



PATHWAYS

WALKING WITH THE MINISTRIES OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE



WINTER 2021

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Jason Byant/AMBS

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Virginia
Mennonite
Conference



Special Ministries Coordinators are responsible for caring for credentialed ministers in non-congregational roles and will coordinate special ministries clusters. Respective clusters will be organized for such ministries as leadership/administration, teaching, chaplaincy, and evangelistic/prophetic. Special ministries oversight leaders shall serve on the FLC as well in order to provide representation for special ministry persons.

Behind the Scenes with the Leadership & Administration Cluster

By BERYL JANTZI

In January 2021, I became the Auxiliary Cluster Minister for the VMC Leadership & Administration Cluster. I followed in the paths of Craig Maven and Gordon Zook who served prior to me in this capacity.

Before making this transition, I served for eleven years as the Southern District Minister, providing oversight for seven congregations and eight pastors in Augusta and Nelson counties in Virginia.

I credit the VMC district and cluster model for keeping us together structurally and relationally as a Conference.

I am grateful for the VMC administrative predecessors who saw the value of this kind of polity. It has helped retain a sense of relational belonging and loyalty not found in other conferences of our mother denomination.

Virginia Mennonite Conference is fortunate to host several denominational agencies in our midst, as well as 13 conference-related ministries that developed out of initiatives led by members and congregations from within.

Many of these organizations have licensed and ordained workers for special forms of ministry. Because of this, we have needed a structure to provide both accountability and fellowship for these persons.

The VMC Leadership Handbook outlines our polity and leadership roles very nicely along with the rights and responsibilities for these ministering persons.

Among other things, the Relational Job Description for Special Ministries Oversight Leaders states the following expectations of the coordinators for special ministries clusters, including the Leadership and Administration Cluster.

1. Promote an environment of mutual trust, respect and support among colleagues.
2. Bring regular reports regarding the concerns, activities and developments of the cluster.
3. Monitor developments in the religious arena and secular sphere, bringing issues with moral and ethical dimensions to the Faith & Life Commission (FLC) for discussion and discernment.
4. Participate with integrity in discerning the mind of Christ on issues brought to the FLC, facilitating decision-making.
5. Request approval from FLC for conferring ministerial credentials and making any changes in credential status (e.g., changes to different categories of credentials, transfers within VMC, and inter-conference transfers).

The current make-up of the Leadership & Administrative cluster consists of:

- Beth Good, EMU Intercultural Program Director, Intercultural Programs

- Les Horning, MCC East Coast Donor Relations
- Aaron Kauffman, President of VM Missions, and VM Missions staff persons Skip Tobin and Jason Rhodes Showalter

Earlier in 2021, we had four persons transition from the VMC Leadership and Administration Cluster to retired status.

Beryl Jantzi served as Auxiliary Cluster Minister for the Leadership & Administration Cluster of Virginia Mennonite Conference through December 31, 2021.

Pathways

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In a worship service of leadership transition and commissioning held at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church on November 21, Sara Wenger Shenk shared a message highlighting some hopes and dreams for VMC. Photo: June Miller

BY SARA WENGER SHENK

I offer three images that are lighting my spirit in recent days: a name; a boat at sea, and a farm implement.

What's in a name? Multiple names or titles have been used to refer to different leaders in VMC, including Moderator. A name that has renewed power for me in recent months is Sister in Christ.

I remember how at Lancaster Mennonite High school in the late 1960's, just after my family had moved from Ethiopia to the USA, we were instructed to address our teachers as Brother [name] or Sister [name] rather than the more standard Mr., Mrs. or Miss. At the time, it seemed odd, even quaint. Since returning to Virginia Conference now, that memory has returned, and the relational significance of actively regarding each other as brothers and sisters in Christ has grown on me.

As I get reacquainted with Virginia Conference after ten years away, I've been invited into respectful, intense conversations with some of you and look forward

to many more. I sense people trying to figure out where I belong in terms of affinity and conviction, which is important for building trust and shared understanding. Several of the conversations have circled around what one brother called the "defining issue of our time": the polarization over varied responses to human sexuality. Some of us, no doubt, would suggest that there are other defining issues, but given how prominent and polarizing the issue our brother identified is in Virginia Conference, I begin to understand why the names Sister in Christ, Brother in Christ, Friend in Christ, have risen in my awareness, and become so precious to me.

The reality is that I have worked with (and no doubt many of you have worked with) persons on different sides of the human sexuality conundrum; people from the global Anabaptist community and from Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA who are brothers and sisters in Christ; persons who evidence the fruit of the Spirit in their lives and are providing leadership to thriving congregations and neighborhood ministries; brothers and sisters in Christ who

are not defined by this issue but defined by a calling to go into all the world, into the highways and byways, with the liberating, transforming good news of Jesus Christ.

My invitation to all of us who belong to the beloved family of Virginia Mennonite community of congregations, is to remind each other of our foundational identity as brothers and sisters in Christ, an identity that eclipses all other identities.

I don't say this in order to spiritualize things in a way that distracts from real moral and ethical deliberations and actions. I say it because re-grounding ourselves in our primary identity will make all the difference in the world with how we engage moral and ethical deliberations.

And we might just make the joyful discovery of what Paul meant when he exulted with wonder that: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ" (Gal 3:27-28).

The second image: **Jesus and his disciples in a boat, in the midst of a wind storm, swamped by the waves; a story told by Matthew, Mark and Luke.**

As I was lying in bed the other night, genuinely perplexed by the level of anxiety I sense in Virginia Conference right now (understandably prompted by the pandemic, and also by leadership transitions, resolutions coming out of MC USA and congregations threatening to leave the conference) this image came to me. It's as if we're at sea in the midst of a windstorm. When we feel at risk, stress skyrockets. That's human nature. We get to work bailing water, frantically rowing, sure we're about to tip over.

And then there's Jesus (with this infuriating little detail from Mark's telling) asleep on a cushion in the stern. Out of our minds with fear, disbelief and maybe a little anger, we yell into the wind: "Lord,



Christ in the Storm on Lake Galilee by Rembrandt, 1633. Courtesy Wikipedia

Save us. Don't you care that we are perishing?"

Jesus gets up, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And then, to his disciples he offers another rebuke, perhaps more gently. "Why are you afraid. Where is your faith?"

The storm calms down, but does the disciples' fear go away? No, writes Luke. After the calm descends,

"They were afraid ... and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?'"

Those of us in Virginia Conference, who very well may feel at risk right now (I know I do), in the midst of a wind-storm, would do well to ask ourselves Jesus' question: Why are we afraid? Where is our faith?

When Jesus intervenes to calm the storm, as Jesus does—and will—then another kind of fear replaces the panic fear of the storm; a fear that comes of recognizing where real power lies. Real power lies not in the effectiveness of our frantic rowing and bailing, but in the beauty and

power of Jesus, the Christ.

The third image: **a yoke—a wooden frame carved to hold two oxen together while plowing the field**; an image I often saw as a child in Ethiopia.

Jesus said, as quoted by Matthew: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

This image became important for me when I first began in pastoral ministry in Virginia Conference 30 years ago, and I learned then that it had been important for my grandfather, AD Wenger.

Jesus' words on one level sound ludicrous, even silly. Carrying a yoke, pulling a heavy plow through clods of soil, is anything but restful. But at some deep level, we get it. Life is hard. Leadership is hard work, especially in these polarized, pandemic times. We know what it's like to feel the weight of a yoke on our shoulders. So what does Jesus' invitation mean: take "my yoke" upon you?

What I hear is that being yoked with



Jesus relieves me of the arrogance, the vaunted ego delusion that it's somehow up to me to make it come round right. Being yoked with Jesus releases me from straining to be a super hero, thinking that this is mine to fix, or yours to fix. Being yoked with Jesus frees me to do what I can, which is not everything; which is very limited; very human.



Watch the service of leadership transition and commissioning of Sara Wenger Shenk as Virginia Mennonite Conference Moderator and commemorating Richard Early's tenure as VMC Moderator.

The service was held on Sunday, November 21 at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. Watch: virginiainc.org/moderator-commissioning-service/

I am willing to do what I can. And I hope you are willing to do what you can.

And that somehow, together, being yoked with Jesus frees all of us who are weary and burdened to enjoy rest. To enjoy God's Shalom. That's why we go about this work: to be the church that shows how good life together can be.

This is a mystery that defies explanation: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." And yet, the more times I've fallen down and gotten up; the more times I've been surprised by wonderful provision that had nothing to do with what I brought to the table, the more I begin to understand maybe, a little bit of what Jesus meant when he said, "My yoke is

easy and my burden is light, and you will find rest." You will find Shalom. May we each find it to be so, yoked with Jesus.

Sara Wenger Shenk serves as Moderator of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Transformed Through Friendship

By KEVIN GASSER

I often find myself transformed through my interactions with people who see the world differently. More times than not, those transformations are for the better, bringing me to a clearer understanding of not only the beliefs of others, but also my own convictions.

I try to seek out my friend Mohamed anytime I am in the Northern Virginia area. Mohamed was born, raised and educated in Morocco. Because of his background, Mohamed brings fresh and significant insights to every conversation he has with me, an old farm boy from Ohio. I've known Mohamed for a few years, and on a recent trip to Washington, D.C., I asked Mohamed if he was interested in meeting for lunch. He suggested a falafel place along the Potomac River, and I was eager to join him there to further develop our relationship, and my palate.

Mohamed and I are both religious people, and as his name might suggest, we have some significant differences in our views of the divine. I also know that Mohamed shares my interest in learning more about the "religious other." As we sat down along the banks of the river, I asked Mohamed about his normal mealtime practices.

"We say the Basmala before a meal," Mohamed informed me, referring to the Arabic prayer that emphasizes the compassion and mercy of God. He continued, "I bet you and your family hold hands and sing your prayer before you eat."

He was right. Every time we sit down to a shared meal, my wife, children and I hold hands, and we often sing. But why? I had never given any thought to why we hold hands or the significance of singing our prayer.

I found myself casually considering Mohamed's insight over the next few days. *Why do we pray the way we do?* A mealtime prayer is a way to thank God for the gifts we have received. But why do we hold hands and sometimes sing? I soon realized we do this because this is how my wife's family prays before a meal.



And when I asked my father-in-law about this practice, he told me that it is how my mother-in-law's family prayed. We pray in this way, in part, because that is how we have always done it.

Perhaps holding hands is symbolic of our desire for community and our connection to one another. Someone else suggested that holding hands prevents little children from digging into their meal before the prayer has concluded. I'm still not sure, but both seem like valid reasons.

I recently came across a quote that is often attributed to Augustine of Hippo, a theologian from the fourth and fifth centuries. Augustine wrote, "A prayer sung is twice said." I think that is beautiful, yet I'm not sure I really know what Augustine meant. Perhaps we sing our prayers because, in doing so, we combine praise and giving thanks into one act. I'm going to have to do some more research.

My life has been significantly transformed through interactions with people

who look, think, act and live differently than I do. Not only did I learn something new about Mohamed and his culture, our interaction, over a shared meal, caused me to think more deeply about my own background, beliefs and practices. The things that I simply assume are normal, or do without question, may appear weird to someone else. My experiences with others have not only given me insight into their lives and religious practices, but they have also caused me to dig deeper and learn more about my own.

I may not always find the answers for which I look, but often, I find myself transformed through the process of searching.

Kevin Gasser is pastor of Staunton Mennonite Church, Staunton, Va. This article was posted as part of Mennonite Church USA's #BeTransformed series at mennoniteusa.org/menno-snapshots/transformed-through-friendship/

NewBridges Meets Needs During Time of Transition

By MAKAYLA FULMER

Our team at NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center is extremely grateful for the warm and generous support from our community that has allowed us to continue being able to fulfill our organizational mission of engaging immigrants, connecting cultures, and building community.

We have experienced significant transition as our well respected and appreciated Executive Director who dedicated her servant leadership for 12 years at NewBridges has moved forward to new adventures. In the interim we have hired two new staff members for our Immigration Legal Program and our newly-launched program, beginning January 2022, which focuses on providing holistic resources for victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. We also continue to serve other needs in the

immigrant community such as document translation, supporting form completion for various agencies such as Social Services, Social Security, and more.

Recently we have also been awarded a grant from the Department of Social Services which has fueled us to launch our Domestic Violence Program. We are very much looking forward to seeing how we can best serve our local communities' needs.

As we continue to navigate through the global pandemic we have been able to adjust quite well. We began the pandemic working exclusively remote to now being fully present in our office by appointment only. Apart from our biggest desire of meeting client needs, we have also been creative in determining how to be part of our larger community and develop relationships with our donors and neighbors.

Shifting away from Taste of the World, our largest annual fundraiser which hosted a specific country of cel-

ebration each year with food, music, and dance, we hosted for the first time a more intimate gathering at Brix & Columns Vineyard where we had a night of food trucks and music under the stars to thank our donors and celebrate the work that we collaboratively produce together.

We are looking forward to continue finding ways of safely hosting events and gatherings to honor the generosity of the community and provide opportunities to learn more about the immigrant community that we are grateful to know and work with. To learn more about NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center and you can be a part of supporting your immigrant neighbors, please visit us at: www.newbridgesirc.org

From your friends at NewBridges, we wish you all good health, many blessings, and deep rest in the New Year!

Makayla Fulmer is the Immigration Legal Program Coordinator at NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center.

VMRC: Supporting Those Living with Dementia Diseases

By REBEKAH HARSH

According to the Alzheimer's Association, one in three seniors is affected by Alzheimer's Disease or another dementia. This means that many of us either are, or will be, personally affected by dementia diseases at some point in our lifetime.

VMRC offers a number of resources for those living with or caring for someone affected by dementia.

For those living on our campus, Memory Care is integrated into our Assisted Living neighborhoods where residents receive highly individualized care. Our staff caregivers receive specialized and on-going training sufficiently equipping them with the tools needed to enrich the lives of residents living with dementia as much as possible.

For the community, we offer trainings from our Dementia Friends

Champions staff members. These staff persons have completed a training program through LeadingAge Virginia that equips them to facilitate information sessions with friends, family and co-workers to help community members understand dementia and the small things that can be done to make a difference to those living with dementia.

According to VMRC's director of Assisted Living and Dementia Friends Champion Kristin Trask, "Things we think are helpful to our loved one, like asking them to remember certain fond memories, may in fact be very upsetting. This program offers tangible guidance on how to support those we care about and interact with in our community."

To learn more about scheduling an information session, contact Lolly Miller at (540) 564-3625 or lmiller@vmrc.org.

More detail about this valuable program can be found here: <https://dementiafriendsusa.org/>

Our website (vmrc.org/assisted-living/resource-list) and blog (vmrc.org/about-us-blog) are additional sources of information for a variety of topics including how to recognize and address concerns about dementia with a family member or friend.

In addition to dementia resources, we offer guides to aid the adult child in navigating their parents' move to Assisted Living. These downloadable resources can help families determine if it's time for a parent to move and offers tips and suggestions for how to start and direct the conversation.

Learn more about VMRC on our website vmrc.org or visit our Facebook page: facebook.com/vmrcharrisonburg.

Rebekah Harsh is Content Marketing Manager for Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community.

Eastern Mennonite Seminary Hosts Hybrid 2022 School for Leadership Training

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

The School for Leadership Training was held at Eastern Mennonite Seminary from January 10-13 in a hybrid and virtual conference on the theme “Race, Place, and Catastrophe: Becoming Grapevine and Fig Tree Planters In a Time of Crisis.”

The event was hosted in collaboration with the Inverse Podcast community.

The event also included in-person and virtual workshops, worship through gospel music, opportunities for group fun and play, and some distinct InVerse way contributions to our time together.

The theme this year was oriented around the global crisis at the intersection of ongoing ecological devastation and white supremacy.

Rather than speaking abstractly, we wanted to ground this conversation from the vantage point of the land we live upon together and how a Micah 4 infused imagination invites us to disrupt the global forces seeking to steal, kill, and destroy a sustainable and inhabitable way of life. Instead, the life-giving seeds of resistance will be found in God’s dream for all of creation while leaning into flourishing ways of being and interacting with one another and the ecosystem that sustains us.

Participants who attended were encouraged to courageously envision and pursue shalom in the land, while also encountering unique Inverse community practices and processes, stories and testimonials that inspire local leaders and congregations. It also included the unique opportunity of joining in a live recording of an Inverse podcast episode with an exciting surprise guest.

For more information about this year’s School for Leadership Training’s speakers and planning committee, visit www.emu.edu/seminary/slt



Keynote speakers include:



Drew G.I. Hart

Harrisburg, Pa.
Co-host of Inverse Podcast, author, professor at Messiah College



Jarrod McKenna

Perth, Australia
Co-host and founder of Inverse Podcast



Carol Ng'ang'a

Nairobi, Kenya
Founder of Msingi Trust and Msingi Talks Podcast.

Noticing God's Faithfulness

By MARIAN BUCKWALTER

I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten." This was God's faithful promise to the land of Judah through the prophet Joel (2:25).

Dawn Mast, speaker at the Women's Retreat, found these words to be a faithful promise to her as well. The beginning of her pregnancy in 2002 was so different from previous pregnancies (which brought forth sons), that she knew she was having a daughter. However, on September 11 her hopes were dashed with her doctor's discovery that there was no heartbeat. Heartbroken and devastated she cried out to the Lord. For many years that day symbolized her personal grief.

Fast forward 17 years. Dawn's oldest son met a lovely young woman at college, someone very special. When he called to describe her to his mom, he mentioned her birthday: September 11. Dawn burst into tears! The daughter she lost so many years ago can never be replaced, but a

of grief for so many years. God has indeed repaid Dawn and her family for the years the locusts had eaten.

Eighty-eight women gathered at the Richmond Marriott Short Pump November 12-14, happy for the chance to meet together. We worshiped through songs from Voices Together led by Rachel Stutzman, along with Renita Shank,



The Executive Committee of Mennonite Women of Virginia (from left): Sara Nafziger, Tammy Driver, Sharon Arbaugh, Marian Buckwalter, Evie Christner, Joyce Nussbaum, Ann Frank. Photo courtesy of Mary Stauffer

beautiful gift has been given. Now she has a daughter-in-law, whose birthday falls on the same day that had been a source

plate God's faithfulness in our own lives. Saturday evening Vespers brought quiet reflection. Mealtimes and late evening



Dawn Mast, the speaker at the Women's Retreat. She is a member of Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va. Photo: encouragementcafe.com



Browsing the Silent Auction. Photo by Mary Stauffer

snack time allowed for connecting with friends old and new.

For me a sacred space was the Saturday afternoon free time, when I had determined to walk the Richmond Slave Trail. Four other women took up my invitation to join in walking the same trail that captured Africans had been forced to walk from ship to downtown auction block. The markers along the path told stories of untold inhumanities. How could I really grasp the pain, tears, and fears of the men and women forced to walk those 2 ½ miles to a future of misery? Where was this faithful God then? How is God calling me to respond? How will God repay the descendants of those enslaved ones for the years the locusts have eaten?

May we each take note of God's faithfulness through the ages, and in the place where we find ourselves today. And may we respond with our own faithfulness.

Marian Buckwalter is the outgoing president of Mennonite Women of Virginia.



MENNONITE WOMEN OF VIRGINIA

ANNUAL MISSIONS DAY

March 5, 2022 | Waynesboro Mennonite Church

Beginning at 9:00 AM with bread from Central Asia, then hearing from a missionary serving there.

Spend time in worship and share financially with love gifts for current missionaries and ministries through VMissions.

Enjoy lunch and fellowship together to close.

RSVP to MWVSecretary@gmail.com | Childcare offered up to age 5



March 1 to April 5, 2022 | Meeting via Zoom

LENTEN SERIES

A Guided Imaginative Scripture Contemplation Series

These guided imaginative scripture contemplation sessions will give you the opportunity to slow down and rest in God's presence for an hour a week during the Lenten season.

Presented by:



virginiaconference.org/events/lenten-series



Facilitated by
MaryBeth Heatwole Moore



A CHALLENGE TO SEGREGATION

FOOTPRINTS FROM THE PAST

BY ELWOOD YODER

During the 1944 semiannual communion service at the Gay Street Mennonite Mission in Harrisonburg, Va., Fannie Swartzentruber became frustrated with the segregated restrictions imposed by the Virginia Mission Board.

Initiated by Eastern Mennonite School students in 1936, and operated by the mission board of the Virginia Mennonite Conference, Fannie and her husband Ernest were matron and superintendent of the Gay Street Mission from 1938 to 1945.

By 1944, when Fannie became upset with segregated communion, African Americans had joined the Gay Street church as members. However, the Virginia Conference segregated the observance of communion, footwashing and used the holy kiss along racial lines.

Fannie's friend Rowena Lark, an African-American, had helped with the summer Bible School program, teaching and supporting the Swartzentrubers in their work. Fannie could not accept that Rowena Lark needed to drink from a different cup during communion because of segregation.

After being patient since beginning their work in Harrisonburg six years earlier, Fannie went out the door of the Gay

Street Church and walked four miles to their farm north of Harrisonburg. Fannie took her young daughter with her on the walk home. Never again, she told her husband, would she sit through such a segregated service.

Ernest had joined his wife's protest by not greeting whites who came to the mission with a holy kiss since church rules prevented him from greeting African American brothers with the holy kiss. The following year, 1945, the Virginia Mission Board replaced Ernest as superintendent.

Fannie's matron position had been as a volunteer. Fannie, Ernest, and their children moved back to their home in Delaware, but in 1952 they moved to Schuyler, Virginia, to help establish the Rehoboth Mennonite Church.

In the past decade, three scholarly books have told this seminal story in mid-twentieth century Virginia Mennonite history. In reading former Professor Nathan E. Yoder's outstanding history book about the Conservative Mennonite Conference, I learned the story in the context of the Swartzentruber's Conservative Conference Delaware roots, which is why Nathan Yoder used the story.

Professor Donald Kraybill couches his excellent account of Fannie Swartzentruber's protest in how Eastern

Mennonite School students helped start the Gay Street Mission and volunteered to help. Students from Harrisonburg wondered about overseas missions during the 1930s and insisted on missions among African Americans in Harrisonburg. Nathan Yoder and Donald Kraybill acknowledge the work of Tobin Miller Shearer in *Daily Demonstrators*, 2010. Shearer interviewed a son of Ernest and Fannie Swartzentruber and Vida and Harold Huber, leaders at Broad Street Mennonite Church. In 1945, the mission to black children in Harrisonburg moved from Gay Street to Broad Street.

Fannie Swartzentruber's challenge to segregation occurred in a church on Gay Street in Harrisonburg in the fall of 1944. It is unknown how many noticed Fannie bolt out the church door with her daughter in tow. Ernest finished the communion service and drove the family car home. Decades later, Tobin Miller Shearer dug the story out of Conference Archives and interviews. Fannie's stand against segregation at the Gay Street Mennonite Mission challenges us to speak for justice, work for equality, and act when necessary.

Elwood Yoder is a historian and author working on a book about VMC history. This story emerged from his research for that book project, and will appear in it.



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

Pastoral transitions

OCTOBER 2021 TO JANUARY 2022

Micah Hurst, transferred to Western District.

Zachary Dey, licensed at Williamsburg Mennonite Church.

Kinley Simmers, ordained at Trinity United Church of Christ.

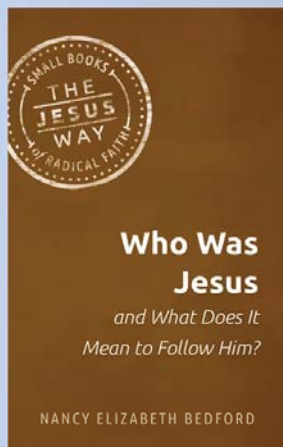
Marvin Lorenzana, withdrawn from VMC to LMC (Lancaster).

MaryBeth Heatwole Moore, left pastorate at Signs of Life, moved to Ordained without Charge.



AUGSBURGER LECTURE SERIES | MARCH 29-30, 2022

DR. NANCY E. BEDFORD



Lectures will be open to the public.
Pastors events are being planned.

virginiaconference.org/dr-nancy-bedford/

Check out Dr. Bedford's latest book:
Who Was Jesus and What Does It Mean to Follow Him? (Herald Press, 2021)

