

Across boundaries and divisions, being “Neighbors: Strangers No More”

I bind my soul this day to the neighbor far away, to the stranger near at hand in this town and in this land. (Verse 2 of *I Bind My Heart This Tide*)

By JON TROTTER

In a landscape of walls and fences, of separation and alienation because others may look, sound, and act different from us, delegates and those who attended the evening worship sessions at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly were challenged to become intentionally vulnerable, and to embrace the stranger and foreigner as our neighbor across lines of difference.

In the diverse city of Harrisonburg, Va., where Assembly was held at Park View Mennonite Church, people from all over the world are our neighbors. In a polarized political climate of increased deportation efforts, it was here, in this community, that Immanuel Mennonite Church and Pastor Matthew Bucher first erected a sign in English, Spanish, and Arabic, the three predominate languages of the church's neighborhood, in front of the church: *No matter where you are from, we're glad you're our neighbor.* The message was redesigned for yard signs and released to whomever wanted to print them. The result has been a widespread phenomenon that has gained national attention.

Welcoming the stranger as our neighbor is a concept that permeates the entire biblical story. It may also be one of the hardest to practice, because it requires changed lenses of understanding. How do we see God in everyone we meet? Where do we find the love of God for all people when we can't understand someone, distrust them, or fear their motives? It takes vulnerability. It takes a compassionate heart and a sacrificial willingness to bear one another's burdens. Real relationship comes when we



New credentialed leaders, mission workers, and those with new ministry assignments were commissioned during the Friday evening service at Conference Assembly. Some of those commissioned include (from left): Jeongih Han, Brad Kolb, Bill Eberly, Merle Christner, Jason Kuniholm, Nevin Mast, Chris Scott, and Randy Smith. Photo: Jon Trotter

reach across the barrier, when we are open to learning from another and trusting that God loves them equally.

VMC leaders shared stories of breaking barriers. At the Thursday evening worship service, MaryBeth Heatwole Moore shared stories from the deaf church she pastors in Staunton, Va., called Signs of Life. Deaf people, she said, are among the most unreached people group for the gospel in the world. They often endure a deep pain of separation from the hearing world, because many people make no effort to communicate. They face low expectations, as they are often thought to be unintelli-

gent or incapable of learning. They feel forgotten by society and by God. Moore said that members of Signs of Life shared that they had never known that God loved them and valued them, because they were treated as a mistake. By delegate vote, followed by loud applause, this small congregation—which has been used by God to heal wounds caused by separation—was promoted to full congregational status and accepted into membership the following day.

Using the John 4:1-42 text, the story of the Samaritan woman at the well with

Becoming neighbors

By **ELROY MILLER**, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



The worship, Bible studies and keynote sermons at the July 20-22, 2017 Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly were very meaningful and thought provoking. The

singing, echoing through Park View Mennonite Church's vaulted sanctuary, reminded me of what's in store for those expecting to sing in heaven (Rev 11:5-14). I want to thank Gloria Diener, Benjamin Bergey, and the worship team, for drawing us into meaningful worship, reflection and meditation of what it means to be neighborly.

The keynote messages and Bible studies moved me in a deep way to reflect on my obligations to be more neighborly. It was very moving to hear the experience of Saulo Padilla, Mennonite Central Committee's U.S. Immigration Coordinator, who, as a youth sojourned from Guatemala to Canada, and from Goshen Collage into church ministry and leadership as an adult. We were shown how God watched over his family, and how ordinary people of faith in the church helped his family find a place to live, connect with the church, and find their way in a very different land and culture. Saulo challenged us, as followers of Jesus,

to embrace people of different cultures and to be neighborly—as Jesus was with the Samaritan woman in John 4.

César García, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, also challenged us to expand our capacity to appreciate how God works in sometimes puzzling ways. He drew on Acts 10's account of Cornelius the Centurion and Peter's experience. In this situation, God used a Gentile Roman soldier to grow Peter's capacity to know God's heart, and to desire to reach out to—and to be in relationship with—peoples of all tribes and nations regardless of culture and religion.

Wilma Bailey, Old Testament scholar, lead Bible studies from the books of Ruth and 2 Kings. Wilma recast these known scriptures, and in so doing, challenged us to grow our understanding of God's commitment to be known to all peoples, already in the Old Testament story.

The Bible study, the keynote messages, the mission stories and the fellowship reminded us of the necessary work of the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18-20. All of us who claim faith in Jesus have been given the authority (blessing) to share our faith story in word and deed in diverse settings and among diverse people, at home and abroad. May we have the courage to embody the Great Commission in our daily living.

Pastoral transitions (May-September 2017)

William "Bill" Eberly, lead pastor at Powhatan Mennonite Church, ordained on September 3.

Andrew Buckwalter Fairfield, licensed for the role of lead pastor at Christiansburg Mennonite Fellowship, July 1.

Joanne Gallardo, formerly associated with the teaching cluster, transferred to Indiana-Michigan Conference.

Jeonghi Han was licensed in August for her role as co-pastor of CrossWay Mennonite Church, Stephens City, Va., a congregation-in-formation.

Bradley Kolb, pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, ordained on May 7.

Jason Kuniholm, interim lead pastor at Lindale Mennonite Church, credentials transferred from Lancaster Mennonite Conference to VMC.

Nevin Mast, lead pastor at Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church, was ordained on August 13.

Patrick "Pat" McFarren became lead pastor at Knoxville (Tenn.) Mennonite Church, August 8.

Nicholas "Nick" Meyer was licensed on June 4, for the role of chaplain at Harrisonburg/ Rockingham Regional Jail. **Ken Wettig** replaces Meyer as lead pastor at Early Church.

Christopher "Chris" Scott, church planter at "the exchange," a congregation-in-formation in Winchester, Va., was ordained on June 11.

Kinley Simmers, youth/associate pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, was licensed on May 21.

Jason Wagner, licensed on June 4 for the role of chaplain, Harrisonburg/Rockingham Regional Jail.

Jonah Yang, former pastor of Peace Mennonite Church, transferred in May to Central Plains Mennonite Conference.

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FaithTrust Institute trains Investigation Team, others in VMC

Every Virginia Mennonite Conference pastoral leader agrees to honor certain boundaries as part of receiving ministerial credentials. Knowledge of what are appropriate behaviors and what are not is crucial to a pastor's effective ministry.

To increase awareness of the need for healthy and appropriate boundaries, and to provide ongoing education, VMC invited a consulting group called FaithTrust to provide training for Faith and Life Commission and the Investigation Team that will investigate complaints against credentialed leaders.

The training was in two parts—first, a day-long training led by Lonnie and Teresa Boshart Yoder on June 29 called *Healthy Boundaries 101—Fundamentals*. Boundary topics included dating congregational members, receiving personal gifts, potential sexualized behaviors such as hugging and touch, stress management and self-care.

This one-day training was followed by a more intensive two-day consultation on July 14-15 called Leadership Training: Responding to Clergy Misconduct, with the emphasis on responding to sexual miscon-

duct by credentialed leaders. Input was presented by slide presentations, case studies, lectures and discussions.

duct by credentialed leaders. Input was presented by slide presentations, case studies, lectures and discussions. client, employee, student, or staff member in a professional relationship. Such misconduct is a violation of the ministerial relationship in which a person in a position of religious leadership takes advantage of a vulnerable person, instead of protecting him or her.

Training began by looking at issues around ministerial sexual misconduct. What is sexual misconduct? Who are the abusers and who are the victims? What is sexualized behavior? A major piece of the teaching aimed at understanding the power of the ministerial role and the vulnerability of those whom the pastor serves. One session focused on forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation in situations involving misconduct.

Most of the second day was spent on looking at the policies and procedures VMC has in place for responding to pastoral misconduct. Current policies have been in place for some years and are currently being updated to conform to Mennonite Church USA's policies and procedures. Faith and Life Commission has recommended to Conference Council that VMC adopt Mennonite Church USA's model. Action on that recommendation should be on the next Conference Council meeting this fall.

Carl Mericle, District Minister for Eastern (Virginia) District, noted how important our policies are and how carefully we must follow them. "Consequently, our policies must be carefully stated," he said. He continued, "The case studies opened for me how varied interpretation can be by each observer/participant in a misconduct situation. I also believe the training heightened the importance of our actions when it comes to the process of reporting misconduct and how vital follow-up is when a written complaint is filed.



M.L. Daniel is a trainer for religious groups with FaithTrust Institute on boundaries issues. Photo by Jon Trotter

desire for healing and restoration where they find brokenness. The FaithTrust training helped us understand that to jump into those roles too quickly clouds an investigation and may appear to be more covering over rather than striving for justice for victims. We were encouraged to focus on investigation, naming, and justice early in the process. Efforts for restoration must wait for a separate process."

FaithTrust Institute is a national organization working to end sexual and domestic violence. Founded in 1977 by the Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune, FaithTrust Institute provides church communities with the tools and knowledge they need to address the religious and cultural issues related to abuse. One Faith and Life Commission member said, "Their expertise is an invaluable resource to VMC in developing a trusted protocol for responding to situations of misconduct."

A powerful Bible study based on two Old Testament passages, Ezekiel 34 (God's condemnation of shepherds) and 2 Samuel 11 (King David's sexual misconduct with Bathsheba) opened the training. Obviously the issues considered in this consultation have been around since the Old Testament.

Written by a member of the Investigation Team, whose four members are not being named at the counsel and recommendation of FaithTrust Institute.



Emily Cohen, a trainer with FaithTrust Institute, led aspects of the Healthy Boundaries training. Photo by Jon Trotter

James Akerson, co-District Minister for Central District, commented, "District Ministers are pastoral at heart with a keen

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Saulo Padilla, Mennonite Central Committee's U.S. Immigration Coordinator, brought the message during the Thursday evening service. All photos: Jon Trotter

Jesus, speaker Saulo Padilla, Mennonite Central Committee's US Immigration Coordinator, noted the woman's question to Jesus: "Aren't you a Jew? Don't you know I am a Samaritan?" While the woman turned the

well into a wall of separation, Jesus turned it into a bridge, an invitation. "Won't you give me a drink?" He had a human need for a drink, but he also had something to offer: living water and redemption for her dignity. Padilla noted that maybe we see immigrants or foreigners as only in need, but they also have much to offer. We often go to the law, he said, on the issue of immigration, but why not the scriptures? Abraham was a stranger who had to



Wilma Bailey, an Old Testament scholar, led Bible studies on Friday and Saturday from the books of Ruth and 2 Kings.

hide the identity of himself and his wife. Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers, a victim of human trafficking. Jesus was an immigrant from heaven, and also experienced a refugee's flight to Egypt with his family. How can the many stories of God's concern for the stranger among us be

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César García, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, was the Friday evening worship speaker.

starting point in the present debates?

Wilma Bailey, an Old Testament scholar, led Bible studies on Friday and Saturday from the books of Ruth and 2 Kings. These Old Testament examples are replete with stories of Israel and strangers or foreigners, and God's command to love those in their midst as neighbors.

"The mission of God is about vulnerability," said César García, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference and the Friday evening worship speaker. Based on the Acts 10 account of Cornelius the centurion and Peter, García used the term *anomalies* to describe strange or different aspects of the story from the old understandings.

Peter was a minority within a minority, a Jew who followed Jesus, who is sent for by a representative of an occupying foreign power—a God-fearing Gentile Roman soldier and a minority among his people—with a heart of trust and a desire to know more about God.

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ter needed to be vulnerable to God's new command to "Kill and eat!" all that had been deemed unclean. He rejected this command three times, but eventually came to understand that God is in the business of breaking down walls of separation and is pouring out his Spirit on Gentiles.

Taryn Zander, a VM Missions worker, shared about her work and vision with

The Assembly band led worship both evenings.



Worship leaders Marvin Lorenzana and Gloria Diener lead a prayer of invitation.

short-term teams and refugee ministries at the Friday morning delegate session.

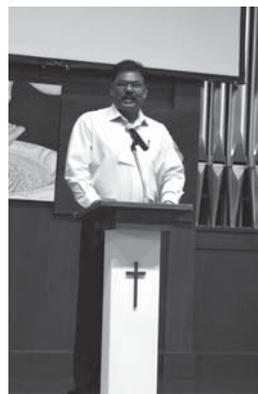
Ramesh Jaimani, a fraternal delegate from Trinidad & Tobago, shared a missional story on Friday evening.

During the delegate sessions, delegates received reports and updates from Clyde G. Kratz, Executive Conference Minister, Moderator Elroy Miller, Virginia Mennonite Missions, and many other VMC-related agencies. Virginia Conference is working with FaithTrust Institute's Healthy Boundaries trainings and local trainers Lonnie and Teresa Yoder to train credentialed and lay leaders in all districts in the coming year. Due to the urgency of

the boundary training and a desire to act quickly, schedules are filling up. Pastors are encouraged to bring congregational leaders along for the trainings so the congregation is more invested.

Conference Council is also engaged in a review of polity through a Polity Task Force, which over the next year will examine the power structures and ways that congregations relate to the Conference. They will then bring recommendations to Conference Council.

As in the theme, the business of the church required a willingness for delegates to be vulnerable as they worked from different positions but approached each other in love and with mutual respect. Honest questions and thoughts were a part of open microphone times, which delegates appreciated. Many noted how the theme and content of Assembly was timely and relevant.



Ramesh Jaimani, a fraternal delegate from Trinidad & Tobago, shared a missional story on Friday evening.



Jon Trotter is Communications Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Where does the Virginia Mennonite story begin?

By STEVEN NOLT

Perhaps the Virginia Mennonite Conference story begins in early summer 1671, in a village in the German Palatinate, where deacon Valentine Heatwole offers bedding and clothing to Christina Weis, a thirty-six-year-old refugee who had fled her home in Switzerland, traveling more than two hundred miles with her three children, the youngest only twelve months of age.

The sad fact was, Heatwole reported, Weis actually had five children, but was forced to leave two of her offspring behind. She also had no hope of seeing her husband again. He was among the Anabaptists sold into slavery to row cargo boats on the Adriatic Sea.

Heatwole's church is taking in some seven hundred refugees that year, motivated by their own memory of fleeing persecution a decade or two earlier.

Or perhaps our story begins in Dry Fork, West Virginia, in 1926, where a girl named Anna Whitecotton is composing a letter to the Mennonite children's magazine, *Words of Cheer*. While adults debate theology, Anna reports on her religious world.

"Dear *Words of Cheer* [...] My birthday is August 17. I live on a farm of 20 acres. We have 4 rabbits, 1 cat and 1 dog for pets. I have a sister, 2 brothers, and a half-brother. Their names are Mary, Harry, Clyde, and Jimmy Jr. [...] I have a father and a brother in heaven. I go to Sunday school every Sunday I can. I have only missed one Sunday this summer. My teacher's name is Miss Vada Heatwole. I like her for a teacher. [...] I am reading the Bible thru this summer."

Hundreds of children from Virginia, West Virginia, and Tennessee write to *Words of Cheer*, and their letters uniformly convey the fact that the most important people in Virginia Mennonite Conference are Sunday school teachers.

Or maybe our story begins in Newport News in 1972, where a forty-three-year-old pastor named Leslie Francisco II, born in Roaring Creek, North Carolina, receives a vision, grounded in Habakkuk 2:3, to begin a church in Hampton, despite the many practical, financial, and spiritual barriers.

The prophet's verse counsels both patience and persistence. As he prepares himself to follow the call, Francisco pens an essay entitled "Let Me Be Your Whole Brother": "When I was hungry, you formed a humanities club and discussed me in the appropriate committee. When I was imprisoned, you crept off quietly to your chapel and prayed, while I waited in vain for your visit. When I was naked, you made a statement about the immorality of my appearance. When I was sick, you pitied me – and knelt and thanked God for your own good health. When I was homeless, you preached to me about the heavenly home waiting for me after death. When I was lonely you did not want to disturb me, so you left me alone. [...] But I'm still hungry and lonely and cold."

Or perhaps our story begins in Chacachacare Island, four miles off shore from Trinidad. There, the Trinidadian government has isolated those with Hansen's Disease. Banished to the island, they have created a community of necessity that often transcends their Afro-Caribbean and south Asian Muslim and Hindu backgrounds.

By some accounts, the church had paid limited attention to them until Dr. Richard Keeler, from Virginia, instigates a holistic and broad-based public health campaign to treat and repatriate Chacachacare residents, people who carry their connections and trust of one another into the church. People like Ruphina Moze, baptized in July 1978, along with her 93-year-old mother-in-law, and Kouncil Mohammed, whose Muslim husband, Shazzie Mohammed, never stood in the way of their home being open for Bible study.

Sembach. Dry Fork. Newport News. Chacachacare. All of these places are starting points for our story.

If the idea of plural beginnings seems surprising, perhaps an unconventional opening can remind us that there is no singular human starting point for church history. Our story ultimately begins with God, who has been and is at work across time and around the world.

The meaning we discover in the gospel's connections among people and places

is one way of talking about the church's mission. And that truth brings us back to the one place we must begin, a new-yet-old story that is, from beginning to end, God's love for the world.



Steven Nolt is the Young Center Senior Scholar, Elizabethtown (Pa.) College, and a recognized author of Mennonite history.

New Virginia Mennonite history book planned

A new history book is being planned that will narrate signs of God's kingdom in Virginia Mennonite Conference.

The emphasis will be on Virginia Mennonite Conference churches, but other groups that have intersected with or emerged out of VMC will be included. It will outline distinctive features of the overall Mennonite story, such as immigration into the Valley, a southern geographic and cultural context, race and slavery, the Civil War, twentieth century church institutions and missions, and twenty-first century developments.

Steven Nolt, Young Center Senior Scholar, Elizabethtown College, a recognized author and writer of Mennonite history, has agreed to author the book.

This is a joint project of Shenandoah Valley Mennonite Historians and Virginia Mennonite Conference Historical Committee, "interpreting the past to inform the present." The joint committee senses need for a new book because the narrative in Harry A. Brunk's two-volume set of history books ends in 1960. Many new churches and ministries have been established since Brunk finished his scholarly books.

The project cost is about \$50,000. If you would like to contribute, visit virginiaconference.org/about/conference-archives/virginia-mennonite-history-book/. For more information, contact Elwood Yoder at elyoder@gmail.com



Join the EMS “Block Party!”

By PAUL G. LEAMAN

Back in the 1970s, my neighborhood on Rockingham Drive held an annual summer block party. People grilled hotdogs, served mac and cheese, and ate watermelon. Favorite foods brought neighborhood kids around the table, but before long basketball hoops and backyards beckoned us for games lasting past twilight. Each year as new people joined our growing neighborhood the block party turned acquaintances into friendships and our street as a place of belonging.

EMS’s Centennial Homecoming is our block party for you! There will be great food to bring you to the table, but events and friendship sightings will quickly grab your attention. Held during a shared weekend with EMU, October 12–15, 2017 will fill your life with opportunities to reminisce, rekindle, and remember alongside friends from over the years. It will also be a chance to hear about future vision, break ground,

The EMS centennial faculty and staff, pictured in August 2017. Photo: Andrew Gascho

and watch today’s generation speak, play, and perform.

Over the past 100 years, Eastern Mennonite School has formed neighborhoods of belonging and friendship which last a lifetime. Learning together and being part of events and activities during formative years create “Strangers No More” communities, and we are so blessed to have thousands of graduates and friends who give of their talent, time, and treasure as part of God’s faithfulness and blessing to EMS.

Visionary ideas from the early 1900’s sprouted and have been carried forth by generations of many loyal families. Pictured at top right, the Blosser family began their ties to EMS upon its founding as Daniel Blosser, Glendon’s grandfather, served on the first EMS Board. This early vision for a Bible, music, and vocational school grew into a college, and now a university with a seminary, graduate programs, a satellite program, and world-renowned Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. This early vision



Pictured left to right are four of the six generations of the Blosser family who have EMS ties: Glendon ’47, Floyd ’72, Jesse ’98, Tyler ’28. Not pictured are Glendon’s father Mahlon (1924), and grandfather Daniel Blosser. Photo: Jesse Blosser

also grew deeper attracting young families with today’s elementary (EMES), middle (EMMS), and high (EMHS) schools which have centennial plans to break ground for our K-12 campus as part of the Let the Children Come campaign.

Pictured below are the faculty and staff of Eastern Mennonite School’s Centennial year. Can you identify the 19 alumni in this photo? Alumni called back to teach and serve represents a powerful testimony of the influence EMS has in shaping lives for the future. Shouts of confidence in EMS also come from the 59 children of EMS employees who currently attend the school.

Our one-of-a-kind school environment where “athletes sing” and everyone belongs has attracted many newcomers to the EMS neighborhood. Our doors are open wide for families seeking Christian education from an Anabaptist perspective, where each student is known, taught and encouraged to follow Jesus; belongs to a caring community; explores and thinks constructively; practices leadership; serves; and learns peacebuilding skills. Presently, our neighborhood includes 15 denominations and 48 congregations...and is growing.

We love our neighborhood where God’s love rules and strangers become friends for a lifetime. Come join in our “Block Party” and celebrate with us this Centennial year!



Paul Leaman is Eastern Mennonite School’s Head of School.



WCRC hosts a ‘wonderful human collage’ of groups

By BOB BRISCOE

It's always exciting to see who is coming in the next week to the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center. The variety of groups is a wonderful human collage.

In one eight week period this summer, we had the privilege of hosting St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, Mision Cristiana Elim, Hampton University Student Leadership and One Mind Presbyterian Church.

The Coptic group is made up of Egyptian immigrant families who live in the Hampton area. They speak Arabic and they cook amazingly wonderful food. Mision Cristiana Elim is a church of Hispanic immigrants in Williamsburg, mostly from Guatemala. I'm convinced they are the happiest group we host. Hampton University is one of the top historically black universities in the world and they come to WCRC for leadership training and lots of fun. One Mind Presbyterian is a Korean Church in the Northern Virginia area. They get up early to exercise and pray. We are humbled by their discipline.

In addition, we have great variety in our own Kaleidoscope Camp ministry. With



The Girls Cabin enjoys outdoor worship at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center. Photo courtesy of author

campers from Asian, African, South and Central American, Ukrainian, and Indian descent, we get to see a great cross section of the world, right here at camp.

From near or far, all are neighbors and brothers and sisters as they join us here to focus on Jesus. As Galatians 3:28 says,

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Praise God for the unity that is available to us in Christ!

Bob Briscoe is Executive Director of Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, Toano, Va.

Highland partners with churches so more kids can attend

By KENT KAUFFMAN

As most people who have spent time at Christian summer camps can tell you, camp is often life-changing; at camp, young people form solid friendships and deepen

their faith in ways that last well beyond one summer. Highland has been fostering partnerships with area churches to help children from local congregations and communities attend camp.

Scholarship money donated by generous individuals goes a long way toward making camp affordable for every family, but when churches help pay camp fees, Highland makes that money go even further through our church match program. This summer, 14 churches participated in the program, and Highland helped them reduce costs for about 160 campers.

Each participating church has a specific vision for how to use the church match program. Some churches contribute toward the cost of camp for every child in their congregation, while others use it to help families

with specific financial needs. Still others are using Highland's church match program to extend their community outreach programs. We celebrate every vision, but have found particular joy in the last one.

We have delighted in sharing camp experiences with children from Ridgeway's Kids Club and Harrisonburg Mennonite's (HMC) Venture Club. Regina Shultz, who escorted the group from HMC this summer, shares that she “heard stories of crayfish caught in the stream, friendships made and Bible stories heard, songs learned, bonds made with special counselors, and a love of pool time.” Stories like these are exactly what motivate us to keep partnering with churches and bringing children to camp.



Campers enjoy activities at Vacation Bible School. Photo courtesy of author



Kent Kauffman is Executive Director of Highland Retreat, Bergton, Va.

Mennowood: not just a retirement community, but family

By JON ALDRIDGE

Change is never easy and especially when we get older, it seems especially hard.

When residents move into Mennowood Retirement Community, we want to make the transition as easy as possible. Mark 12:29-31 tells us to love God first with all our heart, soul and mind. The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. Mennowood strives to put God first and then love our neighbors. This is especially displayed through our Resident Ambassador program.

Our Resident Ambassador program consists of a team of residents who are hands on. They not only meet our new admissions, but they are also available to greet our visitors. They serve as mentors and guides to exploring everything our community has to offer. Our Resident Ambassadors are available to answer any questions about our community and are ready to help you to adjust and experience the

Mennowood lifestyle. When someone joins the Mennowood family they not only have a new home but they meet a new group of friends. This group of Resident Ambassadors are very enthusiastic about living at Mennowood Retirement Community and they want to make sure that your living experience is just as wonderful as theirs!

Mennowood is also active in the community. The residents and families help the SPCA by doing a program called Shred for Paws. Residents and families recycle old newspapers for us to shred and give them to the SPCA. We participate in raising funds for the Alzheimer's association. We participate in the Walk to End Alzheimer's and



Mennowood's Resident Ambassadors in July 2017.
Photo courtesy of author

there is a monthly Canvas and Cola night to raise money for the association. There are a lot of things happening at Mennowood to show love to our neighbors inside and out.



Jon Aldridge is Administrator of Mennowood Retirement Community, Newport News, Va.

EMU's unique cross-cultural program still treasured

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

Professor Kim Brenneman calls the cross-cultural experience "the ultimate classroom." Most Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) alumni agree.

Each semester and summer, EMU students spread out across the globe,

accompanied by faculty and staff who have often lived in the area and with the help of natives, introduce a cultural perspective in more intimate ways beyond the usual tourist sites. The experience is more unique than a typical study-abroad program, in which students are housed in universities and take traditional academic coursework.

Several graduate programs also offer cross-cultural, including the Collaborative MBA and MBA, MA in biomedicine, and the seminary.

Her experience in France and the Ivory Coast "still permeates my life 20 years later," said Carrie Stambaugh Bert at a 2014 cross-cultural reunion. More recently, student Sarah Regan shared that her Central Europe travels "really broadened my view."

Leaders reflected on new challenges, such as globalization and the ubiquity of technology, during a panel discussion, "Drinking in Knowledge at the Source: EMU's Cross Cultural Program," at the

2017 faculty-staff conference. The panel discussed the origins, goals and changes over the years of one of EMU's most unique programs, which started formally in 1982.

Panelists, with their most recent trips listed, included interim cross-cultural program director Ann Hershberger (Guatemala/Cuba); program assistant Linda Martin Burkholder (Bolivia); emeritus professor Ervie Glick (Europe); staff member Byron Peachey (local context and U.S.-Mexico border/Guatemala and Cuba); and professors Kim Brenneman (India) and Kimberly Schmidt (Europe), director of the Washington Community Scholars' Center.

During the Q and A session, one faculty member, speaking for many others, said he was "jealous ... When do we get to go?"



Lauren Jefferson is Editor-In-Chief within EMU's Marketing and Communications Department.



The Radical Roots Anabaptist group led by Professor Kimberly Schmidt and Rev. Seth Miller '07, MDiv '15, pastor of Bethesda Mennonite Church, Henderson, Neb.

Finding the image of God in each incarcerated neighbor

By JASON WAGNER

I will not forget my first time in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham Regional Jail. I was leading music for a Sunday service with Minister Mark Lehman. We were let into the building through a system of locked doors, each controlled by some unseen force behind the surveillance cameras.

Arriving in the room where the service would take place, we arranged the chairs and put song sheets out on the tables. What happened next, I was not prepared for. The door opened to the classroom and prisoners—in bright orange jumpsuits cuffed together in twos—appeared. The chaperoning guard unlocked the cuffs and the men filed into the room, warmly greeting and shaking hands with me and Mark. After all the prisoners arrived the door locked closed and it was just the two of us with all the prisoners. No guard, no cuffs, just us!

I had seen prisoners before in movies, on television, in the newspaper and I even knew many people who had spent time in jail. But, being in a jail with a room full of incarcerated men was a foreign and uncomfortable experience for me. It is painful to admit, but my imagination was primed to see these men as less than human—and as such, to be kept distant and suspect.

As I began to lead music, I was nervous and robotic, unable to get past my thoughts about the environment. Eventually getting over my jitters, I was pleasantly surprised when I could hear the voices of the men faintly singing.



The imposing and nearly windowless back side of the Harrisonburg/Rockingham Regional Jail, where Jason Wagner serves as a chaplain. The jail housed an average daily population of 314 in 2016.

Photo: Skip Tobin

After leading, I sat and listened as Mark led the men in prayer and shared a message. During this time, I could truly observe the men and my eyes began to be opened to the image of God planted in each one, the image of God hidden and obscured under orange jumpsuits, tired eyes and pale, sun-deprived skin.

It was my own jailhouse conversion! My eyes and ears were opened to the deep cry and hunger for the redemptive love of Christ.

The Lord Jesus calls us—the church—to be salt and light in a world that is bland and dark. The jail is a significantly dark and bland corner in our community, housing deeply wounded exiles who are doomed to repeat their crimes if left isolated.

God's redemptive love looks past the distressing disguise of our incarcer-



Jason Wagner in front of the jail.

Photo courtesy of author

ated neighbors. Love begins the long, arduous adventure toward healing. The family of God draws out the God-given potential in every person.

As a newly-licensed minister with VMC, I am serving as a chaplain in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham Regional Jail as a local mission worker with Virginia

Mennonite Missions. Please continue to pray for me as I lead Christian services, offer pastoral care, coordinate visiting ministries and equip the larger church body to actively engage in the jail ministry.

Jason Wagner is a licensed minister for jail chaplain ministry and a mission worker of Virginia Mennonite Missions.



Photo: Skip Tobin

Mennonite Women celebrate 100 years

By ELWOOD YODER

At the Third Annual Virginia Conference Sewing Circle Meeting, May 1956, Edna Harman was surprised to learn that some 700 sewing circle groups met across the United States. Edna was glad to hear of the many garments, bundles, and canned food sent to needy people. Her article, though, in *Missionary Light*, the Virginia Conference newspaper, concluded that spiritual needs were more important than physical needs, and if the women neglected to pray midst their charitable work, they had failed.

This intersection of caring for neighbors through meeting material and spiritual needs is celebrated this year upon the 100th anniversary of Mennonite Women USA. In 1917, Mennonite Women got organized in a meeting near Goshen, Indiana. The women soon took the name Mennonite Women’s Missionary Society, which was renamed Women’s Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC) in 1971, and Mennonite Women USA in 2003.

Some years prior to the beginning of the national organization, Susanna Hartman Brunk (1843-1913) called a few women together at Weavers Mennonite Church and



The Warwick River Sewing Circle in 1947, from left Anna Hertzler, Alta Yoder, Phebe F. Krause, and Amanda Shenk. MC USA Archives

started a sewing circle. Since Susanna’s initial invitation to her friends in 1908, the Weavers Sewing Circle has been meeting consistently for well over a hundred years. Famine and deprivation in Russia prompted the women to send many items for relief to the new Mennonite Central Committee, which was organized to respond to needs in Russia during the 1920s. Later, the Weavers Sewing Circle provided material items, such as clothing and supplies, for Vietnamese refugees during the Vietnam War.

The Sewing Circle at Warwick River Mennonite Church supplied relief items and made clothes like other sewing circles. In June 1946, however, they also were asked to make food for Virginia Mennonite Conference, which met at Warwick River Church. In a story from Anita Hooley Yoder’s new book about Mennonite Women, for four days the Warwick women served

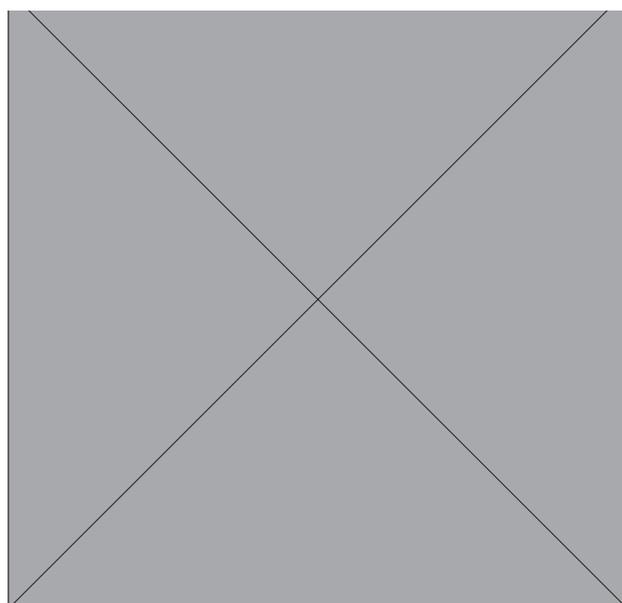
the meals, anywhere from 100-500 people a day—in a building with no stove, refrigerator, or sink!

A dozen years ago, women from Weavers collaborated with women from Tanzania, under the leadership of Edith Shenk Kuhns. With fabric from Tanzania, the Weavers women made a beautiful quilt that was auctioned at the 2005 Virginia Relief Sale for \$4,100, purchased by David and Ruth Emswiler, who then gave it as a wedding gift to their daughter Jan Emswiler, missionary in Tanzania.

On this centennial of the Mennonite Women’s movement in the US, many thanks to the women of Virginia Conference sewing circles for their Godly work. Some have ministered for decades, though in other churches sewing circles have been disbanded as times change. In her October 11, 1939 minutes detailing the monthly meeting of the Weavers Sewing Circle, Secretary Laura Wenger finished her accounting of the day’s activities with a cursive flourish at the bottom of the page, “Long live the Sewing Circle!”

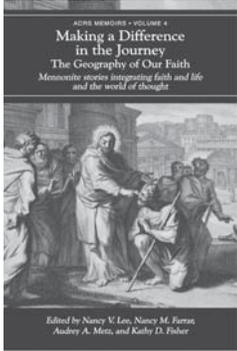


Elwood Yoder teaches Bible and Social Studies at Eastern Mennonite School, Harrisonburg, Va.



Trissels Sewing Circle 2013, from left Sharon Showalter Bowers, Virginia Martin, Doris Showalter Trumbo (standing), Gloria Synder, Karen Miller, Gloria Turner Swope. Photo courtesy of Eunice Showalter

New ARCS memoir to be released



The new Memoir 4 from The Anabaptist Center for Religion and Society (ACRS) will be released and on sale at the EMU Homecoming, Friday, October 13, 12:30- 1 p.m., at the conclu-

sion of the EMU Jubilee Alumni meeting in Martin Chapel in the Seminary. This is the fourth volume of the ACRS series of “The Geography of Our Faith,” edited by Nancy V. Lee, Nancy Farrar, Audrey Metz and Kathy Fisher.

Making a Difference in the Journey: The Geography of Our Faith, contains Brethren and Mennonite stories “integrating faith, life and the world of thought.”

Editor Nancy Lee states: “While the first volume of ACRS memoirs (2007, 2009) traced the effects of a tumultuous century on mainly rural Mennonites who grew up to become leaders, the second volume (2009) goes behind somewhat different scenes. Here readers—and former EMU students—can view what they wish they could have known about the crucial events and questions in the hearts and minds of these church and college administrators, professors, authors, and the ones who became internationalists.” The storytellers in Volume 3 (2016), who included Church of the Brethren as well as Mennonite authors, illustrated—in the midst of a world of war and genocide—their new perceptions of ways to serve. Volume 4 (2017) now concludes the series with the stories of both Church of the Brethren and Mennonite leaders whose different ways of serving enriched and, indeed, saved the lives of many.

The 15 authors of the book are: Robert Earl Alley, Martin Lehman, Fred W. Swartz, Beryl H. Brubaker, Joseph L. Lapp, W. Robert McFadden, Lee M. Yoder, Douglas Hostetter, Paul Swarr, Richard (Rick) Yoder, Richard L. (Dick) Benner, Lawrence (Larry) Hoover, Allon H. Lefever, Peggy B. Shenk, and Shirley H. Showalter.

The necessity of sabbatical leave

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



these years as *the years I worked for a living*. This period of my life meant long work hours (60-65 hours) that contributed to physical exhaustion.

There were also some challenging safety issues when, for example, changing a truck tire on the driver’s side of a truck at 4:30 in the afternoon during rush hour. Scheduling tire changes on a fleet of trucks and trailers required management skills.

Negotiating a supervisor’s expectation to maintain tires on a truck heading into winter, and the driver’s expectation of new tires, contributed to unique emotional dynamics in my role.

This past year, I can acknowledge that in my role as the Executive Conference Minister there were long hours, physical and mental exhaustion, intellectual challenges, and emotional issues.

All this is to say, *ministry is working for a living*. I have the expectation that this work requires endurance, both physically and mentally, contains intellectual stimulation, and involves engaging in disagreements.

On almost all occasions, I sleep well. I apparently inherited my father’s propensity to be able to lie down at night—or even during the day—and merely go to sleep. It fits with my sincere belief that individuals who have peace with God and fellow men can always sleep.

This year was difficult. But as you can see, that is why it is called work and ministry.

I have experienced much joy in this endeavor of working as the Executive Conference Minister. The difficulties of cultural change, whether it is new ways to responding to allegations of misconduct, denominational realignments, changing partnership relationships, or finding ways to be true to our identity as the people of God in the

Many years ago, I was employed as a truck tire specialist engaged in changing truck tires, driving truck, and working in a truck garage.

I usually refer to

A sabbatical provides a minister with the opportunity to think, plan, and rejuvenate for the next phase of their ministry in the congregation, which also extends the longevity of their ministry.

midst of cultural challenges, is essential work of being a conference. I value this opportunity to serve the church.

I shall be taking a sabbatical from my role of Executive Conference Minister beginning on October 1 and concluding December 31, 2017.

I am grateful for this opportunity to rest from the labor of ministry. I will seek ways to rejuvenate for the difficult work that lies ahead for Virginia Mennonite Conference. My sabbatical plan includes a week in a personal retreat, two executive minister retreats, vacation time with my wife, Eunice, family time in Pennsylvania, volunteer time with Mennonite Disaster Service, and a list of books to read.

In my absence, Conference Council is appointing an Interim Conference Minister to tend the work of the Conference during this time.

I am grateful for this opportunity to take a sabbatical, but I also lament that many pastors have not received a sabbatical during their tenure as ministers.

I encourage congregational leaders to grant their pastor a sabbatical consistent with the Mennonite Church USA Pastor Salary Guidelines, which recommends three-month sabbaticals every four years of service.

A sabbatical provides a minister with the opportunity to think, plan, and rejuvenate for the next phase of their ministry in the congregation, which also extends the longevity of their ministry.

If your congregation has not provided a sabbatical to your pastor, please consult with your District Minister concerning a sabbatical policy, or go online to view the salary guidelines at: http://mennonite-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/InterpComments2017_2018.pdf.

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



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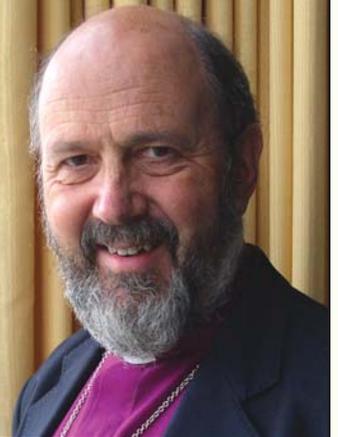
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