



PATHWAYS

WALKING WITH THE MINISTRIES OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE



FALL 2021
Vol. 7, No. 3



Reconciliation and Transformation 5



Measuring Intercultural Competence in VMC 3



Virginia History Book Project Kicks Off Again 6



Richard Early Resigns as Moderator 6



Eastside Church Receives Mennonite Men Grant 8





Takeaways from My Sabbatical

In the final week of a three-month sabbatical, I was surprised how excited I was to return to the work of Virginia Mennonite Conference. Looking back to the beginning of the sabbatical, I realized the extent of my exhaustion and fatigue, and my somewhat fragile emotional state. The timing was perfect to undertake my sabbatical activities in the month of June: reading and on-site learning on an African Experience in America theme, as well as connecting with family and friends, and resting. This was interrupted in July by a major health crisis due to my suffering a heart attack, and the subsequent rehab. In August, I reengaged some of the themes of study and continued connecting with family and friends.

I want to share some of the things I learned over my sabbatical on these three themes: Africans in America, family and rest, and reengaging my leadership role.

Four Takeaways from the African Experience in America

I have learned at least four things from the African Experience in America readings and experiences.

Limitations of Heroic Narratives

One of my “decade goals” is to read all the presidential biographies that are listed on Barnes and Noble’s recommended list. As part of the African Experience reading, I have now completed the Founding Fathers part of the list. I previously read the biographies of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.

During this sabbatical time, I read about John Adams and James Monroe. In my mind, each of these biographies are heroic narratives. The writer seeks to highlight the leadership qualities of the president portrayed, identify the leadership crisis they faced along with the resolution, describes the friendships and conflicted relationships with other leaders, and demonstrates their leadership as

an emerging nation. In these narratives, there is an awareness that these leaders are noteworthy, ahead of their time, and struggle with the challenges before them.

However, the confusing part of the narratives is the Founding Fathers’ commitment to equality and justice, but inability to dismantle slavery. John Adams is the only president of this period who never owned slaves. The Virginia Presidents (Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe) were slave owners and had intellectual difficulty with slavery. However, they noted the reasons why they could not abolish slavery in the colonies and keep the union of colonies together.

One of the challenges of leadership is having the knowledge that some things must change, but also recognizing the political reality limitations to implement the needed changes for an organization or culture.

Value of Marginalized Voices

I read several books written by African Americans who experienced American life in a different way than the Heroic Narratives represent. They provide insights from largely overlooked aspects of our history not accentuated in the Heroic Narratives. Both narratives can provide insights and truth, but marginalized voices have a role in helping us see how the predominate culture is actually functioning more completely.

Those in leadership should value and seek out the marginalized voices in order to gain a fuller picture of culture, organizational impact, and ways that different groups of people can become whole and integrated in the decision-making.

A Culture Rewards Those Who Created It

In 1998, William Booth reflected on the play by Israel Zangwill, “The Melting Pot” in *The Washington Post*. Zang-

Editorial continued on page 4

Pastoral transitions

JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2021

Matthew Cabbage, withdrawal from VMC, 3:16 Christian Community Church Hickory, NC.

John Engle, transfer from Mosaic Mennonite Conference for pastorate at Powhatan Mennonite Church, Powhatan, Va.

Sherah-Leigh Gerber, transferred from VMC to Ohio Mennonite Conference.

David Gingerich, left pastorate at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va., license withdrawn.

Phil Helmuth, moved to retired status.

Pablo Hernandez, left pastorate at Esperanza de Vida, Harrisonburg, Va., license withdrawn.

Dan Horning, withdrawal from VMC, Gospel Hill Mennonite Church, Fulks Run, Va.

Mark Kimmet, withdrawal from VMC, 3:16 Christian Community Church, Hickory, NC.

Dennis Kuhns, moved to retired status.

Barbara Lehman, transferred from VMC to Central District Conference.

John Lehman, transferred from VMC to Central District Conference.

Curt Stutzman, license for pastorate at Weavers Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

John David Thacker, transferred to VMC from Pacific Northwest Conference, serving as church planter in Charleston, W.Va.

Kathy Yoder, moved to retired status.

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Virginia Mennonite Conference hosted Glen Guyton, Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, in a Intercultural Development Inventory training for VMC leadership groups on August 28.

Photo: Jon Trotter

Measuring Intercultural Competence in VMC

By CALEB SCHROCK-HURST

The Virginia Mennonite Conference Racial Justice Task Force was privileged to host Glen Guyton, the Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA, for a training session on the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) on August 28. Mennonite Church USA uses the IDI as “an assessment tool that measures intercultural competence—the ability to engage effectively and appropriately with people who are different than ourselves.”¹

Per the desires of the Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF), in attendance at Park View Mennonite Church were Virginia Mennonite Conference staff, Conference Council, Faith and Life Commission, and the RJTF. By gathering this group, which represents the conference’s formal leadership, the RJTF hoped to take stock of the conference leadership’s current intercultural competency level and continue inspiring conference leadership to work for racial justice by equipping them for work with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

This training was the second of three portions of the IDI. Before the event, participants filled out the IDI Assessment, a 60-question survey, providing the IDI staff with VMC-specific data, which Executive Director Guyton used to shape his presentation. In the coming weeks, participants will complete the third portion of the IDI, a one-on-one meeting with Dayton, Va.,-based IDI practitioner

Jane Ellen Reid, to discuss their individual survey results.

The IDI places groups and individuals into five categories of cultural competency: denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation. On the ‘monocultural mindset’ end of the IDI scale is denial—a cultural orientation that overlooks or is made uncomfortable by cultural differences—while the most intercultural mindset is adaptation, which describes groups and individuals able to act authentically in various cultural settings.

As is typical to many groups and organizations who wish to focus more on racial justice and intercultural competency, according to Guyton, VMC leadership fell in Minimization, the middle category. Minimization is “an orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles [but] that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.”

This demonstrates that while VMC leadership is able to work with people from varied cultural backgrounds and has some experience in doing so, more work needs to be done to make the conference a place where cultural differences can be celebrated and where leadership is confident and culturally sensitive when working with churches and conference members of all racial and cultural backgrounds.

Rather than prescribing what should be done next at the end of his presentation, Executive Director Guyton

challenged the conference leadership to map its own steps towards cultural competency and anti-racism. Guyton emphasized that each organization and conference is different and that real movement towards racial justice and cultural competency will only come about if the conference commits itself to work for change over an extended period of time.

While everyone can and should contribute to this work, I find it significant and hopeful that conference leaders were willing to devote time and energy to a training such as this one. Additionally, I’m grateful that the RJTF, already a year into its work, will continue to provide recommendations and guidance as we continue on this journey together. I am lucky to be a part of this work in my role as Racial Justice and Equality Leader, and while I am new to the role—I began about a month ago—I look forward to walking with the conference as we continue this important work.

While VMC is already a diverse conference, the IDI made it clear that we must continue to learn about other cultures and races, and I hope to help each of us learn to fully embrace the racial and cultural diversity of God’s creation as reflected in our church family.

Caleb Schrock-Hurst is Racial Justice and Equity Leader for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

<https://www.mennoniteusa.org/ministry/peacebuilding/undoing-racism/intercultural-development-inventory-idi/>

will, a Jew from England writing in 1908, captured the national imagination: “The promise that all immigrants can be transformed into Americans, a new alloy forged in a crucible of democracy, freedom, and civic responsibility.”

At that time, the “largest influx of immigrants in its history—Irish and Germans, followed by Italians and East Europeans, Catholics and Jews – some 18 million new citizens between 1890 and 1920.”

Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents is a book by Isabel Wilkerson about how America today and throughout its history has been shaped by a hidden caste system, a rigid hierarchy of human rankings. I came away from the book reflecting on how culture benefits those that constructed it. I remember when growing up in my home congregation, there was an annual vote on all available congregational positions with three names listed for each position on the ballot. During an informal conversation with several adult friends, one person said they could not get elected because they were not one of the favorite sons of the congregation. He married a woman from the congregation, but from his vantage point, he remained an outsider.

The author of *Caste* makes the case that the culture of the United States is not broken, it merely rewards those that constructed it. I believe the same is true for our conference.

Cultural practices are difficult to change, and in times of extreme anxiety, a culture reverts to its former behavior. The challenge that lies ahead is for our conference to vigorously engage the contemporary challenge of anti-racism in order to establish a more equitable culture for all people.

Where Knowledge is Folly, Ignorance is Bliss

I have learned that my historic perspectives on African Americans and their experiences is anemic. I have taken the time to read and engage in activities in order to better understand the way people in this community have been treated. In Philadelphia, a woman asked me why I went to the museum there. I replied that

I was seeking to understand the African experience in America during the colonial period. She retorted, “You are one of those woke people.” I responded by saying, “I am seeking to be empathetic to the experience of people including African Americans.”

It remains my perspective that gathering information through reading and experience can make a difference in our view of the world and the faith community. I want to remain curiously engaged in uncovering the blind spots that have been institutionalized in me by the limits of my educational pursuits and memory.

Family and Friends Time

My life was enriched by connecting to family and friends in Pennsylvania during my sabbatical. My visit to Pennsylvania coincided with my mother’s hospitalization. She was hospitalized in June and July. The medical procedures were successful on both occasions. My parents are planning to move to the Souderton campus of Living Branches. My mother is 85 and my dad will turn 87 in December. Dad and mother are currently in good health. Because they are moving into this next phase of their life, it is my desire to travel to visit them more than once a year. This pandemic season has frustrated my goal of more frequent visits.

Making special efforts with our grandchildren has been meaningful. While I was unable to accompany two grandsons to the Major League Soccer game in Philadelphia, they had a memorable time. The two grandsons that love to experiment with food had a thrilling time at the Melting Pot. Our granddaughter is interested in attending the American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars Playhouse to see a Shakespeare play, which we are planning to do this fall. As a family, our children and grandchildren, enjoyed an event evening at Kyoto’s Japanese Steakhouse. The grandchildren not only enjoyed the food, but also the entertainment by the chef!

Advance Ahead

Returning to the role of Executive Conference Minister has been exciting thus far. I want to take this opportunity to express sincere appreciation for June Miller’s leadership during my sabbati-

cal. She demonstrated the breadth of her leadership capacity as she coordinated the work of the Conference, including the Summer Delegate Assembly, and managed the office. She is an important, valued asset to our Conference.

Caleb Schrock-Hurst began his work for the Conference as Racial Justice and Equity Leader on August 1. He has been engaging with the Racial Justice Task Force throughout the summer and fall. Caleb is open to bring a morning message in congregations based on his schedule availability. Please invite him into your congregation soon.

The most exciting component of my return is to begin engaging in the leadership of the Strategic Plan. The Faith and Life Commission is working on action plans for each of the five goals. Over the next five years our Conference goals are:

1. To renew relationships with God, each other, and creation
2. To engage in missional outreach
3. To support leaders and multiple modes of ministry while adapting to new realities.
4. To hear the voices and welcome the leadership of people of color, the differently-abled, women, and youth
5. To provide mutual aid or counsel to struggling congregations

Engagement with the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was a fulfilling endeavor. It is meaningful to me to have 43 of our primary leaders complete the IDI. More exciting was their participation in the event with Glen Guyton on August 28, where he reviewed our composite scores for the members of Conference Council, Faith and Life Commission, Racial Justice Task Force, and our staff. I have met with Jane Ellen Reed and have learned my score on this assessment. She has given me some things that I can work on in order to intentionally guide my development in this area.

As we forge ahead as the people of God in Virginia Mennonite Conference, I look forward to working with Sara Wenger Shenk, Moderator-Elect as she embraces her role within our conference.

—CGK

Reconciliation and Transformation

By MICHAEL SHENK III
AND ALDINE MUSSER

As followers of Jesus in the Anabaptist tradition, Northern District is working toward reconciliation with God, each other, and the world.

We believe the Racial Justice Task Force is an important part of this work. Recently, Northern District funded a tour of the Harriet Tubman Cultural Center in Harrisonburg, VA. for District pastors and their families. The tour was a

and minds, so that we may truly love our neighbors as ourselves.

Transformation and reconciliation take shape in a variety of ways in Northern District faith communities.

One example is Lindale Mennonite Church. A common narrative of the past is complex. Opportunities to speak the truth of painful experiences helps to open the door for reconciliation. Pastor Robert Yutzy is a deep listener and cares about the healing of the past, even as he envisions the future.

A recent survey at Zion Mennonite

faithfulness in our community during a challenging and divisive time for our country and our world.”

“God has used the challenges of the pandemic, says Lead Pastor Sarah Piper, and Zion’s desire for pastoral leadership to increase our faith in God and our love for one another.”

Pastoral transitions offer opportunities for transformation and restoration. After several pastoral transitions over the space of 2-3 years, Grace Mennonite Fellowship in Lacy Spring called Luann Yutzy as an intentional transitional interim pastor. Luann guided the church through a process designed to prepare the church for the calling of a new lead pastor.

Transformation and restoration are common themes in times of grief associated with significant loss.

In the space of about three months Valley View Mennonite Church, located in the small rural community of Bergton/Criders, experienced the death of a 16-year-old in a car crash and a fire that destroyed the Bergton Grocery, known as “Susan’s”. These losses were the latest in a series of losses through the years that began with the closing of the elementary school in 1987 and Green Valley Clinic in 2018 that served the residents since 1949.

As a way of providing care to the church and community Pr. Mike Shenk composed music to commemorate the most recent loss of life and livelihood. Transition and restoration are referenced in the refrain to “Susan’s Song”

*Susan, can you hear us singing,
Singing a sad, sad song
Well, you know the morning’s coming
But the nights can get so long.*

Michael Shenk III and Aldine Musser are District Ministers of Virginia Mennonite Conference’s Northern District.



Michael Shenk III, Harold and Karen Miller, back row: Diana MacLin, Xykia MacLin, Diane Marin, Basil Marin, David Gingerich, Josiah Gingerich, front row: Milagra Alvarado, Jim Musser, Sophia Alvarado, Maria Alvarado Alfonso Alvarado. Courtesy photo

way of increasing awareness of the horrific history of enslaved Africans in the United States. Stan MacLin, from New Song Anabaptist Fellowship, pastored by Basil Marin, founded the center in 2010. Since Stan’s death in 2020 from Covid19 complications, his wife, Diana, guides the tours and manages the center.

In a recent racial awareness training, Glen Guyton reminded us that love involves commitment and sacrifice. We pray that God will transform our hearts

Church affirmed a type of transformation and reconciliation in a new model of pastoral ministry.

Hannah Schrock Leaman, Congregational Leadership Chair, says, “Zion continues to encounter God through our new approach to pastoral leadership. Our pastoral team model has encouraged us to see God’s goodness in diversity of leadership styles and gifts that together with lay leadership draw us closer together and closer to God. We witness God’s



Richard Early

Richard Early Resigns as VMC Moderator

By CLYDE G. KRATZ

It is with sadness that I inform you that Officers of Conference Council, Sara Wenger Shenk (moderator elect), Jim Hershberger (secretary) and I have received a letter of resignation from Richard Early, moderator, effective October 31, 2021. Richard's resignation states:

My circumstances have changed as a result of Covid-19's impact on my wife's catering business. This has required me to assist her in a greater capacity than before. Additionally, the amount of responsibility and time required to successfully balance this role and my family commitments has become more than I can handle. At this stage of my life, post retirement, it is important to appropriately prioritize my time and my energy. I cannot continue in this role and still make my health and my family my priority.

The officers and I informed the Conference Council of Richard's resignation on September 16, 2021. At Conference Council's next meeting on October 21, we will bring leadership options for discussion and decision. In the meantime, we are grateful for Richard's ongoing counsel during the transition.

We bless Richard in this transition as he pursues God's unfolding plans for his life.

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

Virginia History Book Project Kicks Off Again With Changes

By JON TROTTER

Representatives from the Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) Historical Committee and the History Book Committee met with the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians at Eastern Mennonite University's Sadie Hartzler Library on August 27 to restart and reenergize efforts to complete a history book of the Mennonite story in Virginia, from early colonial roots to the present day.

The three groups met to approve a memo of understanding about the history book project parameters. The joint meeting was chaired by Jim Hershberger, Chair of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians, and Elwood Yoder, project co-author.

The history book project emerged 10 years ago as a way to update and fill out the historical stories since the last publication, Harry A. Brunk's two-volume Mennonites in Virginia set, ends in 1960.

The goal is to write a 350-400 page narrative history book about Mennonites in Virginia. The book will be co-authored by Steve Nolt, professor of history and Anabaptist studies at Elizabethtown (Pa.) College and senior scholar at the college's Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies as lead author, and Elwood Yoder, Editor of the Shenandoah Mennonite Historian and former history and Bible teacher at Eastern Mennonite School as co-author.

The authors will write a chronologically-organized, narrative history focusing on people and churches of Virginia Mennonite Conference. The authors will include other Mennonite groups that have departed or joined VMC over time and Mennonites with links to VMC via migration and mission (such as Jamaica Mennonite Church, Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago, and others). Nolt and Yoder aim to situate the Mennonite story in Virginia's broader historical and cultural context and the Mennonite world beyond Virginia. The authors will

seek to tell the stories of women and men and to include the voices and experiences of minority groups with VMC history. The book will include a comprehensive index and appendix of selected items, and the book will include a number of photos and captions.



Steve Nolt



Elwood Yoder

The History Book Committee will review the book materials, assist in the research process, provide advice on the book's direction, and counsel the writers. They will meet as needed throughout the process.

The VMC Historical Committee, Shenandoah Mennonite Historians, and History Book Committee signed the new Memo of Understanding to replace the original MOU from 2011. The biggest change between the two documents is for Nolt and Yoder to co-author the book with instead of being written by Nolt alone. The goal for the book's release is sometime in late 2025, with the writing completed by October 2024.

The History Book Committee is fundraising to cover the costs of research and writing, with about \$50,000 still needed. Virginia Mennonite Conference is collecting donations and keeping financial records for the project.

All donations are tax deductible. Donate online or by check at virginiaconference.org/history-book/

Jon Trotter is Communications Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale Unmasks Generous Spirit

By JIM BISHOP

Early summer pleasant temperatures and rainfall in the Shenandoah Valley, then nearly two months of dry conditions, evolved into warm fall weather just in time for the 55th annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale held Oct. 1-2 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds.

This year's sale raised a preliminary figure of \$355,000 for the worldwide relief, service and peacebuilding program of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Despite certain restrictions in fund-raising brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, last year's effort raised \$333,931; final actual proceeds in 2019 totaled \$381,033.

"When all expense reports are finalized and additional funds come in, our total receipts will likely exceed the funds raised this weekend," said Dave Rush, relief sale chair of Harrisonburg. "We had a lot of activity and received positive comments about the online bidding and video available this year."

Rush noted that there were winning bidders on line from 9 different states, adding: "One man won top bid on a wood crafted item while in a plane flying from Maine to the West Coast."

Activities began Friday evening with a barbecued pork barbeque dinner, special music by several local groups and the start of the live and silent auction that resumed Saturday morning and ran through early afternoon.

Auction

The annual auction of handmade quilts, wall hangings, knotted comforters, artwork and wooden handcrafted items accounted for \$138,988 of the total funds raised. The highest auction bid, on an oak side table with drawer and door made and donated by Norman and Grace Lambert of North Carolina, brought in \$5,700. There were 37 items that brought \$1,000 or more; 23 of these were quilts.

Special Projects

Total funds raised from the annual "My Coins Count" project was \$16,052, with more funds expected to come in from area congregations, businesses and other groups. The funds will be evenly divided between Mennonite Central Committee and Virginia Mennonite Missions (VMMissions) to purchase classroom supplies for church-related schools in rural Zambia (MCC) and family discipleship ministries in Latino congregations and scripture-based music ministries through Kids' Klub programs in the U.S. (VMMissions).

This year's "special projects" offering raised \$3,300 to be divided equally between two area organizations – a WARM cold weather shelter in Waynesboro, Va., for homeless persons or at imminent risk of homelessness and to assist "People Helping People," an ecumenical financial aid program supported by local faith communities.

A Return

A return of the popular donuts caused relief sale patrons of all ages to have glazed looks on their faces as Strite's Donuts of Harrisonburg brought their donut-making operation on site and sold some 6,000 of their confectionary delights. Persons also formed long lines to purchase quantities of Brunswick stew, with 165 gallons made in vats on the fairground premises headed by Ronnie Grove of Sherando and members of Springdale Mennonite Church in Augusta County.

Other homemade food items around the fairgrounds included numerous baked goods, 1,200 barbecued chicken halves, cider, fresh produce, kettle-cooked potato chips and international fare including Indian food and lamb.

A Spirit of Unity

Dave Rush, in his 12th year as relief sale chair, is enthused over this year's fund-raising effort.



Waynesboro Mennonite Church Pastor Clair Good pours pancake batter on the griddle during the Relief Sale breakfast on Saturday, October 2, 2021. Photo: Jim Bishop

"It was good to be back (at the relief sale)," Rush said. "We had beautiful weather and fun together. A huge 'thank you' to the many volunteers who gave their time and energy to make this event possible. Also, many thanks to the donors and buyers, and for a cooperative spirit expressed by those who wore masks indoors," he added. "Every year it brings me much joy to see us all work together to raise money for MCC in the name of Christ. I was impressed with the way so many people come together in a spirit of unity, both the volunteer effort and the generous giving to the work of MCC," Rush said. "Through this event, we work together to help others around the world whom Jesus calls us to serve."

MCC, based in Akron, Pa., is a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches that share God's love and compassion with people at home and around the world to ease oppression, poverty and conflict. They lead natural disaster relief efforts, community development and peace work in more than 50 countries.

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



The auditorium space under construction in Eastside Church's new building. Courtesy of Matt Schwartz

Community and Collaboration for Youth Ministry

By CHRIS COX

What an amazing time it is to be leading students! While it's easy to identify the challenges that come with this new COVID-19 driven climate, it's also rewarding to think about the possibilities that are before us to reach students, right where they are, with the message of God's peace, which is so needed for their everyday life.

Since March 2020, when the world was impacted by this pandemic, my passion for uniting youth pastors and leaders around the idea of community and collaboration has gone to the next level. I started a Facebook community called "The Collective Youth Workers Group," that has grown to about 300 leaders, and together, we are committed to the sharing of ideas and resources to help each other reach the students in our communities.

The beauty of all of this is found in the fact that none of us are experts in leading in a pandemic. None of us have ever experienced this type of world-shifting event, so we are forced to rely on community and collaboration to talk out ideas and share our wins and challenges.

The past 18-plus months have taught us that even when we have to take a pivot in our methods, our mission is still the same — that is, to introduce a generation to the peace that comes with knowing Jesus. For us here at C3 Hampton, where I serve as the youth pastor, we have taken a more personal and one-on-one approach to our discipleship over the past few months. Now that our church is in our first stages of our re-engagement plan, we are starting to dream about what youth ministry will look like for us in the future. I am excited to share some of these ideas with other leaders, while receiving inspiration from hearing what God has been speaking into others about our leadership in this season.

Eastside Church Awarded JoinHands Building Grant

By JON TROTTER

Eastside Church, a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation in Harrisonburg, Va., embarked on a building purchase and complete renovation at a bad time. As building materials skyrocketed in the pandemic, the project suddenly cost much more than budgeted and raised.

"It is likely no surprise that a building project during the pandemic, with greatly increased material costs, went over budget. After a successful vision campaign in which God provided beyond our expectation, we still had financial need to complete our project," Pastor Matt Schwartz noted.

Through the JoinHands Mennonite Church Building Program, Mennonite Men provides grants to help new congregations acquire their first church building. Mennonite Men has given over 2 million dollars to new congregations for this purpose.

"We are very grateful for the generous JoinHands grant," said Schwartz. "Having to completely renovate a space has been time consuming and patience testing. The JoinHands grant is going

towards meeting that increased overall renovation budget cost." Swartz wrote.

"As the prices skyrocketed during the pandemic, receiving a generous grant was a tremendous encouragement to the entire team. It was yet another way that we experienced God's abundant provision and affirmation of the work he has called us to," noted Pastor Peter Eberly.

Eastside Church is completely renovating a building in close proximity to an apartment complex where they have a longstanding Kids Club ministry.

Eastside Church has not had a regular place to meet for worship since Covid shutdowns began in 2020. The new building is also close to residential neighborhoods, which Schwartz noted was lacking when they rented space from Skyline Middle School.

"We are excited to begin worshipping in a place that is within walking distance of our Kids Club and many new neighbors."

Jon Trotter is Communications Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

COST OF POVERTY

Learn. Pray. Join.

Mennonite Church USA Launches New Initiative

By MENNONITE CHURCH USA STAFF

Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) has launched “Learn, Pray, Join: Cost of Poverty,” an initiative to raise awareness about the impact of the pandemic on poverty in the United States and how Jesus calls his followers to respond. During September and October, MC USA will seek to engage people in the initiative by offering resources, prayers and ways to care for one another and to address systemic issues that lead to poverty.

“The pandemic is apocalyptic,” said Sue Park-Hur, denominational minister of Transformative Peacemaking. “It is revealing the structural issues that cause poverty and their disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable among us.”

In a recently updated report, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), a nonpartisan research and policy institute, revealed that one in three children in the United States faces food or housing hardship and that one in four adults had difficulty paying their expenses in the last seven days.

According to the CBPP report, “The impacts of the pandemic and the economic fallout have been widespread, but remain particularly prevalent among Black adults, Latino adults and other people of color [reflecting] harsh, long-standing inequities — often stemming from structural racism in education, employment, housing and health care — that the current crisis has exacerbated.”

“Jesus taught us how to respond to these inequities,” said Park-Hur. “Throughout his ministry, Jesus centered and uplifted those who were poor and oppressed.

As Anabaptists, we are called to follow his example,” she added.

The call to care for each other’s needs is a central theme in the Bible and in Anabaptist theology. MC USA’s “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective,” Article 21 encourages Mennonites to be responsible stewards of money and possessions, saying, “We are to live simply, practice mutual aid within the church, uphold economic justice, and give generously and cheerfully.”

The Cost of Poverty initiative will look closely at the theology surrounding issues of poverty and focus on housing insecurity, as one of its many consequences.

“We will be wrestling with questions such as, Who are the poor among us? What causes the inequities that lead to poverty? How is poverty impacting our congregations and communities? and How can we respond?” said Park-Hur.

Through “Learn, Pray, Join: Cost of Poverty,” MC USA is providing members with opportunities to learn about the Cost of Poverty, through congregational study guides, news stories and resources. In addition, leaders from MC USA agencies, congregations, affiliated colleges and ministry partners will contribute blogs over the next several weeks, which will explore what poverty looks like in different communities, its intersectional nature, how churches are responding and how their Anabaptist faith values are compelling them to do this work.

The initiative also provides an invitation to pray for economic justice and for our congregations and communities coping with poverty. Congregations are invited to pray and worship together using responsive readings and hymns from MennoMedia’s

MC USA’s “Learn, Pray, Join” initiatives seek to create opportunities across the church to deepen understanding around a common topic and to come together in prayer and support.

new Voices Together hymnal, as recommended on the Cost of Poverty landing page.

Lastly, there is a call to join in mutual aid initiatives and advocacy work within MC USA and across the broader Anabaptist community. MC USA’s advocacy work includes the denomination’s Justice Fund, a mutual aid fund that provides financial assistance to MC USA congregations engaging in their communities to address poverty and dismantle racism. Links to other faith-based organizations on the Cost of Poverty landing page provide additional ways to respond.

For more information on “Learn, Pray, Join: Cost of Poverty,” visit the online resource page throughout the campaign at: <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/ministry/peacebuilding/learn-pray-join/cost-of-poverty/>

This article was first published [mennoniteusa.org/news/mc-usa-launches-learn-pray-join-cost-of-poverty-initiative/](https://www.mennoniteusa.org/news/mc-usa-launches-learn-pray-join-cost-of-poverty-initiative/)



Fifth grade students sign the elementary school peace pledge, Fall 2021.

Peace Pledge Sets Tone for Year Ahead at Eastern Mennonite School

By ANDREA WENGER

How do we want to “live” together this year? Treat each other? Be treated? And care for our school and the environment?

These are questions Eastern Mennonite Elementary School students explore together at the beginning of each school year, signing classroom agreements and the elementary school peace pledge.

Adapted from materials created by The Institute for Peace and Justice, the pledge invites students to commit to: respect self and others; communicate better; listen; forgive; respect nature; play creatively; and be courageous.

Erika Gascho’s fifth grade classroom compared the school-wide pledge with their own classroom agreement, which featured concepts the students brainstormed together the first week of school. Many of the concepts overlapped. Their agreement said they will:

- **Include others**
- **No racism**
- **Listen to each other**
- **Be fair**
- **Respect each other**
- **Be kind**

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Before each class had a signing ceremony in their classrooms, they gathered by Zoom (since it was raining outside) as a full school. Fourth grade students led the classes in American Sign Language as they went over each concept in the pledge.

Gini Trotter, K-8 counselor and peace-building teacher, shared a children’s book, “The Peace Stick,” by Nidhi Misra. The fictional story is based on the practice of listening with attention and sharing with intention held within many Indigenous cultures. The story is about two Indigenous boys of America who have an argument about one stick, which leads them to learn about a different stick — a special stick — which they learn to use as a talking piece to make sure everyone gets a chance to be heard. EMES students practice respectful listening in circles and develop peacebuilding skills.

“Practicing these skills is one way we learn use Jesus as our model for living,” says Maria Archer, K-8 principal. “We believe Jesus wants us to respect and get along with all kinds of people, even when we disagree.

Andrea Wenger is Director of Advancement, Title IX Compliance Coordinator for EMS.

New Changes to Alumni Awards

By ANDREA WENGER

The tradition of honoring alumni with awards each fall is taking a new twist at Eastern Mennonite School, with the emphasis moving to sharing — and celebrating — alumni stories, rather than presenting awards.

For nearly 30 years, the school has highlighted alumni at homecoming each fall in categories including lifetime service, alumnus of the year, and later, young alumnus and community engagement award. The tradition will shift from an award focus to a story telling focus.

“Giving awards has served the school in helping to connect alumni, draw classmates to reunions, and highlight accomplishments and service,” notes Paul Leaman, head of school. But staff and alumni board leadership members agree that it’s time to re-frame the tradition.

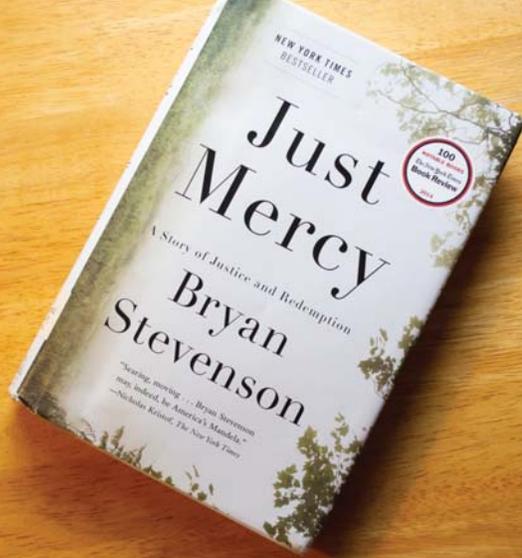
Annette Loker ‘96, alumni board secretary, has observed the process of identifying and recognizing awardees for many years. “Sometimes people feel uncomfortable accepting an ‘award,’” she notes. “And it doesn’t feel right to hold some people’s ‘success’ — however you measure that — as above others. So I feel this is a healthy fresh approach for EMS at this time.”

“One thing the COVID-19 shut down taught us,” observed Leaman, “is that everyone’s role in keeping society functioning is ‘crucial.’ We celebrate alumni in all kinds of jobs and professions, as well as their family, church, and community involvement. I hope this will open up ways for us to hear alumni stories we might have otherwise missed.”

In 2021, EMS will celebrate three alumni with class reunions at Homecoming on Oct. 16: Justin Weirich ‘06, doctor of osteopathic medicine in Fort Wayne, Ind., and John and Kathryn Fairfield, both class of ‘66.

EMS welcomes suggestions for stories of alumni, as well as former faculty and staff, to celebrate each fall. Submissions need not fit in a particular category as used in the past.

First published at <https://www.easternmennonite.org/2021/08/ems-launches-new-era-for-alumni-recognition/>



EMU Photo

After years of prohibition and delay, executions were again taking place in the Deep South, and most of the people crowded on death row had no lawyer and no right to counsel. There was a growing fear that people would soon be killed without ever having their cases reviewed by skilled counsel. We were getting frantic calls every day from people who had no legal assistance but whose dates of execution were on the calendar and approaching fast. I'd never heard voices so desperate.

– Bryan Stevenson

EMU Common Read Selection 'Just Mercy' Delves Into Mass Incarceration in America

By RANDI B. HAGI

This year's Common Read selection at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) is the New York Times bestseller *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* by Bryan Stevenson (Spiegel & Grau, 2014), in which Stevenson tells the story of one of his first cases as a young attorney with the Southern Prisoners Defense Committee, an organization based in Atlanta that assisted condemned people on death row. It was adapted into the multi-award-winning movie by the same name, which starred Michael B. Jordan and Jamie Foxx.

EMU's Common Read establishes common ground for discussion in classrooms and other venues.

In *Just Mercy*, Stevenson, who is Black, vibrantly paints pictures of his time commuting across the South, interacting with defendants and judges and police officers. He weaves together his own and others' personal stories alongside threads of statistics, case law examples, and regional and racial history.

The book focuses on one man he represented in particular: Walter McMillan, a Black man who was convicted of murder in 1988 by a nearly all-white jury. Their decision was based solely on eyewitness

testimony, in spite of the nearly one dozen friends, family members, and a police officer who accounted for his whereabouts the day of the killing.

"This book is about getting closer to mass incarceration and extreme punishment in America," writes Stevenson. "It is about how easily we condemn people in this country and the injustice we create when we allow fear, anger, and distance to shape the way we treat the most vulnerable among us. It's also about a dramatic period in our recent history, a period that indelibly marked the lives of millions of Americans—of all races, ages, and sexes—and the American psyche as a whole."

Stevenson is the founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit based in Montgomery, Alabama, that provides legal representation to those who have been "illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons," according to their website. The organization also works on education initiatives concerning race in America, such as the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a memorial dedicated to the legacy of enslaved Black people and those affected by lynching, racial segregation, and police violence.

"I hope readers will use the information and stories from this book to take a critical look at the criminal justice system, mass incarceration and harsh punishments that don't seem to look for the truth but just want to seek retribution," said Jennifer Ulrich, technical services librarian at EMU. "I hope we think about bias and racism and poverty and how these things can make it impossible for someone caught up in this system to get out. I hope we take Mr. Stevenson's quote on page 17, 'Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done,' to heart."

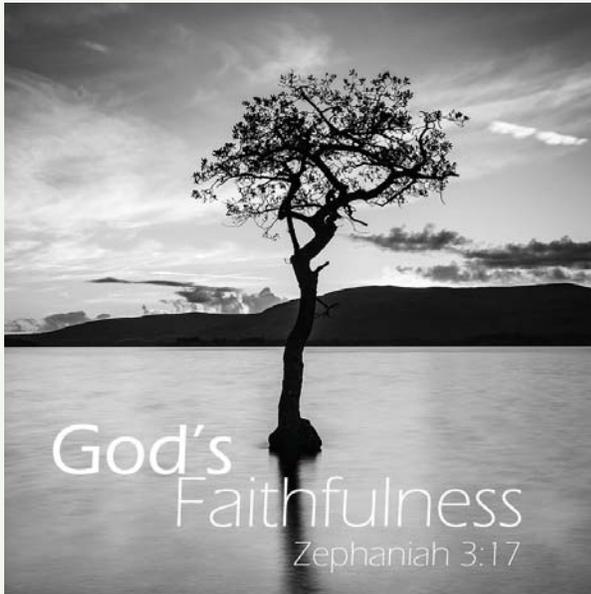
Previous Common Read selections at EMU have included *In the Shelter: Finding a Home in the World* by Pádraig Ó Tuama (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid (Riverhead, 2017) *Callings* by Dave Isay with Maya Millett (Penguin, 2017), *Between the World and Me* by Ta-Nehisi Coates (Random House, 2015), and *Memory of Water* by Emmi Itäranta (Teos, 2012).

Randi B. Hagi is staff writer for *Crossroads*, the alumni magazine of Eastern Mennonite University. This article was first published in the Spring/Summer 2021 issue.

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