**  
**Veva Mumaw**  
**Kenton Derstine**  
**Millard Osborne**  
**Jason Gerlach**  
**Byron Peachy**  
**Kathy Hochstedler**  
**Jennifer Davis Sensenig**  
**Lana Miller**  
**Lonnie Yoder**

#### **Leaders Retiring their Credentials:**

- **Mark Lehman**, special ministries-chaplain
- **Carolyn Lyndaker**, Crest Hill Community Church, Wardensville, W.Va.
- **Daryl Byler**, Special Ministries-Leadership/Administration
- **Richard Early**, Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va.
- **Lowell Haarer**, Zion Hill Mennonite Church, Singers Glen, Va.

A requirement to hold a ministerial credential by Virginia Mennonite Conference is congregational membership in a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation. Ministerial credentials are withdrawn by the Conference if membership is outside a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation. At times, an individual will surrender their ministerial credentials because of a vocational change. **The following persons are in this category:**

- **Ross Erb**, formerly of Park View Mennonite Church, surrendered his credentials for vocational change
- **William Eberly**, formerly of Powhatan Mennonite Church
- **I. Keith Miller**, formerly of Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church
- **Mauricio Chenlo**, member of Raleigh Mennonite Church, no longer a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation
- **Reuben Horst**, a member of New Beginnings Fellowship, no longer a VMC congregation

#### **With sadness, we acknowledge the credentialed ministers who died in the past year:**

- **John Kiblinger** died on October 11, 2019; he is survived by his wife Kathy
- **Mark Landis** died on December 12, 2019; he is survived by his wife Elizabeth
- **Ken Peterson** died on December 16, 2019; he is survived by his wife Carol
- **Paul T. Yoder** died on December 16, 2019; his wife **Daisy** died on July 1, 2020
- **Nate Yoder** died on April 3, 2020; he is survived by his wife Miriam
- **Lloyd Weaver, Jr.** died on April 7, 2020; he is survived by his wife Sarah
- **Ronnie Pride** died on May 14, 2020; he is survived by his wife Louvenia
- **Ed Godshall** died on July 10, 2020; he is survived by his wife Evelyn

As Virginia Mennonite Conference continues to navigate through various leadership transitions celebrating the conclusion of ministry, but also launching new ministries, we value the local congregation identifying and empowering persons to consider pastoral ministry. Please contact Clyde G. Kratz, Executive Conference Minister, if you have interest in considering pastoral ministry.

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