



PATHWAYS

WALKING WITH THE MINISTRIES OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE



SPRING 2022
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The Blessing of Hospitality

By DON OSWALD

In August 2021, the United States armed forces pulled out of Afghanistan, prompting the evacuation of more than 123,000 civilians from that country. In the weeks that followed, over 15,000 Afghan refugees arrived at the Virginia military bases of Quantico, Fort Pickett, and Fort Lee. Their presence offered an opportunity to put into practice the words of Jesus: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

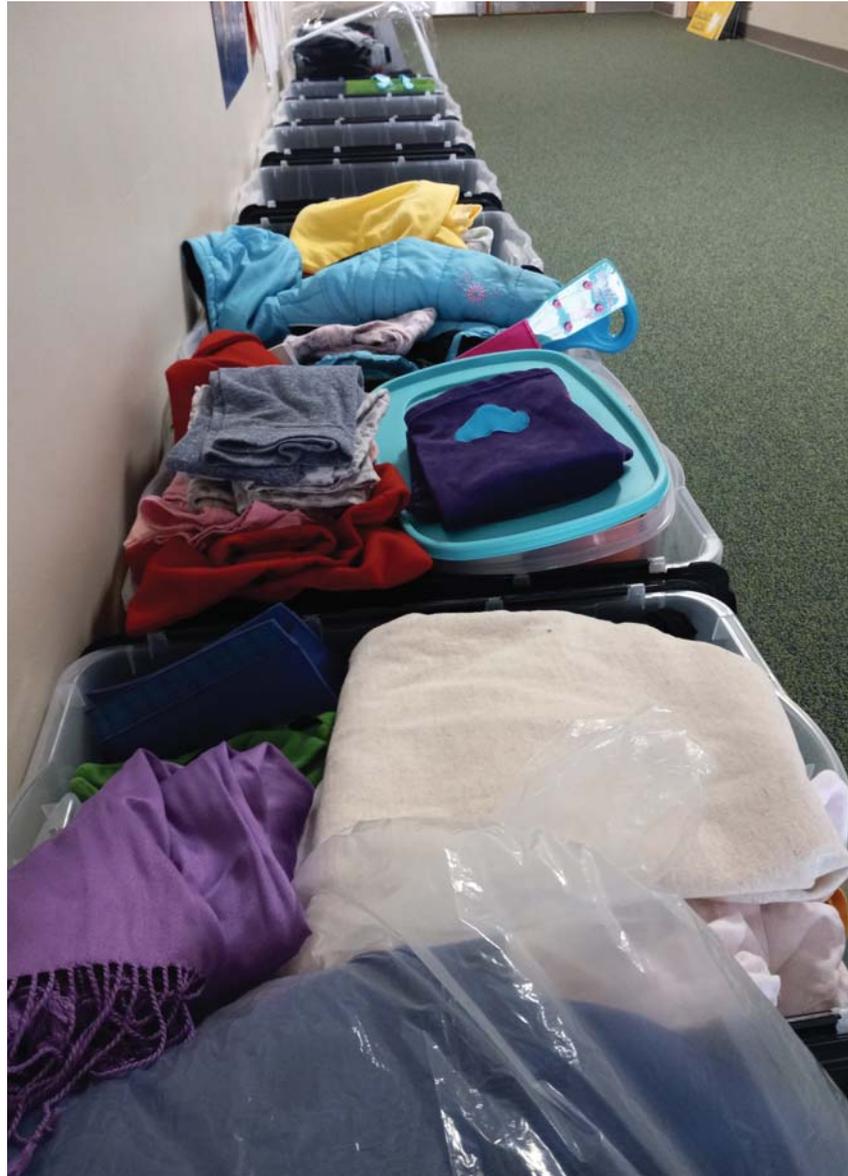
In October, members at First Mennonite Church in Richmond contacted the local International Rescue Committee (IRC) office with an interest in providing support to a newly-relocated Afghan family. The IRC is one agency providing refugee resettlement services in the Richmond area. A small group of FMC members formed a team and began raising funds to purchase household items and to subsidize rent. First Mennonite members and friends were very responsive to the appeal, and we were joined in this effort by members of Williamsburg Mennonite Church who also contributed a generous amount. Members and friends from the community also donated clothing, furniture, and other household items to equip a home.

The Aslami family left Afghanistan in August and were housed at Quantico, Va., for several months. Since the beginning of December, the family has been living in two suites in an extended stay hotel. In January, we met them for the first time (mother, father and eight children) and began our journey together. Since then, team members have been providing transportation for shopping, health care visits, and mosque attendance; assisting in the search for a home; and preparing to enroll the children in school. Consistent with the Afghan culture of hospitality, our contacts with the family invariably end with an invitation to tea, despite their limited living situation.

As of this writing, the family is anticipating a move-in date within a short time. The First Mennonite Church team is preparing to provide the house with furniture and household items and to assist the family in the move. The upcoming weeks will be occupied by community orientation, transportation, supporting English language learning, and getting the children into school.

The opportunity to walk alongside this family has been a blessing to us. We have benefited in many ways, including the gaining of a perspective on the lives of those affected by armed conflict, the further revelation of the nature and extent of our privileged lives, and the enjoyment of time with a roomful of active and enthusiastic children. We continue to learn more about how to respond to the needs of those who have experienced great trauma and loss as well as how to offer support that fosters self-determination and independence. Our hope is that we will be a welcoming voice in what must often seem like an incomprehensible situation. We look forward to our continuing engagement with this family.

Don Oswald is a member of First Mennonite Church, Richmond, Va.



First Mennonite Church members arranged for a box of donated clothing and toys for each of the children in the family. Photo by Jean Oswald

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Kratz Resigns as Executive Conference Minister



Clyde G. Kratz. VMC photo

Clyde G. Kratz, Virginia Mennonite Conference Executive Conference Minister, submitted a letter of resignation on March 22, 2022, to Sara Wenger Shenk, VMC Moderator. Kratz's resignation comes following the conclusion of an eight-month nonsexual ministerial misconduct process.

Virginia Mennonite Conference's Ministerial Misconduct Policy stipulates that when a complaint is against a conference minister, it must be filed with Mennonite Church USA. In the summer of 2021, four persons filed a nonsexual misconduct complaint against Clyde Kratz with Mennonite Church USA. VMC's misconduct policy then guided a process that involved an Investigation Team appointed by Mennonite Church USA, the VMC Faith & Life Commission officers, and an Appeal Panel appointed by VMC leaders.

The Appeal Panel's judgment is the final word in the misconduct process. Their determination, on March 15, was that Kratz "more likely than not DID engage in ministerial misconduct" on five charges:

- *misuse of power;*
- *violation of truth telling;*
- *breaking and misusing confidentiality;*
- *intentional deception and dishonesty;*
- *harming the leadership of another pastor*

Clyde's ministerial credentials had been placed on probation early in the process, which continues. The professional standard used throughout this process to determine ministerial misconduct is A Shared Understanding of Ministerial leadership: a polity manual for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA.

In a letter to conference pastors and delegates on March 16, Wenger Shenk, speaking on behalf of the VMC Conference Council, observed that the "Virginia Mennonite Conference family has been experiencing a crisis in leadership for months which some of us have been more aware of than others... We speak now out of a place of deep sadness," she wrote.

"We grieve for those who've experienced great harm because of Clyde's actions, for Clyde, and for those who are dismayed by this news because they have deeply appreciated Clyde's leadership."

She further noted that "What became evident through this many month long process, is that the responsibility for this crisis in leadership belongs to Clyde, yes, but also to a systemic failure of leadership. The investigators, having interviewed

44 witnesses [22 women and 22 men] from diverse theological backgrounds, a wide range of ages and a variety of districts within VMC, reported on widespread distrust, pain and anger in our conference. Conference Council has begun to reflect on why earlier calls for greater accountability...failed to resolve problematic leadership behaviors."

Wenger Shenk concluded: "As a conference family, we have much healing work to do, and I, along with Conference Council, am eager to do what we can to facilitate processes that will contribute to naming where breakdowns occurred, and how we might together rebuild trust and solidarity throughout our VMC family. We're aware that there are those who are only now learning about the misconduct complaint who may want to report their own experience of harm. VMC provides an opportunity for persons to be able to confidentially report, at this link: virginiacommunity.org/ministerial-complaints/"

NEXT STEPS FOR VMC

Conference Council is taking the following steps to open channels for healing in the Virginia Mennonite Conference family—and a season for revisioning a way forward.

Appoint a taskforce to guide a healing process

Conference Council agreed unanimously on March 31 to appoint a taskforce to guide a listening, truth-telling, lament and recommitment process. The purpose of the taskforce will be to design a process meant to create safe spaces for people to name where breakdowns occurred and to describe their experience of harm. At the conclusion of this process, they will design a service of lament meant to publicly name what went wrong, and to state VMC-wide and conference leader commitments to restore integrity and trust in conference processes.

A variety of qualifications are desired for persons who serve on the taskforce, among which are these: persons who listen well; are trusted to keep confidentiality; have family systems training; have experience and/or training in trauma and abuse awareness and prevention; healthy boundaries training; and familiarity with ethical expectations for ministerial leadership. Leaders are invited to nominate persons from VMC or beyond who they think could serve well on such a task force.

Interim conference ministry leadership

Conference Council agreed unanimously to appoint a person or team of persons to serve in interim conference leadership for 2-3 years (to be determined). The governing body agreed there is much work to do as a conference to address deep cultural problems that have contributed to this leadership crisis. Conference Council will seek an interim leader or leaders with a pastor's heart—someone who can contribute to needed healing, community building across divides, fundraising, encouraging persons for ministry, and helping the conference family envision a way into a vibrant future.

Group Sews “Peace By Piece” at Williamsburg

By KATHLEEN KENNEDY

Each week, and sometimes up to two or three times a week, a special group of like-minded individuals meets in the fellowship hall of Williamsburg Mennonite Church. They love to sew and to quilt, and most of all, to share their talents with others.

Prior to the pandemic, four or five women from the church and three or four from the surrounding community, came to sew and design quilts, cloth bags, and other fabric creations.

Around 2005, Lorraine Mooney started the group as an offshoot from a larger quilting guild in the area. “Peace by Piece” (PBP) reflects hope that their work might somehow contribute peace just as the small individual pieces of a quilt come together in beautiful wholeness. When word spread that the women (and one dedicated male quilter) were sewing for charity, the Lord provided indeed.

Quilters, crafters and seamstresses in the community opened their fabric stashes and a stream of donated supplies poured in. Soon a room in the church held shelves full of bright bolts and spools of color. As the group gained momentum, handcrafted items increased, created by “many hands making light the work.”

Participation in “Peace by Piece” is not just for the experienced quilter. Knotting of comforters can be learned in a minute. Working with a group makes the job go quickly and gives even the inexperienced a feeling of accomplishment.

It is gratifying to help produce something that will literally be a warm “comforter” for a refugee. Several persons from the church reached out to a woman in the community whose shop burned to the ground. A beautiful quilt helped express love and concern for her and she responded by growing in love for the Lord.

Another member invited her neighbor, who became a regular participant and grew in understanding of what it means to walk with the Lord.



The Williamsburg Mennonite Church (Williamsburg, Va.) “Peace By Piece” sewing group: Front row: Alta Blosser, Mary Jo Evans, Kay Smith and Lavonne Lehman. Back row: Millie Webb, Lorraine Mooney, Wilda Kruzinski, Kathleen Kennedy and Marion Delagrange.

In the background are quilts that were auctioned at the relief sale. On the table and floor are school kits and comforters ready to go to MCC in Akron, Pa., for shipping around the world. Photo courtesy of Lavonne Lehman

For the most part the creative sewing for charity has continued during the pandemic although on a smaller scale. Hundreds of masks were made, including 500 made by Kay Smith, who sewed from home. Profits from the sale of “PBP” items at the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale were reduced in 2020 but otherwise grew from \$4,600 in 2017 to \$10,100 in 2021.

When able to sew together, conversations are interesting and informative, exchanging practical advice and sewing techniques, with comfortable feelings that encourage the telling of family stories and personal testimonies of those who walk with God.

This has been a fun and natural way to relate to women in the community, making connections through a craft that members enjoy. But it is also an expression of faith that benefits loved ones and those in need. Besides learning new ways to make things, artistic abilities are developed, life-long friendships formed and faith in Jesus is shared.

Kathleen Kennedy is a member of the “Peace By Piece” sewing group at Williamsburg Mennonite Church.

Southern District Churches Resettle Refugees

By KEVIN GASSER

The Southern District of Virginia Mennonite Church consists of seven congregations scattered across Augusta and Nelson Counties. While divided by more than a few mountains and miles, we are finding that what holds us together is much stronger than the things that pull us apart. As I've heard said before, theology divides, while mission unites.

This leads me to reflect on our existence as an expanded body of Christ. What is the purpose of a district of churches, especially as we consider the changing landscape of a (hopefully soon) post-Covid society?

I believe that every congregation would do well to ask these questions, but we must not forget the need to continue to adapt as a district as well. I am a firm believer that we are stronger together, and I am interested in asking how we go about doing that in the most effective and faithful ways possible. How do we join in a shared mission here in Augusta and Nelson Counties?

The Southern District joins together in support of the ministry of Iglesia Shalom-Nuevo Comienzo, a Spanish-speaking congregation that meets at Waynesboro Mennonite Church. It has been encouraging to watch the ministry of Armando and Veronica Sanchez grow and develop in this community.

For instance, last year Iglesia Shalom partnered with Augusta Health to host a vaccination clinic where people were free to ask questions and receive explanations in their native language, hopefully reducing anxiety through a welcoming and engaging atmosphere.

In December, Iglesia Shalom began a women's ministry, and they continue to provide aid in the community, assisting new neighbors as they become familiar with local social services, such as the distribution food using emergency pandemic funds.

In a literal effort toward community building, Iglesia Shalom recently partnered with our district churches to re-

roof the house of a community member.

This is not, however, the only place we find our district coming together for a shared mission. The violent overthrow of Afghanistan in August of 2021 left millions of Afghans displaced from their homes, including more than 75,000 evacuated by the United States, many of whom have been resettled in new communities around this country.

In late 2021, word began circulating that the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Charlottesville was considering relocating some of these displaced people to the Waynesboro, Virginia, area, and they were looking for churches to help sponsor several families.

This seemed like an overwhelming task for any one church to take on. In addition to the financial costs, the sponsoring church would be responsible for providing transportation to and from meetings and appointments, helping to secure long-term housing and household items, and finding adequate employment for the families.

Thankfully, this didn't need to be done by any one church alone.

Two individuals from Springdale Mennonite stepped forward to provide leadership to this ministry and received training from the IRC on the expectations for sponsoring churches.

Springdale Mennonite Church held a pie fundraiser to begin accumulating the finances necessary to sponsor a family, and items were collected and stored wherever space could be found. Soon, other churches began collaborating with Springdale as they prepared to welcome these strangers, many of whom did not speak the language, and were not accustomed to rural living. Twenty-two Afghans, including eleven children, moved into temporary housing



Stock image: PxHere

in a Waynesboro hotel just before the beginning of the new year.

Those participating in this ministry began meeting with the Afghan families in early December, providing resources and introducing them to the language, culture, and life in Augusta County. Church members helped find housing and jobs for the Afghan families, and soon noticed a transition.

The anonymous people who had been forced from their homes months earlier had become more than a charity or opportunity for service. They had become friends, or, as the people of Springdale prefer, "They are our new neighbors."

Additionally, as of the first part of March, all of our new neighbors have found housing and employment, allowing them to further participate in the life of the community. Multiple churches, both within and outside of the Southern District, have contributed to these shared ministries. Furthermore, these ecumenical movements have not been led by the pastors alone, but by the lay leaders who saw a need and stepped up.

Perhaps we have learned through the community-building ministries of Springdale and Iglesia Shalom that ministry in a post-Covid world will begin from the ground up by building relationships and establishing connections around a shared mission.

Kevin Gasser is Southern District Minister and pastor of Staunton Mennonite Church, Staunton, Va.

DELEGATE ASSEMBLY 2022



Mennonite Church USA has announced the worship speakers, led by Dr. Samuel Sarpiya, for the Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, May 27-30, in Kansas City Missouri.

The Special Session of the Delegate Assembly will kick off on Friday evening with a worship service featuring storytellers from across the denomination. The speakers will share stories on the theme, “Emerging Through the Storms of Leadership,” based on their ministry experiences. The storytellers will be:

- Jeff Hochstetler, lead pastor, Berlin Mennonite Church, Berlin, Ohio.
- Katherine Jameson Pitts, executive conference minister, Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference, Portland, Ore.
- Sunoko Lin, pastor, Maranatha Christian Fellowship, Northridge, Calif.
- Anna Yoder Schlabach, pastor of worship and pastoral care, Assembly Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind.

“Worship will feature a variety of speakers who will inspire us as we start each day,” said Scott Hartman, MC USA director of convention planning. “Dr. Sarpiya, our keynote speaker, brings a passion for peace that is very contagious.”

Sarpiya, discipleship pastor at The Meeting House in Oakville, Ontario, Canada, will lead morning worship on Saturday, May 28, and Sunday, May 29. Sarpiya is an author, teacher, trainer, activist and coach for leaders who want to create a better world from the inside out using peace and nonviolence methods. He is also the founding director of the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict, Rockford, Illinois.

On Saturday, his message will be, “What Matters Most: For We Are God’s

Children Through Faith,” based on Galatians 3:23-29. On Sunday, his message will be, “The Way of Peace in Our Polarized World,” based on Hebrews 12:14 and Romans 12:1-2.

Also on Saturday, a panel of MC USA leaders will participate in a discussion on the theme, “Perspectives: Ministry in Context.” Marisa Smucker, Mennonite Mission Network’s senior executive for Ventures, will lead the panel, which will include:

- Jess Engle, pastor of worship, outreach and administration, Hesston Mennonite Church, Hesston, Kan.
- Vickie Pruitt-Sorrells, pastor, Lee Heights Mennonite Church, Cleveland, Ohio.
- Megan Ramer, lead pastor, Seattle Mennonite Church, Seattle, Wash.
- Aldo Siahann, pastor, Philadelphia Praise Center, Philadelphia, Pa.

On Monday morning, Dr. Malinda Elizabeth Berry and Rev. Dr. Sarah Ann Bixler will share a message entitled, “Great Expectations? Rejoicing and Mourning in One Body,” with a scriptural grounding in Ecclesiastes 3.

Berry is an associate professor of Theology and Ethics and chair of the History, Theology and Ethics Department at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. Bixler is an assistant professor of Formation and Practical Theology and associate dean of Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

For more information on the Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, including official documents, proposed resolutions, staff impact statement, webinars and more, please visit the Delegate Assembly webpage at <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/special-delegate-session-22/>.



Dr. Samuel Sarpiya

MC USA photo

Mennonite Church USA has released guidelines for allowable actions and procedures during its Special Session of the Delegate Assembly, May 27-30 in Kansas City, Missouri. According to the guidelines, delegates must submit suggested amendments to the proposed resolutions by Monday, May 6.

The purpose of the Special Session, as outlined in the Feb. 9 Official Notice to Delegates, is “to complete the 2019-2021 biennium resolution process. Delegates will discuss and vote on resolutions that were delayed due to the global pandemic.”

The May 6 deadline for amendments is “to facilitate a proper review of proposed amendments due to the limited time available at the Special Assembly.” The Resolutions Committee will prioritize proposed amendments that meet this deadline. The guidelines also provide instructions for making a motion, submitting and addressing amendments, initiating and tabling discussion, and adjourning the meeting.

Guiding the Vulnerable: The VMC Chaplain's Cluster

By PEARL HARTMAN

Call the Chaplain!" Those words may strike fear into the person who hears them said. "You mean it's that bad? Does it mean I'm dying?" Chaplains have a distinct role to play in times of crisis and fear. The past two years have held much of both of these aspects and the Chaplains in the Chaplains Cluster have risen to the occasion in many ways.

When covid first arrived, the elderly and medically fragile were at the highest risk. That meant an ever-evolving response, from changing worship service formats and a steep technological learning curve for chaplains, to doing all visits by phone in hospice situations.

Grief and uncertainty were a part of daily life as they had never been before. Chaplains were a life-line of care that attended to the spiritual concerns of those facing their own mortality and vulnerability.

There was the delicate balancing of keeping family safe while being present to those needing pastoral care. Drug abuse and overdoses went rampant and meetings could no longer be held in-person for those struggling with addictions. That meant finding creative ways to continue to reach out in whatever way possible.

The vulnerability of the disabled was accentuated by staffing challenges. Beloved residents grieved housemates who were their friends. All these factors have an impact on the chaplain offering the presence of Christ in their unique setting.

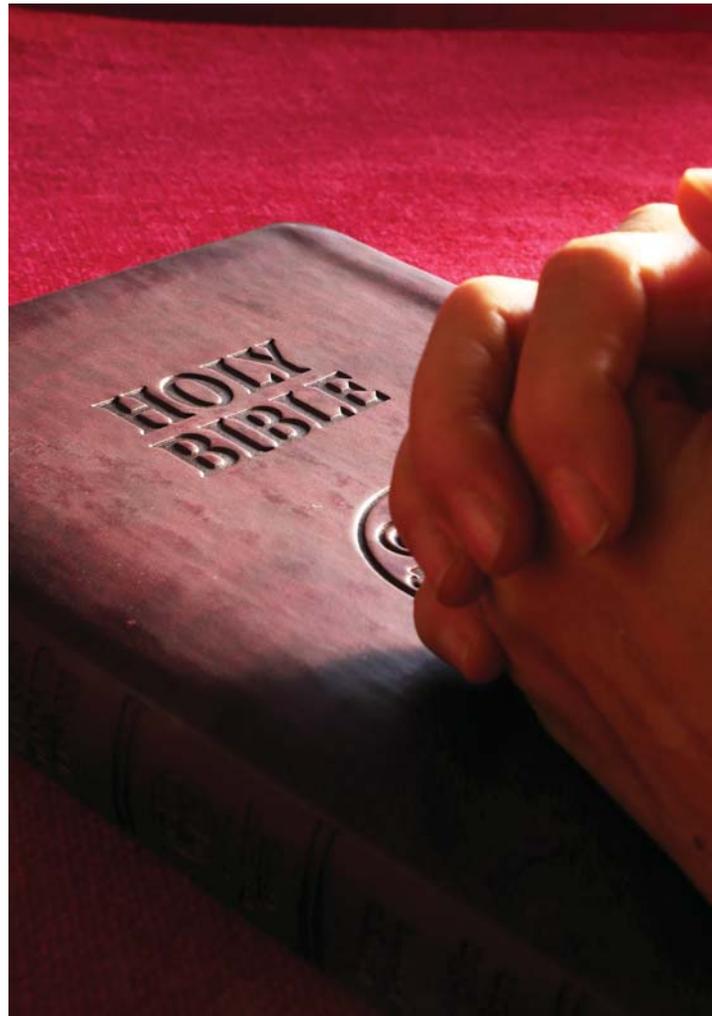
Because chaplains work in settings where confidentiality is protected by HIPPA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act), sharing stories is done with thoughtful attentiveness to

the privacy of the person's circumstances. We give each other general counsel if asked but we also do a lot of listening.

Chaplaincy is a specialized ministry and often the additional training of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is expected for the role. Part of CPE is to reflect on how the chaplain enters into a conversation with the person they are with. We do this more informally in the Chaplain's Cluster, asking for ideas or input on how to deal with a certain situation. Even though we have a variety of ministries within the cluster: the differently-abled, addictions, hospice, retirement communities, we find common ground.

Chaplains do work with end-of-life situations as well as daily life. A gentle, calm spirit is vital and each chaplain has developed that spirit in their own personal way. One chaplain reminded us of how important breath and breathing is. Chaplains spend time on a regular basis sitting with families, waiting as death comes to take their loved one. This is holy ground. It also calls for an attention to self-care as families grieve.

As we enter a new phase of life, post-covid, my prayer is that the Chaplain's



Cluster will be strengthened for their unique settings, that they will bring the light of Christ into whatever room they enter and that their ministry is blessed by the organizations they represent. They are truly a blessing for us as they minister in times of crisis and calm.

Pearl Hartman is Chair of the Chaplain's Cluster of Virginia Mennonite Conference.