

## As delegates gather, VMC outlines misconduct policy work ahead

By CLYDE G. KRATZ

At Virginia Mennonite Conference's Winter Delegate Assembly on February 4, delegates engaged in worship, reflected on the mission of the church through a presentation by Dr. Art McPhee, met Eastern Mennonite University's new president, heard reports from Virginia Mennonite Missions and other agencies of VMC, wrestled with ongoing issues of polity, were updated on the findings of and response to the D. Stafford & Associates report, and voted with regret to release a congregation from membership.

Held at Waynesboro Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va., the delegate session commenced after a period of worship, when Dr. Art McPhee spoke on the "Mission of the Church." His presentation reviewed the historical framework for the mission movements and the way in which historic experiences of the Early Church informed the way mission develop. He highlighted how the participation of the church in the mission of God is the most important framework for the twenty-first century believers.

Dr. Susan Shultz Huxman, the ninth President of Eastern Mennonite University, shared her vision for the university as EMU celebrates its one hundredth anniversary this year. While highlighting EMU's numerous achievements, she acknowledged the challenges that Mennonite higher education is now experiencing. She looks forward to preparing youth and young adults to lead and serve in a global context.

Aaron Kauffman, President of Virginia Mennonite Missions, presented an overview of the challenges and opportunities that exist in leading a mission focused agency of the church. While there is a slight decline in congregational giving, there has



Conference delegates respond around tables to questions generated by the agenda. Photo: Jon Trotter

been a significant increase in individual support that comes through direct donations to Virginia Mennonite Missions and the numerous support groups that sustain mission workers through prayer, fellowship, and financial support. There remains a strong commitment to planting churches in North America even as new mission endeavors are emerging in overseas locations.

As Virginia Mennonite Conference continues to navigate the turbulence of social change, I introduced a Polity Task Force to the delegates, which was authorized by Conference Council at its meeting last September. This six-member group will review the authority structure of VMC, and will make recommendations that seek to provide clarity to how authority is exercised at the various levels of the Conference structure, including congregational decision-making, and to clarify our mutual understandings. The task force will seek to complete their work in one year, then make key recommendations to Conference

Council. The work will be coached by David Brubaker, a leadership consultation expert.

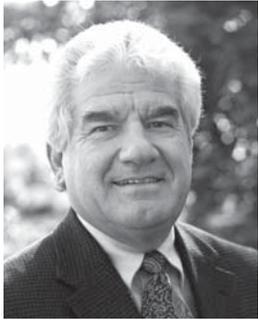
While the turbulence largely has been focused on individual and congregational responses to same-gender marriage issues, the core questions relate to the level of autonomy that congregations have on matters of faith and practice.

I also updated delegates on the conclusions of the D. Stafford & Associates (DSA) report, the relevant timeline of events, the key themes of the investigation, and the next steps for VMC. There are several mandates that Mennonite Church USA has identified for the Conference to carry out. VMC and Northern District Minister Aldine Musser will walk alongside and provide support for Lindale Mennonite Church and its leaders as they process the findings and recommendations of the Mennonite Church USA Executive Board representatives.

**Winter Delegate Session** continued on pg. 3

# A time for Conference self-examination

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



Self-evaluation is always difficult. Self-examination of church organizations is even more difficult and complicated. There is history and

practice—*how we have always done things*—and leadership often has an interest in putting the organization's best foot forward.

If only we always had the attitude of the Psalmist. "Search us, O God, and know our hearts; test us and know our anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in us, and lead us in the way everlasting" (139: 23-24).

So what are we doing in Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) to shine a light on our policies, practices or attitudes that may need to change?

During this time of examination and testing in our Conference, leaders of VMC are committed to finding our way forward in response to The D. Stafford & Associates Report released November 25, 2016. (For more news related to this Conference-initiated investigation, its findings and recommendations, see [virginiaconference.org/2017/02/vmc-responds-dsa-report/](http://virginiaconference.org/2017/02/vmc-responds-dsa-report/)).

To state briefly, the report found that Virginia Mennonite Conference does not currently have adequate policies in place to respond—in a timely manner—to credentialed leaders in the Conference who have abused their power of person or position. This lack of clear policy leaves churches and their members, within and outside the Conference, with a trail of pain and confusion to sort out in some cases.

The report also concluded that Conference leadership failed to adequately support congregations and church leaders experiencing difficult times, and did not respond in an adequately caring and pastoral manner to those victimized by church leaders.

These critiques are painful but necessary. They give VMC an opportunity to step back and face our "sin of omission," our failure to respond in a caring and pastoral way to those in pain. They provide church and Conference leaders an opportunity to learn more about how the abuse of power, organizational silence and victim-blaming punishes those who were preyed upon, as opposed to our being what the church should be—a place where victims feel safe and can come for support, healing, restoration, and even reconciliation where possible.

These critiques provide us with an opportunity to write policies that hold leaders accountable for attitudes and behaviors unbecoming to God's church and those who participate in God's church.

To that end, VMC is collaborating with Mennonite Church USA and FaithTrust Institute ([faithtrustinstitute.org/](http://faithtrustinstitute.org/)), a church consulting agency, to complete the ministerial credential review process. We are committed to writing human resource policies and procedures that more clearly detail how Conference leadership responds promptly to churches, pastors and victims in situations of misconduct where leaders have hurt persons in our churches in emotional, spiritual or sexual ways.

"Show us your ways, O Lord, teach us your paths: guide us in your truth and teach us, for you are God our Savior, and our hope is in you all day long" (25:4-5). May we share the Psalmist's desire for truth and clear guidance.

## Pastoral transitions

**John B. Myer** ended his role as pastor at 3:16 Christian Community, December 19, 2016.

**Marvin L. Kaufman**, pastor in Allegheny Mennonite Conference, in retirement moved to Virginia and served as interim pastor at Beldor, Crossroads and Lynside congregations, passed away February 16, 2017.

**Emmanuel "Manny" Martin**, retired pastor, passed away February 17, 2017.

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# Walking with survivors, holding space for pain and hope

By JACKIE HIEBER AND ROSS ERB

Faith communities have a unique opportunity to be agents of healing and hope for survivors of sexualized violence. Though history reflects frequent shortcomings in our responses, we are not bound by the past.

There are concrete steps people of faith can take. One of the best predictors for long-term traumatic impact is how the victim was responded to at the time of disclosure: Were they believed? Were they supported? Did they have access to community resources? Those are things that any one of us can start to give.

From there, we simply walk with them, holding space for each survivor's unique journey. There are other specifics that we can still improve upon: we need to be willing to repair when we make mistakes, we need to tap into the wisdom of survivors, and we need effective accountability for offenders, a larger conversation in itself.

But the core role each of us can play, even as we continue working out the rest, is to honor each survivor's journey. See them, hear them, and bear witness: to pain, to hope, and to whatever else may come.

What often gets in the way of victim-centered responses is that much of the work begins internally. When sexual violence is made known, it reminds us of our own vulnerabilities.

**“The best thing we can do...is to prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place.”**

We deeply hurt and grieve for victims, but there are often other emotions, too. We might fear for ourselves, our loved ones, and our faith communities. We lose our sense of safety and trust, because if this can happen to someone else, it could happen to us, too. We grieve for what we thought we knew of the offender and the way our worldview shifts. We even, at times, grieve for the offender themselves.

The emotions are complex and at times feel ugly, and in the face of that, it can seem easier to pretend things didn't happen or to blame other people than to sit with those vulnerabilities. Those feelings aren't wrong; they're human. But we can't let them drive our actions. Instead, we name them for what they are and then step forward in courage to continue supporting survivors.

Ultimately, the best thing we can do while honoring the experience of survivors is to prevent sexual violence from happening in the first place.

The reality is that even the best-handled response still leaves wounds on all sides, and it could never undo the harm

of victimization. If we are to truly reduce harm, we must work to be proactive in preventing sexual violence and in looking out for one another.

That means engaging the conversation, acknowledging that sexual violence happens even within our own communities.

It means being willing to speak up when we feel unsure about someone's behavior, just to say, “This makes me feel uncomfortable. Can we talk about it?”

It means naming and intervening in any abuse of power, even if it hasn't yet risen to the level of a crime or formal misconduct.

And it means becoming hope-based, rather than fear-driven: talking positively, amongst adults, teens, and even our youngest children, about healthy sexuality and healthy relationships, so that we might hope for our children's future rather than fear for it.



Jackie Hieber is Administrative & Prevention Coordinator at the Collins Center, Harrisonburg, Va.



Ross Erb is Child Advocate at the Collins Center, Harrisonburg, Va.

## Winter Delegate Session cont'd from cover

VMC is committed to abide by the Mennonite Church USA directive to utilize an outside organization, Oregon-based FaithTrust Institute, in both the formation and implementation of a Ministerial Credential Review process. This process will take some time.

Several other mandates will occur in conversation with FaithTrust Institute as soon as possible, including updating policies and procedures for associate pastoral staff to report concerns to conference leadership without passing through a congregation's lead pastor, and how the Conference receives those concerns, and reviewing current VMC policies for alignment with



Dr Art McPhee gives a presentation to delegates on The Mission of the Church. Photo: Jon Trotter

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Love is a verb

“Love is a Verb” is the theme of Mennonite Church USA Convention this summer in Orlando, Florida.

## Striding toward the future

By ERVIN STUTZMAN

Several months from now, many of us will head for Mennonite Church USA's biennial convention in Orlando, Florida. At least one feature—the Future Church Summit—will be brand new. After a short delegate session for essential business, more than three hundred additional people will join the official delegate body to begin a process of imagining an Anabaptist future for Mennonite Church USA.

The Future Church Summit will not feature speeches or reports presented from the top down, but an open space to generate ideas from the bottom up. Consultant Catherine Barnes of EMU's Center for Justice and Peacebuilding is guiding the process, working alongside convention director Glen Guyton and a diverse design team. While it will not be possible for every voice to be heard in the meeting room, we are trying to ensure the summit is as representative and inclusive as possible.

If you are passionate about the future of Mennonite Church USA and want to participate in the Future Church Summit, go to [convention.mennoniteusa.org/future-church-summit/](http://convention.mennoniteusa.org/future-church-summit/). There you can discover how to add your voice to an energized discussion about the way we desire to follow Jesus together as Anabaptists in the 21st century.

I invite people from all across Virginia Mennonite Conference to register for the Orlando convention, with programming for all ages—including youth, young adults



and families with young children. I hope to see official representatives to the Delegate Assembly from every congregation. We've shortened the time frame for the meeting by one day to make it more convenient for those who have difficulty getting off work. To make it more affordable, we're offering a 50% rebate on registration for congregations who've not sent a delegate to the assembly for the last three conventions.

Over the past few years, delegates have spent significant energy debating our church's stance on controversial social issues. This has magnified our differences and caused painful divisions. The Future Church Summit is not an attempt to minimize these differences or ignore the real pain among us. We simply recognize that something must change if we are going to have a future together, and we hope to discern what that means.

I believe the Future Church Summit will lead to 1) a deeper capacity to listen to each other and live fruitfully together in the midst of our diversity 2) greater trust and meaningful relationship-building as we follow Jesus together, 3) a deepened understanding of what it means to be church together, 4) a common commitment to priorities that will guide our decision-making, and 5) a deeper understanding of ways to be a peace church that shares the good news of Jesus in our communities. With God's help, may it be so.



Ervin Stutzman is Executive Director of Mennonite Church USA. He lives in Harrisonburg, Va.

## The value of boundaries

By TERRI ADAMSON

We've all heard the phrase, *So much to do, so little time*. To some, this can mean we just have so many wonderful things to do, we just cannot squeeze them all in every joyful day we have.

But to others, this can be a very real struggle. Many people have difficulty responding to needs or desires of other people at the expense of their own and then suffer from the chaos that comes from a life without proper boundaries.

Physical, mental and emotional limits are necessary for self-preservation and key to ensuring that relationships are mutually respectful, supportive and caring. These boundaries help preserve our integrity and they help us take responsibility for how we are treated by others.

A person with healthy boundaries is able to take responsibility for their own lives and allows others to live theirs. The goal of boundaries is to make sacrifices for people when appropriate, but never in a destructive manner. Being kind and gracious is not an open invitation for others to drain our emotional resources.

Weak or unhealthy boundaries leave us feeling vulnerable, overwhelmed and helpless. Over time, these negative feelings tend to cause us deep emotional pain that can lead to dependency, depression, anxiety and physical illness.

Boundaries teach us to accept one another as being different yet still valuable. Healthy emotional boundaries mean you value your own feelings and needs and you are not responsible for how others feel or behave. They allow you to let go of worrying about how others feel and places accountability squarely with the individual.

Learning and experiencing appropriate limits with others can help you avoid unnecessary stress and enjoy the peace God wants you to experience.



Terri Adamson is Clinical Director of Family Life Resource Center, Harrisonburg, VA.

# Helping youth establish healthy boundaries

By KINLEY SIMMERS

When thinking about boundaries, we have to get past thinking of them as something negative. We need boundaries to protect ourselves. When working with youth and parents, the number one thing you can do for parents is to make sure their youth is safe, and for the youth is that they feel comfortable in a setting.

What can we do to make sure to meet everyone's needs for comfort and safety? The power of three people is huge. Youth are more likely to talk and share if there are others in the group. If you have to meet one on one, do it in a public space out in the open.

In my first year as a youth pastor, I tried to attend sports, plays, concerts etc. for my youth. While these are very important things in a youth's life, they don't help build a relationship.

I decided to begin meeting with one or two youth for dinner or breakfast at a restaurant. I make contact with both the youth at church and also the parent so that we are always on the same page. We are at a public place, and we can share with each other. We are able to meet and talk about life and how things are going.

Teenagers must trust that you are transparent and genuine in your interest in their life. Youth need spiritual guidance and want to ask questions and want someone to listen but also respond. Eating with my youth gives me an opportunity to share my spiritual journey with them. If we want them to grow we must feed them through God's teachings. Teens love to eat and they love to also talk when they believe someone is listening. You are building a relationship and helping them build one with Christ.

When thinking about boundaries, it is important to remember the equal value of how parents feel, how youth feel, and how you feel as the youth worker. But the most vital component about working with youth is to make sure Jesus is always present.

# Preventing sexual abuse in the church through Safe Church

By JON TROTTER

At least six Virginia Conference congregations, and a number of churches from other denominations, have worked with the Collins Center to implement a program known as Safe Church to set policies, structures, and personnel in place to prevent child sexual abuse.

Conference congregations Park View Mennonite Church, Community Mennonite Church, Early Church, and Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church, as well as former Conference congregation Shalom Mennonite Church, have joined with the Collins Center within the last three years to begin the Safe Church process. Crossroads Mennonite Church and Weavers Mennonite Church are, through May of this year, being guided through the process.

Church by church, the program is empowering and equipping adults to play the primary role in the prevention of child sexual abuse, which affects one in three girls and one in five boys before age eighteen.

The Collins Center notes that 85 to 90 percent of sexual abuse occurs within the child's "safe world"—at home, school, church, sports, scouting and other activities. Too often, "church" and "sexual abuse" are paired in the news due to criminal activity rather than effective prevention work.

How does the Safe Church process begin? Teams from each congregation meet together six times over the course of a year to learn how to detect and prevent sexual abuse and to respond quickly when warning signs are present. Participating churches are offered guidance on the creation of new or improved policies, with



best practices to protect children, education for congregants, worship resources, a retreat for adult survivors, mandated reporting training for staff and volunteers, and healthy boundary curricula for children and teens.

Originating in Lancaster, Pa., Safe Church now has a national reach. The Collins Center, serving Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, is one of ten national sites now trained to offer this groundbreaking sexual abuse prevention program to local faith communities, creating safe havens in churches where adults are committing to keeping children safe.

Congregations in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham community who are interested in the program should contact Jackie Hieber, Prevention Coordinator, for more information at [jackie@thecollinscenter.org](mailto:jackie@thecollinscenter.org) or call (540) 432-6430.

*Safe Church program information courtesy of [thecollinscenter.org/prevention/safe-church-program/](http://thecollinscenter.org/prevention/safe-church-program/)*



Jon Trotter is Communications Manager for Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Photo: Grace Mennonite youth with youth pastor Kinley Simmers on a trip. Courtesy photo



Kinley Simmers is a youth pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Lacey Spring, Va, and a middle school teacher.





Conference Moderator Elroy Miller guides the delegate session through its agenda.  
Photo: Jon Trotter

**Winter Delegate Session** cont'd from pg. 3

Mennonite Church USA's official policies and procedures documents. A timetable was presented for implementing a ministerial misconduct policy applicable to lay leadership, and also offering (and requiring) ethics/boundary training for lay leadership.

Moderator Elroy Miller reported to the delegates that he had received two resolutions and two correspondences, some in favor of a more tolerant approach to applying the *Forbearance Resolution* to a pastor that performs a same-gender marriage, and others calling for the Conference to honor the discernments of the MC USA and VMC concerning membership expectations that are identified in the *Membership Guideline Resolution* and the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*.

Conference Council will review these statements and resolutions at the Conference Council meeting in March 2017.

The Delegates voted to release from membership, with regret, Mountain View Mennonite Church, Lyndhurst, Va. The congregation voted almost unanimously to withdraw from Virginia Mennonite Conference. Earl Monroe, pastor of the congregation, worked with Southern District Minister Beryl Jantzi over several years as he expressed concerns about the direction of Mennonite Church USA and VMC.



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

# Mennonite Women of Virginia announces 2017 events

## Annual Missions Event

**May 6, 2017**  
**First Mennonite Church**  
**Richmond, Va.**

Moriah Hurst, Associate Pastor at Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., will be the featured speaker.



She served in Australia with Mennonite Mission Network, primarily working with a young adult training and discipling program. She has also served

as a youth and young adult pastor. She is passionate about serving the church long-term in ministry to young people.

There will be bus transportation offered with pickups in Harrisonburg and Waynesboro, and an opportunity to spend the afternoon at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens.

For more information and to register online, visit [virginiacommunity.org/partners/mennonite-women-of-virginia/annual-missions-day-event-2017/](http://virginiacommunity.org/partners/mennonite-women-of-virginia/annual-missions-day-event-2017/)

## Annual Prayer Breakfast

**July 22, 2017**  
**Park View Mennonite Church**  
**Harrisonburg, Va.**

Coinciding with Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly, the Annual Prayer Breakfast will feature Theresa Crissman,



who serves in the Shenandoah Valley with Virginia Mennonite Missions. Theresa and her husband Seth, help churches

share the Good News with children in their local communities. They oversee and mentor several young adult Kids Club staff during the summer and desire to expand Kids Club to meet a wider need in the community.

Kids Club shares the Good News of Jesus, equips congregations to engage in their communities, and creates a space to learn how to share God's love to the world. As local volunteers are trained, partnering congregations increase their competence and ownership of the ministry.

## Annual Women's Retreat

**November 10-12, 2017**  
**Natural Bridge, Va.**

Elaine Maust, a pastor, writer, spiritual director and business woman, will provide our input sessions for this year's retreat. Elaine and Duane, her husband and business partner, are co-pastors of Jubilee Mennonite Church, Meridian, Mississippi.



The retreat theme and details are still in process. Mark your calendars and plan to attend this Christ-centered time of fun and fellowship with women from around the Conference.



**Mennonite Women of Virginia**  
*Empowered Women  
Creatively Building  
Christ-centered  
Relationships through  
Fellowship, Leadership,  
Mission and Service.*

# EMU to address sexual misconduct policies and training

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

Eastern Mennonite University President Susan Schultz Huxman launched an Action Plan Steering Committee on January 26 to continue to ensure that the university is meeting federal regulations and is implementing policies using best practices, to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual misconduct.

The appointment of the steering committee is the first of four actions implemented by Huxman in response to the Board of Trustee mandates after receiving the D. Stafford and Associates (DSA) report.

In addition to the work of the steering committee, Huxman announced three other actions to address best practices in the education and prevention of sexual misconduct on campus: development of a full-scale Title IX training program for faculty, staff and students; the implementation of a



Photo: EMU

campus climate survey; and a review of the effectiveness of EMU's Title IX coordinator position, policies recommended by DSA.

The DSA report found that EMU has "extensive and detailed policies" addressing sexual discrimination, but these policies are found in disparate places; their recommendation was to create one comprehensive institutional policy.

"We are eager to move forward," Huxman said. "I was pleased by the focus and commitment at our first meeting. This group of full-time EMU employees

collectively has the requisite special expertise in all facets of education around sexual violence and discrimination. I have full confidence that this committee will prepare a report that takes us beyond compliance, one that helps us to live into our mission and our Anabaptist values of peace and reconciliation."



Lauren Jefferson is Editor-in-Chief of EMU Marketing and Communications.

# VMRC: Art displays explore various cultures without travel

By SUE GEORGE

Art and education make for lifelong learning and appreciation of other cultures, as residents at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community know well.

Several different public exhibits are offered at the Park Gables Gallery throughout the year. The gallery features art by local and national artists. Many of them have ties to the Shenandoah Valley and produce art especially relevant to Harrisonburg.

"Because the space is so inviting, we are able to attract diversity in artists as well as audiences," said VMRC Arts and Education Program Manager Lolly Miller.

"Most artists will tell you that they create for other people to see. When you have a gallery space like Park Gables, an



Lolly Miller. Photo courtesy of Maureen Pearson

artist's work actually gets seen and admired and sometimes even purchased."

From March 3 to April 1, the 6x6x30 show, sponsored by the Spitzer Arts Center, is being exhibited. *The Seven Pillars of Mennonite Theology* by Kathryn Fenton, an EMU graduate, ended in February.

The Shenandoah Valley Lyceum, presented by VMRC, offers four informative, educational and cultural programs. The Lyceum was created through a donation in honor of Karl and Millicent Stutzman.

One of the four programs each season is a musical artist or group who performs and discusses their work.

"I pay attention to cutting edge topics, research them and try to find diverse speakers to address them. For example, we did one on immigration—which is very relevant to Harrisonburg," said Lolly.



Sue George is a freelance writer residing in Harrisonburg, Va.

# Grateful for 100 years as a Conference ministry

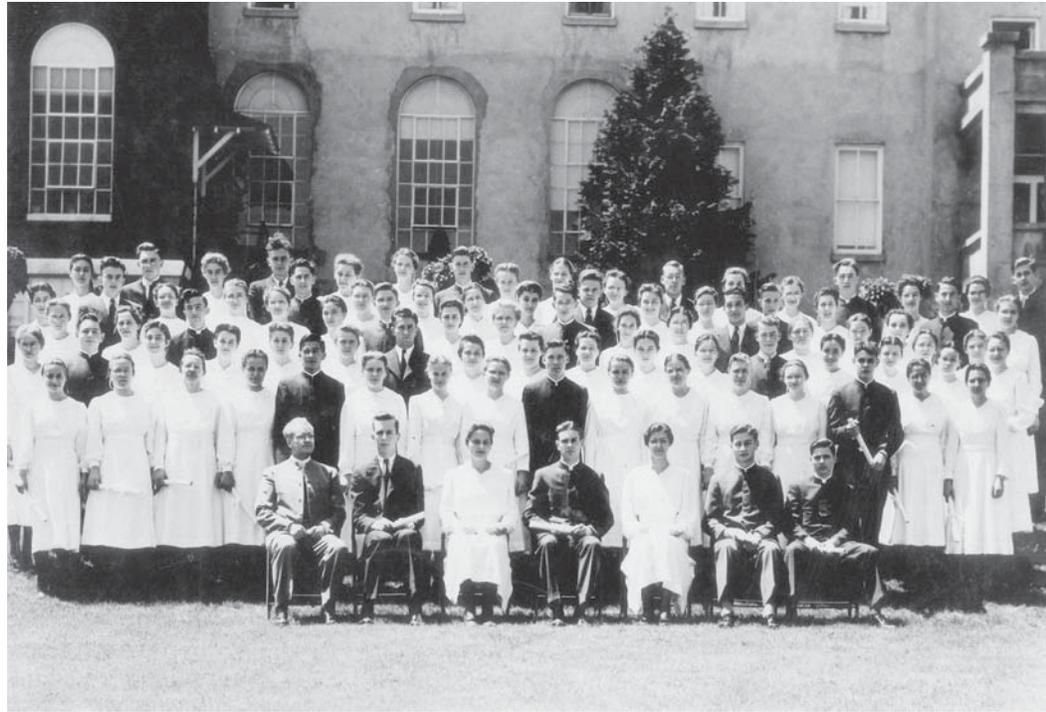
By ELWOOD YODER

It seems to have been God's providence that Mennonite leaders established Eastern Mennonite School (EMS) in the good location of the Shenandoah Valley one hundred years ago. Other places had been seriously considered, but visionaries in Harrisonburg found money and a facility where they could begin the new school in October 1917.

We are grateful at EMS that our school has the Virginia Mennonite Conference designation of "Conference Ministry." This means that the school originated from within the Virginia Mennonite Conference. We have a separate structure and board of directors, but the primary constituency for EMS remains Virginia Mennonite Conference. It has been a century of vital connection to the church, clearly evident from the beginning, that has kept our school strong.

I have been searching through a hundred years of EMS photos in order to make five historical panels for our Centennial Homecoming this fall. When I find a clear slide or an outstanding print from an earlier decade, I rejoice. Looking through a hundred years of photos gives me a new sense of gratitude that EMS has been such an important Conference Ministry.

I was elated to find an exceptional black and white print of the high school class of 1945. The photo, which has remarkably good resolution and sharp detail considering its age, reveals that only a few boys



The 1945 class of Eastern Mennonite School. Photo courtesy of EMS Archives

were seniors that year at the end of World War Two. M. T. Brackbill was the class adviser, and their motto was *Thy Will, Not Mine*. I showed it to my World History students, EMHS juniors who are the school's one-hundredth class, and they immediately appreciated the outstanding photo.

I recognized four men in the 1945 class photo who are still living, one of whom is my wife's uncle, a long-term missionary in Ethiopia with his wife and family. All four men were ministers of the gospel. As I look

at school photos from the past, I am reminded in each scene of the legacy of faith transmitted over the years by this Conference Ministry. In the midst of teaching faith, offering excellent academics, and creating a unique worldview based on kingdom principles, I pray each year that our graduates will make a difference for Christ like the distinguished class of 1945.

Please join in our 100th year celebration October 13-15, 2017. We're holding our Centennial Homecoming jointly with EMU this fall. There will be reunions, a worship service, special recognitions, concerts, and a grand Touring Choir reunion with Jay Hartzler, Director. Help us make a difference for the next 100 years by sending your children as students, supporting our Annual Fund and Financial Aid programs, but most importantly, praying for us.

We are grateful to have been a vital Conference ministry during the past ten decades and are grateful for your confidence in our quality Christian education.



The 100th class of Eastern Mennonite School, taken January 2017. Two members of the class are fifth generation students from their families to attend Eastern Mennonite School, and three more are the fourth generation. These are juniors at EMHS, and will graduate in June 2018.

Photo by Andrew Gascho



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

# Combating human trafficking with the hope of Christ

By CAITLIN TICE

New Creation is a local nonprofit that counteracts human trafficking through prevention, awareness, design, and most importantly, the hope of Christ. Many people know us through our New Creation Shoppe on the south end of Harrisonburg, where we sell items made by those around the world who are either at risk and vulnerable to being trafficked, or survivors of trafficking who are in the process of restoration and recovery.

New Creation, though, is much more than an adorable Shoppe with handmade goods. It is a place where countless hours each year are spent supporting the livelihoods of rescued women from around the world. Like a beam of light shining in the darkness, myself and our team at New Creation get to be a part of saving lives, through prevention education, community awareness, and the support we provide to many from our Shoppe.

The world of human trafficking is a deeply rooted, dark and dangerous industry that affects millions of lives around the world. Simply stated, human trafficking is the exploitation of one's vulnerabilities, something we all possess. Webster's Dictionary defines human trafficking as an



Caitlin in the New Creation Shoppe.  
Photo courtesy of Caitlin Tice

organized criminal activity in which human beings are treated as possessions to be controlled and exploited (as by being forced into prostitution or involuntary labor). It is a \$150 billion industry, more than



The Shoppe sells products made by women rescued from trafficking, including the mirror (top photo) and jewelry.

Photos courtesy of Caitlin Tice

the profits of Google, Nike and Starbucks combined. In the US, the average age of a girl entering the sex trade is 12. The average lifespan of a girl in the industry, if not rescued, is only 7 years.

To me, sharing hope (the hope of Christ) is the most important thing we do. There is some extreme darkness in this world, and trafficking is definitely one of the things that contributes to the darkness.

But we have hope in Jesus, and it is our job to bring the kingdom to those around us. Hope needs to be shared with everyone: the victims, the pimps/traffickers, the johns/buyers – even when we think they don't deserve it. Darkness never has to be the end of anyone's story, it can always be the beginning if the right people are there to share hope.

I'd like to share one such story about a girl I'll call Erica, who was trafficked in Harrisonburg, Va. Our director, Sabrina,

started working with her in December 2015. When they first met, Erica was very discouraged, frustrated, and down. She felt pretty hopeless. Within a few months after being rescued, Sabrina saw a complete turnaround in her outlook. She is now positive and believes in herself – accomplishing things she never thought she'd be able to do. She's hopeful. She has since completed her Certified Nursing Assistant training and wants to pursue becoming a registered nurse. Most importantly, Sabrina was able to share the hope of Jesus with her.

All this is possible because we have been able to start the conversation, in this case, with our local law enforcement agencies about human trafficking. The officer assigned to her case saw her as a girl with a future. He did not treat the case how he might have previously, because he recognized the signs of trafficking and knew there was more to her story.

We are thankful for what God is doing in Erica's life. We also thank God for those who enable the ministry of New Creation and those who work against trafficking by purchasing items from the Shoppe, learning more about their work, or getting more involved. Support is also welcomed for Caitlin, who serves New Creation as a worker through Virginia Mennonite Missions.

New Creation also wants volunteers— if interested, please email [volunteer@newcreationva.org](mailto:volunteer@newcreationva.org)



Caitlin Tice serves at New Creation as a USA Ministries worker of Virginia Mennonite Missions.

# Two votes against the prohibition of musical instruments

By ELWOOD YODER

Since its inception in 1835, Virginia Conference has lodged authority for practice and belief with congregations, districts, and Conference Assembly delegates. It has been a symbiotic relationship that has depended on personalities of leaders and the time period under consideration.

For most of Conference history, congregations have been the primary setting for determining practice, with faith and theology shaped by bishops, district councils, and Conference actions.

But beginning in the 1920s, and for the next twenty years, Conference decisions were made in a more centralized way, a move initiated by ministers who had moved to Harrisonburg to work at the new Eastern Mennonite school.

A story from this era reveals that long-term Virginia Mennonites both accepted the changes brought in by leaders who had not grown up in Virginia, but at the same time continued with practices and models of operating that reached back into the

early 19th century Virginia environment.

Mennonites in Virginia had long enjoyed playing and keeping musical instruments in their homes, but a handful of the ministers associated with the new school, who came from other states where bishops exercised greater authority than in Virginia Conference, stood opposed to instruments in homes, the school, and churches. They favored keeping *a cappella* music only, as they hoped to stem the tide of worldliness.

At the Conference meeting in August 1927, delegates voted on a resolution that opposed having musical instruments in homes and churches.

When a vote was called for, the ministers were asked to stand and show support for the resolution. Almost all the ministers stood in agreement. Then those who disagreed were asked to stand. After a moment of hesitation, two deacons stood and voted “no.”

With their “no” votes, Elias Brunk, 71, and Henry S. Holsinger, 53, made one of the more courageous votes in Conference history. Their “no” meant they believed that it was okay to have musical instruments in homes.

Within twenty years the pendulum swung the other way, and in 1947 the ministers of Conference voted to rescind the earlier resolution, and allowed instruments once again. Deacon Elias Brunk had passed away before the 1947 meeting, but Deacon Henry S. Holsinger, who had never given up his organ at home, was able to vote in 1947 to overturn the earlier resolution opposing musical instruments.

With the reversal of the instruments ban in 1947, and a reversal on the prohibition of radios in homes

at about the same time, congregations



Henry S Holsinger (1874-1969) and wife Elizabeth Cline Holsinger (1877-1968). Photo courtesy of Ed Miller



Elias Brunk (1856-1940) and wife Elizabeth Heatwole Brunk (1857-1928). Photo courtesy of VMC Archives

slowly began exercising greater authority for matters of practice and belief.

Bishops still led their districts and the Conference with significant authority in the 1950s and ‘60s, but in the seventy years since 1947, the direction for decision-making and authority in Virginia Conference has been increasingly lodged with the local congregation. This congregational model of governance, with assent and trust in Conference to give leadership, has been the Conference model for the majority of its 182 years.

With respect for denominational and Conference leadership, and with deep relational ties that create cohesive districts, congregations and individuals have found freedom to conduct kingdom work in Virginia, surrounding states, and mission initiatives around the world.



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

# Tamar, a victim of rape and injustice by inaction

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Sexual abuse can be found throughout the Old Testament.

In the second book of Samuel, chapter 13, there is a heart-wrenching story about Tamar, a

beautiful woman, the unbridled lust of her half brother, Amnon, and their encounter that led to her tragic rape.

Amnon was a son of King David. Tamar was the young man's half sister. Household customs arranged young men and young women in separate living quarters for their own well-being.

But the cunning plot of a friend of Amnon sets the stage for Tamar's defilement. The outcome of this tragic encounter of Amnon's misguided love toward Tamar turned into hatred.

King David was angered by his son's actions. He was pressured to punish his son by Tamar and her male relatives, yet he refused to act. Subsequently, the stage was set for revenge.

Two years after this horrific act, Tamar's brother Absalom plotted with servants and killed the rapist Amnon. Once again, King David failed to act, and more terror followed as Absalom was killed in an accident, seen as judgment for actions against King David.

The story of Tamar and Amnon is only one of many that demonstrate the ways women were subject to abuse.

Because of King David's inability to offer justice when he had the truth, overwhelming pain emerged and snowballed. David's failure to act justly directly led to more horrific acts within his family and caused serious problems that impacted the nation.

Virginia Mennonite Conference is developing leadership responses to allegations of abuse that occur within our

congregations. One center helping us do that is the Collins Center, in Harrisonburg, Va. This organization helps individuals who have experienced abuse, and guides leaders seeking appropriate responses to allegations of abuse within their congregation.

Some congregations have already taken important steps by developing and implementing the "Safe Church" program, a set of policies and practices to maximize the safety of children and youth. Besides a good legal and policy move, families attending these congregations know that their church takes sexual abuse seriously and is doing what it can to prevent it.

Already, Virginia Mennonite Conference has in place protocols for sexual misconduct by pastoral leaders, which were developed in 2003 and recently have been updated by Mennonite Church USA and VMC. The Conference has adopted these newer protocols.

However, our protocols for responding to members and friends of a congregation that engage in abusive behaviors has not been adequately developed. So we are partnering with FaithTrust Institute, an Oregon-based organization "working together to end sexual and domestic violence," to develop leadership responses that reflect best practices for victims, alleged abusers, and the community.

These leadership initiatives are well intended, but I recognize that they are coming too late in some cases. I recognize that numerous persons have experienced inadequate pastoral responses for their trauma and wounds of abuse.

As a church leader, I could have done more to equip pastors through formation, skills development, and best practice pastoral responses for victims of abuse.



I regret the pain and anguish that various persons have experienced by the lack of appropriate guidelines in this area of congregational life.

It remains my commitment to work with FaithTrust Institute to equip pastors and lay leaders of our congregations in this next year. Teresa and Dr. Lonnie Yoder will be trained in "Healthy Boundaries" by FaithTrust in May 2017.

They will be available to each district beginning this fall to train pastors, elders, and lay leaders in both understanding healthy boundaries and implementing best practices to prevent abusive situations.

It remains my hope that the body of Christ as represented by Virginia Mennonite Conference may grow into a faith community that offers healing and hope to people who have experienced various injuries that occur through abusive relationships.

As we live together, may we grow in truth-telling and grace-giving that sustains our faith community through the difficult experiences of life.

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

**Congregations:** Virginia Mennonite Conference Archives requests your weekly bulletins, which you may send monthly, quarterly or semi-annually, as well as past bulletins in many cases. Harold Huber, Archivist, can email your church staff directly with what he needs. Contact him at [harold.huber@virginiacommunity.org](mailto:harold.huber@virginiacommunity.org) or call (540) 432-4169.



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