

Patchwork Pantry: a ministry of multiple congregations serving the food insecure in the Rockingham Co. area

By JENNIFER ULRICH

Every Wednesday evening, people from many walks of life come together to help provide food to persons who are food insecure in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County area of Virginia. Patchwork Pantry's mission is to provide a three-day supply of food for its clients.

Virginia Mennonite Conference congregations in the local area have been strong supporters of Patchwork Pantry since its beginning. Community Mennonite Church has housed the pantry since its opening in 1992, because its founding director, Sheri Hartzler, attended the church. The pantry uses the sanctuary, fellowship hall, kitchen and a Sunday school room each Wednesday night.

For the last few years a pastor and member of Community Mennonite Church have developed a visitation and prayer ministry with Pantry clients. Conversation topics include family, unemployment, health, addictions, immigration status, incarceration, and faith. As the prayer ministry team visits and prays in the sanctuary, the stained glass and worship visuals are constant reminders that God is holding us all together and invites us into faith amidst the struggles that persist in our community.

The pantry uses approximately 25 volunteers each week to staff the various positions. Most recently groups from Zion, Park View, Harrisonburg, Eastside and Ridgeway have staffed the pantry. In January, a group of mentor/mentee pairs from Zion volunteered.

Dawn Nyce, of Zion Mennonite Church, helped out that night with her mentee Jessica. She commented, "It was good to see the needs of the community of



Volunteers from Zion Mennonite Church bag groceries for pantry clients. From left to right: Jennifer Showalter, Emma Resto, Jessica Showalter, Evan Bert, Dawn Nyce. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Ulrich

Harrisonburg and, together with my mentee, be able to help those needs in a small way."

Peyton Erb, of Park View Mennonite Church, works once a month as an evening supervisor. She commented "I love being connected to the community in a very different way from my job or church life. I enjoy collaborating with other church groups who volunteer at pantry, being able to use my Spanish skills to serve clients, and also being informed about resources in our community that may be of use to my families at school as well."

Churches are involved in providing the food that is handed out as well. Weavers Mennonite Church started a garden project which provides fresh produce and at one time flowers to pantry clients. Park View

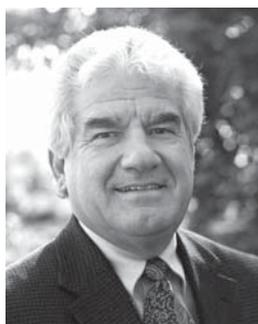
Mennonite does a monthly food drive and supports the pantry financially.

Individuals from VMC congregations also support the pantry through regular volunteering. Board member and volunteer Jay Landis said, "My own interest in the needs of the pantry clientele matches my volunteer job at the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Free Clinic, which serves the health needs of disadvantaged persons. Everyone deserves sufficient food and care for their health and welfare." Some other ways individuals have been involved include a Christmas program to clients by the Harrisonburg Mennonite Church children's choir, and a group of women who crochet/knit scarves for clients.

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Reflections on Winter Delegate Session

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



Don't let the title fool you. The Winter Delegate Session was full of thoughtful, spirit-filled and congenial conversation. It was not boring.

Phil Lehman and Howard Miller, pastors at Waynesboro Mennonite Church, led worship and reflected on how God has called their congregation to engage children in their immediate community. Their church is rethinking what it means to be church "across the street."

In the morning, Phil Kniss, pastor at Part View Mennonite, expanded our thinking about how congregations might work together in unity: 1. "Kingdom Unity—we unite in our mutual confession of God's reign over all things; 2. Missional Unity—we unite in God's mission to share the good news and love of God; 3. Functional Unity—we unite to agree how (VMC churches) could work together; and 4. Covenantal Unity—we unite to make meaningful promises before each other and God." ("A Church Worthy of Its Calling" is posted at virginiacommunity.org/documents/documents-and-statements/). As you might expect, Phil's reflections had VMC delegates reflecting how we might work together amidst our differences in a denomination struggling to maintain unity.

After worship early in the afternoon, Clyde Kratz, Executive Conference Minister, reviewed a document called *A Way Forward for Virginia Mennonite Conference: Forbearance and Membership Resolutions*.

To quote briefly, "Conference Council encourages the Faith and Life Commission to continue to be diligent in their responsibility of giving pastoral leadership to faith and life issues, and providing necessary guidelines and credentials for ministers. In addition, the Conference will continue to engage in constructive dialogue about the social realities of our culture in keeping with the discernments by the body of Christ represented in Mennonite Church USA and Virginia Mennonite Conference."

James Akerson, chair of the Vision & Mission Task Force, reviewed a newly-revised VMC vision and mission statement, core values, organizational assumptions and expectations. Delegate feedback to the Vision & Mission Task Force was positive overall, but concrete: shorten the document, remove academic language, use simpler words, etc. That is good advice in any event.

In summary, the Winter Delegate Session focused on the Conference's commitment to sharpen its mission, vision and ministry efforts, and re-envision how Conference congregations can work together in unity during challenging times. Let's pray that this will be so.

Pastoral transitions (December 2015 to February 2016)

Vernon Moyer, pastor, 3:16 Christian Community (Hickory, N.C.), status changed to ordained, December 6.

John B. Myer, pastor, 3:16 Christian Community (Hickory, N.C.), status changed to ordained, December 6.

Linda Wenger, approved for licensing as chaplain of The Village of Orchard Ridge, Winchester, Va.

Joni Sancken, former EMU faculty, transferred to Central District, December 3.

Brigida & Fernanda Carbajal, commissioned as leaders of El Camino Discipular, a congregation-information, succeeding Marvin Lorenzana.

Carl Mericle, district minister of Eastern District, replacing Harold Bergey, effective January 1.

James Akerson, district minister of Central District along with Robert Wenger. James succeeds interim district minister J. Mark Frederick, effective January 1.

Nick Meyer and Ken Wettig, serving as interim commissioned leaders of Early Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Kinley Simmers commissioned as youth leader of Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va.

Duane Beck, lead pastor of Raleigh, retired effective January 31.

Grace Yoder, 97, of Harrisonburg, Va., spouse of former credentialed pastor Paul R. Yoder, passed away February 1.

James H. Bergey, Sr., 86, of Chesapeake, Va., passed away February 27.

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Financial report

Reporting: September 1, 2015
to February 29, 2016

budget	\$99,324
expenses	\$121,513
income	\$103,525
net	(\$17,988)

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Senior High Retreat: “Peace and Nonresistance”

By DEB HORST

Fifty-four youth and adults engaged in a weekend of learning, laughter, fellowship, and worship at the VMC Senior High Retreat, February 19-21 at Highland Retreat, featuring speakers Titus Peachy, of Lancaster, Pa., and Pat and Earl Martin, of Harrisonburg, Va. All of the speakers have worked for many years in peacemaking, relief and development, and munitions cleanup efforts following conflicts in Asia.

Titus Peachey served as the Coordinator for Peace Education for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) US for 30 years, retiring in January 2016. He was a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War and did alternative service. He and his wife Linda Gehman Peachey later directed MCC’s relief and development work in Laos, where they learned about the problem of unexploded cluster bombs left over from the US air war. Titus returned to Laos for six months in 1994 to administer MCC’s bomb removal program. Titus is a counselor on the G.I. Rights Hotline and has been actively involved in efforts to ban the production, sale and use of cluster munitions.

In a session called “Imagining Peace,” he said that the first step in peacemaking is the capacity to imagine an alternative to violence/war and to think about the “big picture” of peace vs. violence. He got participants thinking about their personal responses to peace and violence. Titus then asked the youth to role-play two biblical stories to bring out the themes of imagination and courage.

“The hospitality of grace and mercy has the power to create peace,” Titus said. He then shared experiences of helping MCC clear the remaining cluster bombs dropped in Laos between 1954-73. Even after twenty years of government-assisted clean-up work, only a small fraction of these bombs have been cleared and the remaining bombs continue to be a threat to the Laotian people.

In the Saturday evening session called “Uncle Sam Wants You!” Titus explored legal issues surrounding Selective Service registration and military recruitment.

Interviewing several youth, both male and female who are at the age to register for Selective Service, he provided infor-



Titus Peachey (center) engages youth with questions. Photo: Deb Horst

mation about MCUSA’s Student Aid for Non-Registrants, which helps replace potential government grants and loans lost by students who for reasons of Christian conscience choose not to register with the U.S. Selective Service System. He also showed several videos of Ben Peters, an Iraq War veteran now committed to peace, recorded at the Kansas City 2015 Convention.

The featured speakers on Sunday morning were Earl and Pat Martin, of Harrisonburg, Va. They were volunteers with MCC in Vietnam, and served farming families who were forced from their homes during the Vietnam War. After additional schooling in the US, they returned to Vietnam to address the problem of unexploded bombs, grenades, and mines in the farmers’ fields. They appealed to the US government to take responsibility to clean up some of their unexploded munitions.

Years later, Earl and Pat worked with MCC in the Philippines with farmers losing their land during martial law to giant multinational agribusinesses. This session was titled, “Bodies Broken and Blessed for Peace!” Using the images of broken bodies, they shared deeply moving and emotional stories of their experiences that brought them face-to-face with the reality of war; experiences that humanized the “faces of those that the nation would have us believe were the enemy.”

They provided strong encouragement that the youth transform their thinking away from worldly actions of war and

violence, to “train ourselves to think and act in the way that Christ would have us respond with love.”

The Martins provided current real-life scenarios to the church groups for role-play. They invited the youth to “open themselves to the way of peacemaking” where they thought and responded like Jesus as they acted out the scenes. The youth wrestled with uncomfortable issues of racism and violence but all were able to offer non-violent responses to very real situations.

Earl and Pat invited the attendees to share bread in an informal representation of sharing the broken body of Christ, and reflect on the invitation to “walk on this earth as the representatives of the one who is called Prince of Peace.”

Kevin Eby (Lindale) led our worship in song at each of the four sessions. The theme song for the retreat was *Jesus help us live in peace (Unity)*. Deb Horst closed the worship with a blessing, “that we may be drenched with the longing for peace, to make justice blossom on earth.”

During the retreat, there were opportunities for outside fun and recreation in the beautiful environment at Highland Retreat. Youth enjoyed getting to know each other in the sunshine, and in the evening playing Glow-in-the-dark Capture the Flag.



Deb Horst is Associate Pastor of Christian Formation and Youth at Lindale Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Asheville Mennonite Church volunteers serve veterans

By CHARLES

I have been helping to serve dinner at the Veterans Restoration Quarters in Asheville, N.C., with other volunteers from Asheville Mennonite Church.

As veterans come through the serving line, interacting with them is enjoyable but usually very hurried and brief. I find that refilling their drinks afterwards allows me to meet them on a more personal level and hear their stories. I can relate to them and

made for them. I often look out over a cafeteria full of 200 to 300 lost souls who have found their way here now. I am mindful that *there but for fortune am I*.

The Veterans Restoration Quarters is not just a place to feed and house these charges. It sets goals for the veterans, to which they are accountable, and assists them on their journey to wellness and independence as they become productive and responsible members of society. The goals normally take a year to a year and a half to accomplish.

One day I met Reggie.

I came upon a table where a young black man was sitting. By his body language, he seemed a little uneasy and apprehensive. I introduced myself and sat down. I asked about his story and what circum-

stances led him to us.

All veterans have a different and interesting story. Reggie and I continued talking. Eventually my wife Barbara sat down with us and joined the conversation. The dinner time wound down and the

understand their stories and their choices on some level because I, too, am a veteran. Many, but not all, are at the Quarters because they have nowhere else to go. Some have no one around who wants them, either by choices they made, or by choices



volunteers from Asheville Mennonite were starting to leave.

I invited Reggie to come worship with us and he asked about directions to our church. He didn't have a car or any transportation. Barbara said we would be glad to

give him a ride.

So began our friendship with this man, who has shown himself to be a man of God with character that I would be proud to see in any of my children. And this friendship has impacted my journey as well.

What Reggie doesn't know is that I used to harbor an intense dislike—even a hatred—for black people, and spent years getting over my anger and disgust. I had been attacked by two black men and left to bleed on a Brooklyn sidewalk, fortunate that their pistol had misfired. It was a long journey to overcome these feelings.

We learned fairly recently that the night we met Reggie, he was feeling very discouraged and was considering returning to Charlotte. Our interest in him and his story was a turning point for him. Our pastor Sanford Yoder began mentoring him, and we have all come to love him and what he brings to our friendship. This congregational service has benefitted us personally and as a congregation as we serve others.

Charles (last name withheld) is a member of Asheville Mennonite Church, Asheville, N.C.



Sanford Yoder, pastor of Asheville Mennonite Church, prepares food with two other church members at the Veterans Restoration Quarters in Asheville, N.C. Photo courtesy of author

Patchwork Pantry continued from cover

Kathy Gerber, of Eastside Church, sums up this way: "As volunteer coordinator, I am always amazed at those who unselfishly give of their time on a regular basis. You may come in after a full day of work tired, but leave feeling refreshed. Clients are very thankful for the canned goods and fresh produce. I leave with a humble heart knowing many in my own community have

little food while I have a full pantry and refrigerator at home. I can give two hours of my time to help fill grocery bags or interview clients, help clients to their cars, or just say a kind word to do what Jesus has commanded us to do—love our neighbors. I am serving in my own community!"

Patchwork Pantry is truly grateful for the support from Virginia Mennonite

Conference congregations. Contact the pantry at patchworkpantry@gmail.com or learn more at patchworkpantry.org or at facebook.com/patchworkpantryva/.



Jennifer Ulrich serves with Patchwork Pantry and resides in Harrisonburg, Va.

Northern Virginia Mennonite Church serves the homeless

By ROBERT C. COLUMBIA

When thinking about service projects to help others, one frequently thinks of traveling to faraway lands, places that popular culture tells us have a serious poverty problem and are in need of brave and bold foreign missionaries. While that sort of activity is helpful, it sometimes distracts us from the work that is needed right here in our own community.

Northern Virginia Mennonite Church has been participating in a countering-hypothermia project with FACETS, a coalition of churches of various denominations in the Fairfax, Va., area. It works to mitigate the problem of homelessness during the cold winter months.

As a small church with only a few dozen members, we have often wondered what we can do to help. We found this opportunity to serve in our community and help make a tangible difference.

We are located near Old Town Fairfax on two major bus routes, and have found a calling in serving as a pick up and drop off

point where people can catch rides to emergency shelter locations. These shelters are frequently located in areas that are much more inconvenient to public transportation. Our centralized location near the middle of

space available is a blessing when one is facing harassment, freezing temperatures, and exhaustion. We also have caring members available to help guests with simple things like filling out a job application or charging a phone, difficult things to do “on the street”.

Being in an area without a strong Mennonite presence, we have been blessed by the cooperative spirit of our own members and others as we work together to fulfill a calling to love and serve others.

When we are faced with a substantial need with limited resources to fulfill that need, we have to start somewhere and with something. Often, that somewhere is right here and that something is very close to us.



Robert Columbia stands in the NVMC kitchen and dining area. He serves as a host for homeless guests during the two-hour period when they gather and wait for transportation to another church that provides overnight lodging for a week.

Photo courtesy of Earl Zimmerman

Fairfax County means that we are close to other Fairfax-area churches.

Our ministry is simple but substantial. We offer a place to come in from the cold, and to access our facilities and refreshments in a safe environment. Simply having this



Robert Columbia serves the homeless through Northern Virginia Mennonite Church, Fairfax, Va.

Park View Mennonite Church hosts annual MCC School Kit assembly

By LISA MAST

Many members of Park View Church are involved in community volunteering through agencies such as Gift and Thrift and/or congregational activities. We have also become involved in an annual Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) School Kit assembly drive since 2008, when Dorothy Logan’s small group first promoted the idea of a school kit “blitz.”

In 2008, just over 1,000 kits were put together. Since then, the annual total has grown more than 50%, with a record of 1,683 shipped to MCC in 2015. These are distributed to some 15 countries.

While the project is now promoted mostly by Park View’s Mennonite Women group, members of Community Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg Mennonite Church and Weavers Mennonite Church also participate.

Tom Matheny produces many of the cloth containers on his sewing machine at home, and has over 400 already on hand for use in next fall’s contribution. The colorful drawstring bags hold four notebooks, eight lead pencils, 12 colored pencils, a ruler and

School Kits continued on pg. 6



Participants at Park View Mennonite’s MCC School Kit drive work together in an assembly line. Photo: Lisa Mast

School Kits continued from pg. 5

eraser. Special offerings collect funds for quantity purchases of the supplies.

Assembling the kits has become a significant congregational event, usually held on a Sunday afternoon in late summer. Park View's foyer and library become a production room for all ages, with multiple assembly lines each contributing their part to the finished kits. On occasion this has also become an international gathering, including adults and children from the Islamic Association of the Shenandoah Valley, along with EMU's Center for Interfaith Engagement.

In addition to the kits, Park View's Mennonite Women have been long-time assemblers and contributors of quilts and comforters for MCC relief as needed around the world. Prompted by the Syrian refugee crisis last fall, they joined with the Weavers and Harrisonburg women's groups in a one-day "comforter blitz," producing 15 comforters for distribution through the Harrisonburg Area Refugee Resettlement Agency.



Park View Mennonite Church's foyer is transformed into an MCC School Kit production facility, with multiple assembly lines. A significant annual event for the church, many volunteers from other Mennonite congregations and other groups also participate in the drive. Photo: Lisa Mast

A number of the women's group leaders had the joy of participating in an October event at the Children's Museum in downtown Harrisonburg, meeting children and families who were visibly grateful to receive these simple gifts in their process of settling in.



Lisa Mast is Interim Youth Program Director at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.

Becoming the hands and feet of Jesus

Waynesboro Mennonite Church works with area refuge ministry WARM

By SARA BETH MUMBAUER

Standing at the serving window of Springdale Mennonite's kitchen with my youth group, I was greeted with smiles and words of appreciation as 27 guests walked through the door, arriving from wherever they had been that day.

Conversation flowed easily, then quieted as announcements were made. Men respectfully took off their hats for prayer

and waited for women to go through the line before they got their food. I was amazed by our guests' politeness, perseverance, and the trust that they put both in God and those who were offering them help. This was but one of the times I have witnessed my congregation coming to the aid of "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40).

Springdale Mennonite Church, in Waynesboro, Va., hosts the Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry (WARM) for a week each year. Following an incident involving a mentally ill homeless person, the community reached out to see what could be done to minister to the local homeless population.

Led in part by Howard Miller, pastor of Waynesboro Mennonite Church, WARM was founded in January of 2012. The founders of WARM created a multifaceted solution to help the local homeless population; a thermal shelter, a house for women and children, assistance with house ownership and re-housing options.

Currently the thermal shelter rotates among sixteen area churches. At each

location, guests are fed spiritually and physically as they are offered nightly devotions, warm meals, and beds.

Springdale hosted the shelter from February 15 to 22. During this time, fifty-seven church persons served and volunteered in some way, contributing over 575 hours in ministry to homeless guests.

In addition to hosting WARM's thermal shelter, church members serve weekly meals at Disciples' Kitchen, compete on interdenominational softball teams, gather roadside trash in the church's neighborhood, and sing at the local hospital.

Springdale Mennonite seeks to transform our community by breaking down barriers through service and relationships, showing Jesus' love to each person with whom we come in contact.



Sara Beth Mumbauer attends Springdale Mennonite Church and is a sophomore at Eastern Mennonite High School.



Eastern Mennonite Seminary: empathy to challenge rhetoric

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

The community at Eastern Mennonite Seminary strives to be responsive and empathetic to national and global world events, even as ministering continues in our local community and among the many congregations in which our students work.

In response to a national rise in anti-Islamic rhetoric during December, Professor Emily Peck-McClain suggested that the seminary community express their “support, care and love to our neighbors at the local mosque in Harrisonburg.”

For three days, material was set out and about 20 notes collected. Peck-McClain delivered them to the mosque, where she met with two women and a child. One of the women was not a member of the mosque, but had come for the same purpose, to show support; the other woman accepted the letters with gratitude.

Dean Michael A. King observes that “amid the inflammatory rhetoric so common today in culture, church, and politics, any expression of a point of view can become one more source of polarization. If there are ways to offer light rather than more heat, I suspect they include reaching out directly with words of support,



A seminary student writes a note in solidarity to the local mosque in Harrisonburg. Courtesy of author

empathy and compassion to persons harmed by harsh actions or rhetoric. I was pleased that members of our seminary community exemplified this when they wrote letters of support to the local mosque amid a surge in anti-Muslim speech.”

Service is a key component of seminary studies. Students participate in internships in congregations, hospitals and non-profit

organizations. Spiritual Life Week events include a community service project, such as preparation of MCC relief kits.



Lauren Jefferson is Editor-in-Chief of Eastern Mennonite University's Marketing Department.



Family Life Resource Center staff, first row from left: Elroy Miller, Andrea Bieber, Harvey Yoder, Alisha Morse, Marie Bradley. Second row: Mark Sensabaugh, Shon Tucker, Dana Blauch, Terri Adamson. Third row: Hilary Bierly, Crystal Horning, Darlene Keller. Courtesy of Terri Adamson

FLRC: counseling for hope, health, healing

Family Life Resource Center (FLRC) is a nonprofit counseling agency meeting the behavioral health needs of individuals, couples and families.

We offer counseling services, educational and support groups, consultations with churches and other organizations, employee assistance programs, and public programs. We also provide resources to churches, businesses, and community groups. Working from a Christian faith perspective, clinicians at FLRC are committed to helping people pursue health and wholeness as individuals and in their relationships.

FLRC is counseling for hope, health and healing – for all of life!

Mennonite Women of Virginia to host Annual Missions Event

Women of all ages are invited to a delicious dinner—prepared by the ladies of Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va.—on Thursday, May 5, at 6:00 p.m.

This Annual Missions Event will also recognize the National Day of Prayer. Share in the joy of chatting with friends from all around Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Following dinner we will begin the missions gifting process, where you can participate in reaching out to mission workers around the world with your financial gifts of love and care. Come prepared to select an item or two from the list of mission needs (\$25 and up) and offer these gifts to mission workers to encourage and sustain them in their ministry. (The missions needs list will be available prior to this event.)

MaryBeth Heatwole Moore will give a meditation. She and her husband Chris were led to adopt two deaf children. This journey, in turn, led them to begin and lead a faith community that gathers in their home. Signs of Life Fellowship is a place where deaf people can see the gospel of



Mennonite Women enjoy the 2015 Annual Missions Event at Mt. Clinton. Courtesy of Dianna Lehman

Jesus Christ in their own language, sometimes for the very first time.

Following the meditation, we will have our mission gifting process and close the event around 8:30 p.m.

For those coming from a distance and who prefer not to drive home late, you are invited to take advantage of our “bed and breakfast” opportunity, staying in a local woman’s home on Thursday night at no charge.

To reserve your place at the dinner table (by April 25) or to make arrangements for an overnight stay (no fee for either one), please contact Dianna Lehman, MWV Missions Needs Secretary, at 540-810-2706 or by email at dianna.lehman@vmmissions.org.

The Executive Committee of Mennonite Women of Virginia welcomes you to this special event, and looks forward to your participation.

VMRC staff and residents team up to serve the community

By MAUREEN PEARSON

With a mission dedicated to caring for older adults, it seems natural that staff and residents of the Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community volunteer in their local community.

Their community service has been expanding in recent years. VMRC residents and staff participated in the 2014 United Way Day of Caring where they were assigned to paint and clean at the Roberta Webb Child Care Center. Roberta Webb was a former resident at VMRC.

“We were thrilled to give back to the organization that bears her name and carries on her legacy of educating children,” said Betsy Hay, vice president of Wellness & Community Based Services at VMRC.

In 2015, the VMRC team volunteered at First Step, a shelter for victims of domestic violence.

VMRC currently has about two dozen staff and residents volunteering twice a month to deliver Meals on Wheels in the



Kate Renalds of VMRC volunteers at the Roberta Webb Child Care Center during the United Way Day of Caring.

Courtesy of Maureen Pearson

neighborhoods surrounding its campus. Five VMRC residents volunteer with Big Brothers Big Sisters’ “Grand Bigs” program which pairs them with students at Waterman Elementary School. The residents visit the school twice a month to read, encourage and support their “littles.”

“There are so many people in our community who need some kind of help;

the sad part is a lot of people in our community don’t even realize it. I didn’t until I started helping with different United Way programs,” said VMRC employee Rosie Heinemann.



Maureen Pearson is Public Relations and Media Liaison for Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community.



The Eastern Mennonite School Syria Prayer Vigil Planning Team (from left): Luke Hertzler '16, In-Kyoo Hwang '16, Karina Pidrouchniak '16, Bradley Bontrager '16, Stephen Lowe '16, Joseph Harder '16, Larissa Graber '16, and Deanna Byler '16 Photo: Elwood Yoder

Eastern Mennonite School students host prayer vigil for Syria and refugee crisis

By ELWOOD YODER

Stephen Lowe (Eastern Mennonite School Class of 2016) is a young man of vision. He has a unique gift for coming up with ideas and then seeking help from others to implement his plans and carry them through with practical details.

Since 10th grade when Stephen began leading songs in chapel, both teachers and students have come to realize the leadership gifts he carries in our student body.

Last fall, when the Syrian refugee crisis was at its worst and much in the news, Stephen had an idea to conduct a 24 hour prayer vigil for refugees fleeing Syria.

Stephen brought his idea for vetting by the National Honor Society and school administration. After receiving enthusiastic approval from both groups, a committee of seniors went to work in order to make the vision a practical reality.

On January 29-30, participants in the Vigil of Prayer for Syria and the Refugee Crisis settled into the school building, beginning at seven on a Friday evening and ending 24 hours later. There were three worship services, hymn sings, and a prayer-through-art event facilitated by art teacher

Barbara Gautcher. A highlight of the vigil was a sermon from J. Daryl Byler (EMS Class of '74), who is the Executive Director of the EMU Center for Justice and Peacebuilding. From years of experience living in the Middle East and a lifetime of learning how to pray, Daryl helped attendees understand why we pray.

"Prayer helps us remember who God is," Byler stated. "It helps us remember who we are, it helps us remember who our neighbor is, and prayer helps prepare us for action."

Byler cautioned his listeners at the prayer vigil to not expect immediate results from hours of prayer. But the week after the event, Stephen Lowe became aware that sluggish peace talks about the Syria refugee crisis started up again in Geneva, Switzerland, at almost the exact moment the vigil ended.



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

ADOPTED PERIL AND PROMISE IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

 **VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE ASSEMBLY**

**JULY 21-23, 2016
PARK VIEW MENNONITE CHURCH
HARRISONBURG, VA**

Mark your calendars and plan to attend Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly this summer.

Guided by Scripture from Ephesians 2 and the Old Testament story of Ruth and Boaz, speakers, worship leaders and workshops will explore themes of being adopted into the household of God, with the promises of God's enduring presence and grace, and the challenges or perils of working together as one people from diverse backgrounds and circumstances for the benefit of God's kingdom.

Hosted by Park View Mennonite Church, the Thursday evening to Saturday noontime event will incorporate delegate meetings, reports, missional stories, singing, worship, and opportunities to learn through workshops.

More information will be coming soon. Online registration will begin in May. We hope to see you there!

UPCOMING VMC EVENTS

Faith and Life Commission meeting, April 15, Lindale Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

Small Church Big Impact seminar, addressing challenges/opportunities of small and rural congregations under 100 members, with speaker David Boshart. April 16, 9 am to 5 pm, Shady Oak Fellowship Hall, Harrisonburg.

Conference Council meeting, June 10-11, Shady Oak Fellowship Hall.

VMC Assembly: "Adopted: Peril and Promise in the Household of God," July 21-23, Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

When lightning struck: a pastor's journey to his calling

By MARVIN LORENZANA

The story goes that on July 2, 1505, Martin Luther was returning to his university on horseback after a trip home. During a thunderstorm, a lightning bolt struck near him. Terrified of the possibility of death and divine judgment, he cried out, "Help, Saint Anna! I will become a monk!"

For pastor Armando Sanchez, this story is very similar to an experience he had one summer day in 1997 at a local soccer field when he was 28.

As was customary on a Sunday afternoon, he was getting ready to participate in a game with a number of friends when out of the blue they all noticed how a dark, menacing cloud slowly came upon the field.

Suddenly a powerful bolt of lightning from the dark cloud struck the ground, knocking Armando and two of his friends down.

After a few seconds, Armando regained conscienceness. After checking himself for blood or wounds, and realizing he was alright, he then went to check on his friends. He was astonished to discover that the bolt of lightning had directly hit and killed one young man. This experience changed Armando's life forever.

Veronica, his wife, had been attending church for a number of months before the incident took place. Armando had resisted getting involved in church. His excuse was

that he was too committed to the sport he loved to let something else get in the way.

After what happened that day on the field, however, Armando started to reconsider. *Perhaps God has a higher calling for my life.*

He remembered that his now dead friend had, for a number of months before the fatal event, refused to seek God. He claimed that he was too young to commit to something that serious.

Armando decided to join his wife and began to attend church regularly. The very first time at church, God's presence so overwhelmed him that he could do nothing but cry his heart out, asking God for forgiveness.

"Nobody had to say anything to me, I just knew that God was there and that he had a claim on my life. I couldn't resist him anymore," Armando said. During those early days after his conversion experience, he was discipled in faith by Pastor Linden Rohrer from Calvary Mennonite Church.

Five years later, Armando became the youth pastor at their congregation. After a series of difficult transitions within the church, Armando became the lead pastor. Today that congregation's name is Enciende Una Luz (Turn On a Light) and about 30 families attend any given Sunday.

For thirteen years Pastor Armando has given leadership and vision to this missional community of disciples of Jesus. The church is actively involved in a number of ministries with the purpose of reaching out to their neighbors in northeast Harrisonburg, Va.



Pastor Armando Sanchez sings with the worship team as his congregation, Enciende Una Luz, worships. Photo: Marvin Lorenzana

They are very intentional in how they make disciples of Jesus. They have a strong visitation ministry with an emphasis on pastoral care and evangelism, and are in the process of developing a married couples ministry.

In 2011, Armando decided to join Virginia Mennonite Conference via the Mennonite Hispanic Initiative (MHI).

"I was looking to belong to something greater than our own congregation. I was also hoping to find access to resources such as theological education for me and my leaders. I found those resources in the Anabaptist Biblical Institute (IBA)," he explained.

Currently Armando and Veronica are part of a "learning huddle," where other Latino leaders are coached into a more missional understanding of the church.



Marvin Lorenzana is Latino Ministries Coach for Virginia Mennonite Missions.



Enciende Una Luz worships together in praise and singing. Photo: Marvin Lorenzana

Joseph Shenk: missions and service enabler

By ELWOOD YODER

Joseph Shenk's (1938-2005) unique leadership style helped create a missions climate at the Weavers Mennonite Church. Shenk facilitated, encouraged, and led members of the historic congregation to get involved in local outreach and overseas ministries. With able lay leaders, Shenk helped the congregation break out of its tight multi-generational family systems, and gently stoked the fires of mission and service that had long been burning in the congregation.

Joseph Shenk and his wife Edith worked as co-pastors of the Weavers congregation from 1986-2002. Joseph gave leadership to mission, service, and pulpit ministries, while Edith worked at visitation and educational ministries. The Shenks, who came to the congregation as former missionaries in Africa, built on decades of missions vitality at the historic congregation.

The church-wide Mennonite Board of Missions had general meetings at the church three times in the twentieth century. The Home Mission Board of the Middle

About ten years into his ministry at Weavers, Michael Martin came to Joseph with an idea and a dream. Martin asked if Shenk would encourage the congregation to launch a missions endeavor to Mexico.

Shenk quickly caught Martin's vision and promoted the trips, urging the congregation to help finance them, and allowed time for reporting after each of the trips. Twelve missions trips later, between 1997 and 2008, most families in the congregation had sent members to Mexico to engage in relief and evangelism work.

Shenk inherited a sturdy set of by-laws when he began pastoring in 1986. Through the work of former Lead Pastor Clyde Kratz and an Elder Team, the congregation revised its bylaws, allowing Shenk and the congregation to forget about structure and use their newly formed Mission and Service Commission to think creatively about mission and outreach.

Shenk and others at Weavers took the 1985 goals of the Mennonite Church, called Vision '95, and wove them into the fabric of the congregation. In 1993, Joseph Shenk



Joseph Shenk, 1993. Courtesy: Edith Shenk Kuhns

there was acute need. That same year, a short-term mission team from Weavers went to Trinidad and Guyana.

During the Shenk pastorate in the mid-1990s, creative Easter dramas involved many in the church and drew in hundreds, and the congregation blended praise style music and hymns in worship each Sunday.

Joseph and Edith Shenk served the Mennonites of Tanzania for over two years following their pastorate at Weavers. While in Africa in July 2005, Joseph was struck and killed by a truck. Shenk's servant-style leadership pattern, learned in Africa and implemented at Weavers, helped create a climate of outreach and missions that touched many lives in the Harrisonburg congregation and in East Africa.



Weavers Mennonite Church members on a missions trip in Miguel Hidalgo, Mexico, in 2001, with local friends and partners. Courtesy of Yvonne Martin

District (1893-1963) was supported and financed by the Weavers Church, and by the 1950s, the church gave heartily to the Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions, which was formed in 1919.

and Myron Blosser gave leadership to implement LIFE (Living in Faithful Evangelism.) Shenk and his youth pastors promoted youth mission trips, including Mennonite Disaster Service projects where



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Laying down our life for a friend

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



John, the Gospel writer, indicates that great love is demonstrated by laying one's life down for a friend. (John 15:13)

A friend is someone that cares about you. A friend seeks your wellbeing; makes sacrifices for you and your mutual relationship. The dictionary definition includes the concept of a trusting relationship and the capacity to be fond of the other.

Volunteerism is also about friendship, perhaps not with a specific person, but connecting a passion for a specific type of social concern which impacts real people. It is a call for me to lay down my life for another.

I spent the majority of my vacation week in March this year with Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) in Griffithsville, W.Va., participating in a bridge building project.*

On my recent vacation, I could have traveled, worked in my wood shop, rode my bike, or merely watched unending news on TV. Deciding to volunteer instead, I learned to know new people, participated in a project that alleviates the suffering and hardship of others, and experienced an overwhelming sense of goodwill.

To lay down one's life is not about physical dying, but giving up something precious for the good of another.

While working on bridges, I learned about several families who experienced the impact of floods in 2015. The bridge from the road to their home was washed out. Some of the individuals had medical conditions for which access to the bridge could be a life and death scenario, and warranted immediate attention. I worked with persons from Virginia Mennonite Conference, the Old Order Mennonite community, and Mennonites from Ohio and Kansas.

Empathy is an important part of friendship, the ability to understand another person's experience and feelings. In order to be a good friend or volunteer, some form

of identification with the person or social concern must be at the heart of our emotional experience.

Harvard Business Review recently published an article on the limits of empathy. The article highlights that an organization can overlook misconduct of a friend or employee when their focus is upon loyalty vs. fairness. As we navigate the ways we lay down of our lives for friends, there are possible dangers that need discernment in any relationship.

We are concluding the season of Easter when we commemorate that Jesus laid his life down for us. In his death and resurrection, we experience new life through Christ, and have an immeasurable hope about the way the world can be reconstructed for the good of the whole of civilization, not just one nation, one person, or one culture.

We are participating in the Kingdom of God—a kingdom built on Jesus Christ, established through voluntary association, cultivated through friendships. Participation demonstrates a high degree of empathy for persons within the community of faith, but more importantly towards all people.

Laying down our life for a friend—that is the Easter story! It is our story, lived out continually from generation to generation. May we not grow weary in telling the story and demonstrating its power through life and work!

*Learn more about the bridge project at: mds.mennonite.net/projects/westvirginiabridges/ and wvvoad.communityyos.org/cms/resilientlybridgingthegap



Four persons from VMC worked on the bridge alongside others: Ed Rissler (third from left), Rod Burkholder, the regional MDS coordinator (fourth from left), Clyde Kratz (center, with sign), and Joe Arbaugh (in purple hoodie).

Photo courtesy of Rod Burkholder