



Ertell M. Whigham Jr., lead facilitator for the Credentialed Leaders Consultation on Developing Intercultural Competence, guides the conversation. He serves as a coach and administrator for Mennonite Church USA's Intercultural Development Inventory. Photo: Jon Trotter



Noel Santiago walks participants through the biblical story of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10:1-48. He used this passage about a faithful Gentile centurion, God making unclean things clean, and the Spirit coming upon Jew and Gentile alike. Peter said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." Photo: Jon Trotter

## Helping pastors develop intercultural competence

By ALDINE MUSSER

The term "white privilege" was not in my vocabulary or understanding while living in a neighborhood for 18 years, where whites were in the minority. In my faith community as a child, my Sunday School teacher and classmates were non-white. It wasn't until I thought about attending Hesston College that I recognized it was more possible for me to leave the city than many of my neighborhood friends. Economically there were similarities—my parents couldn't afford college and neither could my neighbors—yet I had an opportunity to get higher education and many of them did not.

Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) is striving to enhance bridge-building by paying attention to intercultural relationships and how we can do it better.

VMC sponsored a Credentialed Leaders Consultation on May 5 and 6, focusing on developing intercultural competence. Ertell M. Whigham Jr., Yvonne Platts, and Noel Santiago facilitated the meeting. On Saturday, there was a bilingual presentation, which covered the same historical, biblical and practical anti-racism material as Friday's presentation.

Clyde G. Kratz, VMC Executive Conference Minister, is committed to utilizing an assessment tool, the Intercultural Development Inventory, which measures intercultural competency, helps bridge differences, and strengthens inclusion. Part of a commitment for ongoing Conference engagement of pastoral leaders, Kratz hopes building competency in this area will

enhance the ministry capabilities of pastoral leaders.

Following are a few of my learnings or takeaways from the Consultation:

- Racism is race prejudice, plus power.
- There is systemic racism in our country and in our church.
- There is a call for the church to: move toward acceptance and adaptation instead of denial, have the ability to bridge diversity and inclusion, and work for justice for all.
- Our shared goal is to be transformed in our thinking and actions.
- We need to pray, asking for God's help for intercultural transformation.

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# Intercultural competence in VMC

By ELROY MILLER, CONFERENCE MODERATOR



**A**s a white male who grew up in a white, middle-class home, attended white Mennonite churches and benefited from white privilege, it's difficult

for *me* to make the case for increasing intercultural competence in Virginia Mennonite Conference.

I lived in a cross-cultural setting in Costa Rica for 27 months in my early adult years. I related to a number of persons of color at the colleges I attended and where I taught. Apart from that, however, it's been all talk: college and graduate courses, dozens of seminars over the years and 23 years of infusing cross cultural and intercultural studies in my university classes.

That does not make me an expert. In fact, the more I have studied and tried to comprehend cross-cultural and intercultural phenomena, the more I appreciate what I don't know. That's my confession.

I think the heart of the matter is that white, mostly rural, small town or small city Mennonites see the world from a very different set of lenses and understandings than our brothers and sisters in communities of color, and more often than not, from those in urban settings.

Most of us in the Mennonite church can't even begin to imagine what it means to see the world from the historical context of oppression, slavery and genocide. We can't imagine life experiences of servitude, powerlessness, suffering and deep loss. We forget that Jim Crow was anchored in law just three generations ago. Most of our remaining institutions are still anchored in prejudice and racism and controlled by white-privileged males.

Furthermore, we forget that most of the Christian church has not repented for the sins of its forebears. Many Christians actively promote the idea that America is and was founded as a "Christian nation," founded on Judeo-Christian values. But this

narrative overlooks and minimizes the reality of life in America for persons of color and indigenous peoples. While we are only starting to get a proper representation of this history, some actively resist it.

So what can mostly rural and small-city Mennonite churches in VMC do?

First, we acknowledge our sin of racism and white privilege. We repent and live in humility. We acknowledge that white privilege was and is still rooted in oppression, slavery and genocide.

As a starting point, I recommend reading Wikipedia about the Doctrine of Discovery, the triangular slave trade and Jim Crow laws. Read Conrad Kanagy's *Road Signs for the Journey, A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*, especially chapters 3-4. Reflect on Mennonite demographics and their implications for white privilege. Attend a class at a local collage or attend conferences on race, ethnicity and diversity in worship. Read Drew Hart's book entitled *The Trouble I've Seen*, Beverly Benner Miller's book *A Mennonite Church in Norristown* or William M. Kondrath's book *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences*. Explore MC USA's website on intercultural transformation and Doctrine of Discovery ([mennoniteusa.org/category/intercultural-transformation/](http://mennoniteusa.org/category/intercultural-transformation/)). Collaborate with other churches and bring leaders like Drew Hart, Ertell M. Whigham Jr, Leslie W. Francisco III, and others into our churches, learning intercultural competence and getting to know people of color and churches in urban settings.

If a small town Mennonite church is to become "missional across the street," and faithful to the Great Commission, it will need to be intentional and courageous. The Mennonite culture of yesteryear may be dying, and some are lamenting that loss. But how will churches in VMC become neighbors across cultural differences?

It's doable. The Pew Foundation study *On Choosing a New Church* found that 75% of respondents said they made their decision to attend a church after speaking to members of the congregation or speaking to friends and colleagues. We need to be ready to extend the hand of fellowship.

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# Empowering female congregational leaders to use their gifts

By KATHY HOCHSTEDLER

Entering ministry was not a calling that I would have imagined in my youth. But in 1989, when I was in my early 40s, I heard God's call, which led me into ministry with children, youth and families at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church (HMC).

A few years later, I was called to an Associate Pastor role there. Most recently, I served as the solo pastor at Big Spring Mennonite Church, Luray, Va.

God's call took me into relationships and challenges, joy and fulfillment I would never have imagined, including learning to know myself in a deeper way.

On the whole, I experienced affirmation and appreciation for my work at HMC and at Big Spring. Their strong support helped form my identity as a pastoral leader. For some members at HMC, it was acceptable for a woman to be commissioned for a specific role (i.e. Director of Children's Ministries), but they found it difficult to accept a woman being licensed or ordained.

There were adjustments congregational members needed to navigate, as well as accommodations I needed to make. I needed to honor and relate to all regardless of their views on women in ministry. I found it most helpful when my male pastoral colleagues and other congregational leaders advocated for me.

I recall the time when I was teaching the catechism class when a father went to the lead pastor requesting that his child be offered an alternative to baptismal preparation because he was concerned about a woman teaching that class.

After considerable deliberation, a male lay leader simply told him, *No. We accept women teaching our children's Sunday School classes at every age. It is part of*

*Kathy's job description. It is the way we function in this congregation.*

With this leadership support, their child participated in a very positive way and was later baptized.

So what have I learned about gender equality and mutuality in pastoral leadership? What would I say to other young women answering God's call to pastoral ministry? What would I say to male colleagues? What is the work yet to be done?

**Always be open to learning and growing as a disciple of Jesus, as a leader and a pastor.** Make conscious choices about spiritual practices that will keep you centered and growing as a child of God. Having a spiritual director is an extremely helpful practice!

**Women: Continue the work of owning your call, identifying your gifts and forming your identity as a pastor.** Be at peace with knowing that you do not need to be responsible for someone else's beliefs and actions, even when their actions may create significant challenges and even pain for you. Be ready to stand for what you know to be true, but do it with love.

**Men: Be ready to strongly support women in their pastoral roles,** treating them as equal partners in the tasks of ministry. Do not place women in token positions because she is a woman, rather for the gifts and perspective they bring to the work at hand.

**Make sure job descriptions are clear.** When challenging issues come up, know where you can go for counsel and help. All pastoral staff should have some



kind of support from a lay leadership group within the congregation and/or Conference.

**Women and men: Be aware of your power and the power of those around you.** How are we working in collaborative ways with others in the congregation (or on the pastoral team)? Who needs to be a part of decision-making? Who will be affected by decisions we are making and how do we hear their voice?

The dance of mutual respect and the honoring of one another's gifts is a reflection of the dance of the Trinity. The power of love, mutual respect and the power of forgiveness is the oil that makes our calling and work both fulfilling and fruitful. This will always be part of our ongoing work.

I dream of a day when gender will no longer be an issue, a day when the gifts of women and men will be identified and encouraged, called forth to serve in building God's kingdom here and now!



Kathy Hochstedler is a retired pastor. She resides near Harrisonburg, Va.

## Pastoral transitions (March-April 2017)

Eastern Carolina District grieves the loss of retired pastor and former oversight leader **Donald Leedy Brenneman**, who died March 11.

**Jeongih Han**, co-pastor of CrossWay Mennonite Church (formerly Stephens City Korean Ministries), Northern District, was licensed April 23.

Northern District grieves the passing of retired pastor **Marvin L. Kaufman**, who died February 16.

**Timothy "Tim" Kennell**, former pastor at Powhatan, Eastern District, transferred to Lancaster Mennonite Conference on February 21.

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

Harrisonburg District grieves the loss of retired pastor **Emmanuel "Manny" Martin**, who died February 17, and **Herbert Pellman**, former pastor of Mt. Vernon, who died March 16.

**Kinley Nelson Simmers** was licensed for his role at Grace Mennonite Fellowship on May 21.

**Samuel O. Weaver**, Northern District, approved for status change from active to retired, February 21.

**Shirlee K. Yoder**, approved for status change from active to retired, April 3.

# Two major steps for international church planters

By JAMES RHEE

When a person or family leaves their home country and enters a new and strange land, they encounter two inevitable tasks to overcome in the new country. The first is to file paperwork and get settled down with legal permission to live and work there. The second is finding ways to accomplish their vision successfully.

Getting legal permission to stay is primary because the vision hinges on the ability to put down roots and build relationships. This is often more complicated than it may seem.

In 2005, when I was a seminary student at Eastern Mennonite Seminary and desired to use my gifts and passion in church planting, I approached the leadership of Virginia Mennonite Missions to share my vision for church planting and request help. While talking about my vision and possible plans, it was mentioned that some foreign people used a church planting arrangement only to obtain legal permission to stay in the United States. I sensed that there were questions about my intentions.

I was frustrated by this assumption and what seemed to be a roadblock. How can church planting happen in the international or intercultural community if the underlying assumptions are incorrect?

Even after 10 years, I still vividly remember that moment of frustration. Whenever I feel I am losing my identity and passion for the vision I had as a church planter, I recall that moment. I think back to my initial vision.

While true that at the beginning of church planting, the most important thing for me was to find a way to stay and work legally as I began and continued a difficult church plant, I found it made more challenging because there was no organization to contact for these issues. Legal settlement and visa issues are things that only foreigners face, so many native nationals are somewhat ignorant about the complicated legal process and cost.

At the beginning of my church planting journey, I had a Ministry Support Team that met regularly. That is an excellent way to

**Intercultural Competence** continued from cover

- To bring about transformation in an institutional system, a team comprised of insiders and outsiders is needed. The Consultation also generated some questions that I think are helpful to ask ourselves in our ministry:

- What influence do I have to work toward intercultural transformation?
- Who is invited to the table when decisions are made?
- Do I know his/her story?
- How am I speaking into injustice?
- What is the will of God—what is good, acceptable and perfect? (Romans 12:2)
- In what ways am I bringing people from different cultures (ethnicity, race, gender, class, age, etc.) together with a mutual approach?

On his show *United Shades of America* on CNN, comedian W. Kamau Bell works to help people understand the side of the “other” in the hope that we can somehow find common ground. He interacts with a variety of cultures, always with respect.

In my ministry experience, focusing on relationships instead of gender bias or any other cultural difference, and respecting whomever I am communicating with has served me well. I have found it very helpful to be genuinely curious about other cultures and beliefs, while valuing my own.



Aldine Musser is co-pastor of Stephens City Mennonite Church, Stephens City, Va.



Members of CrossWay Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va. Photo courtesy of James Rhee

support new church planters, which I highly recommend. But in my case, I couldn't focus as well as I should have because the legal settlement issue was the primary thing to be solved.

Through my long 10-year journey, there were many unexpected difficulties, but I was so blessed by the Mennonite community, especially Stephens City Mennonite Church. Without the care and support they gave us, my family wouldn't be able to stay and continue our outreach to the Korean community effectively.

I suggest that Virginia Mennonite Conference initiate a support committee for new

arrivals experiencing intercultural complexity as they step into a foreign land.

If a person or family needs some help for the first steps of legal settlement and other intercultural issues, they could contact the committee first.

Mennonite Central Committee now has a similar project run by Saulo Padilla, one of the speakers at VMC's Assembly this summer.



James Rhee is a church planter and pastor of CrossWay Mennonite Church, based in Harrisonburg, Va.



Zion's Voice, a local gospel choir that was invited to sing at First Mennonite Church (FMC), Richmond, Va., last year. FMC intentionally engages difficult conversations and hopes to break down barriers. Photo courtesy of Ryan Ahlgrim

## A ministry of racial and cultural diversity

By RYAN AHLGRIM

One of the attractions for me coming to First Mennonite Church of Richmond was its ethnic and racial diversity. Though our small congregation is predominantly white, we have four African American families, a Haitian family, a Hispanic family, and nine inter-cultural and inter-racial families.

In my previous congregation, First Mennonite Church of Indianapolis, I had a goal of helping the congregation become more diverse. I persuaded an African-American seminary intern, who came from a different denominational background, to join our team as associate pastor.

When Treyvon Martin, an unarmed teenager, was murdered by a Hispanic neighborhood watch captain, she and I had serious conversations about this incident. I discovered that we saw it in significantly different ways. That led to structured congregational conversations about this incident, and then later about white privilege and race relations. These were not easy conversations.

In my Richmond congregation we are conducting a five-month Sunday school class on "Race in America" using two PBS documentaries and Bryan Stevenson's book, *Just Mercy*. The class is full, and the lively discussions always run overtime. Most of the leadership is provided by one of our newest members—an African American who is helping us to see many issues from an unfamiliar perspective.

To become a diverse congregation requires a biblical and spiritual commitment. We must believe that at the heart of the good news is the creation of a community that breaks down barriers and brings together the rich and the poor, as well as the brown, black and white. God desires all suspicion and division and prejudice to be overcome and reconciled. That can happen only if we worship and work together for Christ.

This necessitates a willingness to be very flexible. We all naturally assume that our way of doing church is the right way. But every culture does church differently and understands the Christian faith in different ways. We must learn from each other and be open to new practices. Recently a new family told me they did not celebrate Christmas, partly because of its secular and consumerist focus. We listened to them, and altered our own Christmas observances, removing practices and language that were consumer-oriented. The result was a more profound and biblical celebration of Christmas.

I value and honor the stability and traditions of our rural and small town churches. We also need the urban churches, and their ministry of diversity. Through them we may learn lessons of how to work together.



Ryan Ahlgrim is pastor of First Mennonite Church, Richmond, Va.



In congregational life, there are people who create especially challenging or difficult dynamics. We also recognize that congregational leaders may be among them.

## Pastoral Summit on challenging/difficult people



Lonnie Yoder

Virginia Mennonite Conference will again host a Pastoral Summit on Thursday, July 20, at Shady Oak (Weavers Mennonite Church) before Conference

Assembly begins. This resourcing event is for all credentialed leaders in VMC.

The theme, presented by Lonnie Yoder, is "**Challenging/Difficult People in Congregational Life...including Ourselves.**"

Every congregation includes individuals or groups who, from a pastoral perspective, represent unique challenges or difficulties. In this summit, we will explore helpful strategies for mutual relationship between such individuals/groups and pastoral leadership.

Furthermore, we recognize that pastors may *be* some of the challenging or difficult individuals involved, and are often not considered among this group of people. We will develop awareness around how each of us—as a leader—is a challenging/difficult individual in the context of at least one relationship.

There will be a good mix of input and interactive exercises in small table groups. Everence will provide the evening meal.

There is a registration fee of \$10 per person. Register at [virginiainconference.org/pre-assembly-pastoral-summit/](http://virginiainconference.org/pre-assembly-pastoral-summit/)



Jack Bowman (right) auctions furniture and quilts at the Relief Sale. Photo: Jim Bishop

## How to get involved at the Relief Sale

By LISA LEHMAN

Mark your calendars now for the 51st Annual Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale on Sept. 29-30 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds!

The Relief Sale is an annual, all volunteer event that raises money for Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). The two-day event includes an auction of quilts, woodwork, handmade items, and more. A wide variety of homemade food is also a highlight for many people. Most of your favorite foods and activities will be back again.

Look forward to the delicious food (including some new options this year!), the 5K *Race for Relief*, sporting clay shoot, auction, farmer's market, children's activities, silent auction, craft items, and of course catching up with friends and family!

This year, in addition to MCC, the sale will benefit the following organizations and projects:

- *People Helping People*—a cooperative ministry of churches in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County helping people in an emergency crisis with resources and guidance.
- *WARM* (Waynesboro Area Refugee Ministry)—providing support, temporary shelter or housing, and community development for homeless adults and families in Waynesboro and Augusta County areas.



- *My Coins Count* (formerly *Penny Power*)—funds will help fund various MCC and VM Missions programs.

Now is the time for you to get involved! Start collecting coins for My Coins Count, finish those projects to donate to the live or silent auctions, form plans to make some baked goods with friends, volunteer with applesauce making or apple butter boiling, or help with set-up and tear down.

There are numerous volunteer opportunities for all! If you have questions about how to get involved, please contact your church Relief Sale rep or email [info@vareliefsale.com](mailto:info@vareliefsale.com).

Pictures of auction items, schedule, 5k registration, and more will be on the website, so check for updates frequently. For more information or to sign up to receive a monthly e-newsletter update, go to [www.vareliefsale.com](http://www.vareliefsale.com) and follow us on Facebook!



Lisa Lehman is Chair of the Relief Sale Publicity Committee and resides in Harrisonburg, Va.

## Let's double our Relief Sale income!

By HARVEY YODER

Last year's Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale at the Rockingham Fairgrounds raised its second highest amount ever for Mennonite Central Committee, over a third of a million dollars. Much of it went for desperately needed help for the world's growing refugee crisis.

This year the Relief Sale Board, in response to folks interested in new ways of adding to the total giving, is promoting an "S.O.S (Sharing Our Surplus) Campaign", an attempt to double the amount raised this fall by encouraging generous giving in addition to supporting the auction and the sale of food and other items.

A special table will be set up Friday evening, September 29, and all day Saturday, September 30, to receive such donations for MCC war and famine refugee relief, in addition to the *My Coins Count* projects (formerly *Penny Power*).

With some 10,000 attending the relief sale each year, it should be possible to raise \$1 million annually for humanitarian crises of this kind. When MCC was founded in 1920 in response to suffering caused by famine and war in Ukraine, over \$1.2 million was raised over a three-year period. In today's dollars, that would be some \$16.7 million, a significant accomplishment.

In the spirit of Jubilee, our giving can be over and above our regular tithes and offerings, and not result in decreased giving elsewhere. This could mean our willingly becoming poorer for Christ's sake, rather than assuming the right to amass ever more personal wealth each year regardless of world need.

Such "sacrifices" could include giving a tithe (or more) of whatever is in our savings accounts, matching what we spend annually eating out, keeping an aging vehicle an additional year, etc.

Besides donations made at the Relief Sale or on its website, donations can be made directly to MCC at [mcc.org](http://mcc.org)



Harvey Yoder is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapist at Family Life Resource Center.

# Developing intercultural competence at EMU

By LAUREN JEFFERSON

“The last will be first and the first will be the last: This is what equality looks like, this is what justice is about.”

Dr. Christena Cleveland, a social psychologist and theologian, offered a keynote address at Eastern Mennonite University’s fall 2016 faculty/staff conference, welcoming the gathered into a new paradigm for welcoming and understanding diversity.

The two-day professional development workshops and trainings with outside experts coalesced around the theme of “Embracing Diversity.” Diversity is interpreted in its various dimensions as race, faith, socio-economic background, gender, sexual orientation, political beliefs, physical abilities and other identities. The topic was also informed by goals within the 2017-2022 EMU Strategic Plan.

In 2016, EMU’s traditional undergraduate population included more than 30 percent of students who are ethnic minorities or come from other countries.

In other diversity-focused efforts, a \$300,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) is being used to improve retention rates of minority students through improved instructional techniques in the classroom and laboratory.

President Susan Huxman and Provost Fred Kniss have reiterated the EMU policies that protect the rights, the dignity and



The second annual Donning of the Kente ceremony at Eastern Mennonite University April 20 showcased the accomplishments and mentorship of graduating students of color. Top row, from left: Jonae Guest, Lance Crawford and Eduardo Robles. Middle: Chinazo A. Nwankwo, Chidera T. Nwankwo, Mario Valladores, Fernando Samiento, Micah Shristi, co-director of Multicultural and International Student Services. Front row: Azariah Cox, Oksana Kittrell, Ezriona Prioleau, Carlos Garcia, Celeste R. Thomas, co-director of Multicultural and International Student Services, Maria Esther Showalter, adviser of Latino Student Alliance. Photo: Ivan Harris

the educational resources that immigrant and international students bring to the community. The committee on diversity and inclusion reviews policy and continues proactive efforts to address inequality and equity.

“Our work in global peacebuilding and in restorative justice are a strong foundation to build upon, but we must be proactive

in confronting and addressing questions of inequality and equity that challenge us as a community,” said Kniss.



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

# Coffee and conversation, a cross-cultural habit at VMRC

By MAUREEN B. PEARSON

Preston and Carolyn Nowlin have had the privilege of spending time with two Harrisonburg families, one from Iraq and another from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

“Tensions over immigration and especially the status of refugees have increased our desire to be a welcoming community,” shared Carolyn. “Our lives are always enriched as we get to know people from around the world.”

It’s not a surprise then that the Nowlins recently volunteered to participate with others affiliated with Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community to help students

from Skyline Literacy practice their English. The students have different native languages which include Spanish, French and Arabic.

“Learning to know people from other cultures has always been an interest of ours, and students from France, Russia, and Japan spent time in our home when our children were growing up,” said Carolyn.

Don Franks, another resident of VMRC, helps teach English at Skyline Literacy by talking about physical fitness. He recognized the need for conversation practice among clients and shared that need with other residents of the retirement community and employees.

“There was no lack of interest among volunteers who talked about what we might do,” Franks said. “People wanted to interface with refugees more.”

Volunteers and students met throughout April and May for coffee in the café of the retirement community. Though attendance was minimal among “students,” volunteers continued to gather weekly and will determine whether to continue in the fall.



Maureen Pearson is the Director of Public Relations & Outreach at VMRC, Harrisonburg, Va.

# Hammers and paintbrushes show the love of Christ

By RICH RHODES

Soon after the Civil War, the first town in America chartered by African-Americans was established in North Carolina and named Princeville. The town has deep roots and a long historical memory. In 1999, the town was flooded by Hurricane Floyd. Many Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) volunteers from the Shenandoah Valley responded and rebuilt houses between 2000 and 2003. These volunteers became part of the story of Princeville and are still remembered by name.

Last fall when Hurricane Matthew went through, Princeville was flooded again. The townspeople were required to evacuate and were not allowed to return for three and a half weeks while the water was pumped out.

Before the people were allowed to return, two MDS volunteers drove down to investigate the situation. The National Guard prevented their entrance into town, telling them that the only way in or out of Princeville was by boat. They were told

to wait and a representative from the Sheriff's office would come and see them. When a Sheriff arrived, he recognized the MDS logo and asked if we would be coming to help. He invited them to attend a disaster meeting that evening that the mayor was holding. In the meeting, the mayor also asked if MDS would be coming back to help.

The day after the residents were allowed to return, the men went down again to survey the damage. As before, the MDS car magnet was recognized and the residents approached the men and asked if we would be returning.

They shared stories of the people who came before and asked about them by name. It has been roughly fifteen years but they have not forgotten. With all the tension and friction occurring in our nation, they remembered the love of Christ shown with hammers and saws and paintbrushes.



MDS volunteers get ready for work in Princeville, N.C.  
Photo courtesy of Rich Rhodes

After the houses were cleaned out and the walls of wet drywall were removed, houses were required to sit and dry out. Then MDS brought volunteers in to begin rebuilding them.

As of the end of April, we have completed repairs on 3 houses and 3-5 more are nearly completed. But more work remains. Will you be one of those who will become a part of the story of Princeville? I invite you to bless these people waiting and longing to move back home with the love of Christ.

Rich Rhodes is President of Mennonite Disaster Service of Virginia.

# A persistent hope

By TERRY WITMER

Conference congregation Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista deeply values Mike and Anna's leadership and service in the church and is walking with their family through a very difficult time.

I met Anna in 2012 shortly after she and her husband Mike had moved to the area. My first memory of Mike is of his face tense with pain as he greeted me in passing, heading straight to the bedroom and shutting the door. He had just returned home from a hemodialysis treatment.

Mike was diagnosed in 2011 with Branchiootorenal (BOR) syndrome, a rare genetic condition affecting kidney function and hearing. When their first son was born with kidney problems and hearing loss, both father and son were diagnosed with BOR. Mike was determined to need a kidney transplant. Already expecting their

second son, the family soon suffered the devastating news that this child, too, had BOR.

Both children are U.S. citizens, but their father is not. He arrived in the U.S. as a young teenager from Guatemala, but does not yet qualify for a visa. Without health insurance or citizenship, he has been denied evaluation for a kidney transplant for four years, though he receives peritoneal dialysis every six hours, seven days a week.

God has blessed Mike with a wife who is persistent like the widow of Luke 18; Anna has not given up hope for a kidney transplant for her husband.

They have found a living donor, and Mike's nephrologist agreed to refer him for a transplant evaluation, but with no guarantees of the response to the referral. Weeks later, the family still has not received a call

from the hospital for an appointment with the evaluation team.

As folks in Harrisonburg District and beyond walk alongside this family, we ask you to join us in prayer and advocacy efforts for Mike to be granted an evaluation for a transplant.

Pray that God will intervene in powerful ways. *Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.*



Terry Witmer attends Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista and lives near Harrisonburg, Va.

# Faith and vision guides pastor through adversity

By SKIP TOBIN

Back in November, Alfonso Alvarado had just reached the milestone of appointment as a VMissions church planter when an unexpected obstacle confronted him. A bilateral retinal detachment left him temporarily blind. Three surgeries later, the weeks of recovery have stretched into months. The family has felt immense financial pressure due to the surgeries and his inability to work at his poultry plant job. Through it all, Alfonso has conveyed one unwavering message: I still have vision to plant a new church! Surrounded by the strong support of all who know and love him, Alfonso has been effusive in gratitude to God and his community, an inspiration to all in the midst of his adversity.

On a recent Sunday afternoon, I embarked on a mission trip to a basement Sunday School room of Grace Mennonite Fellowship in Lacey Springs, Va., to experience this new Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah for myself. I joined an eager group of Colombians, Peruvians, Salvadorians, Hondurans and Guatemalans ready to worship God together. With his good eye healing from a second operation, Alfonso was barely able to see well enough to read. But he could pray.

Pray he did, and with his prayerful presence he led us.

Several new families, impacted by Alfonso and Milagro Alvarado's faith and love were present. These new families have been helping to provide for the Alvarados in light of their physical and economic hardship. It was energizing to be led in lively

worship by Marvin Lorenzana and I was encouraged to hear Lizzette Hernandez preaching patience from Isaiah, "They that wait on the Lord will renew their strength." The message connected; we needed our strength renewed. A powerful prayer time followed.

Immediately after the service, we were invited to a church dinner where I enjoyed my first taste of ceviche—raw fish

District to Alfonso and from Alfonso to the District.

I am grateful for Mennonite Hispanic Initiative Director Marvin Lorenzana's initial and ongoing personal care for and connection with Alfonso. I am grateful for the warm welcome the Northern District ministers and churches have extended to the Alvarados. Grace Mennonite Fellowship offered use of their facility. People

have stepped up to be part of the Alvarado's Ministry Support Team.

There are pressing financial needs. While Alfonso has been already appointed as a new worker, and has begun his work as a church planter, he is not yet receiving the one day a week salary as planned. We are still \$9,000 short. In this difficult time for Alfonso and his family, would you join

us in prayer and consider becoming a financial partner? If you wish to donate, go to [vmmissions.org/worker/alfonso-alvarado/](http://vmmissions.org/worker/alfonso-alvarado/)

In Alfonso, I have seen something that I need, and that I sense we all need: deep gratitude, radical dependence on God and fresh vision to shake us awake to the missional opportunities right at our doorsteps. The next time you think about taking a mission trip, how about heading for Lacey Springs?



Members of Iglesia Menonita Monte Moriah and others pray for Alfonso, Milagro and their children. The congregation has been supporting the Alvarados in a time of physical and economic hardship. Photo courtesy of Skip Tobin

cured in citrus juices. Though I am not a Spanish-speaker, and understood only a bit of what was said, I felt the freshness of the Spirit. I knew I was with God's people.

Alfonso has years of experience as a church planter behind him. He has journeyed patiently in our local Mennonite context, serving faithfully on the leadership team of IDA (Iglesia Discipular Anabaptista), all the while waiting for the release and blessing of their leadership team to begin a new work.

He has also allowed me the time to help integrate his vision into the relational context of Northern District, so that blessings can flow in both directions—from the



Skip Tobin is USA Ministries Director for Virginia Mennonite Conference and Virginia Mennonite Missions.

# Energizing Mennonite youth for mission

By ELWOOD YODER

Elizabeth A. Showalter helped launch a decades-long mission opportunity for Mennonite young people beginning in 1935. That's the year Elizabeth, 28, was appointed a member of the Northern District Summer Bible School Committee. Elizabeth brought her organizational skills, desire for outreach, and cultural understandings of mountain folk to energize a youth mission movement.

Raised in a traditional Mennonite home, Elizabeth was the idea person behind the Summer Bible School movement. She also worked at being sensitive to cultural differences. Knowing that mountain folk were different than Valley Mennonites, for

instance, Elizabeth timed a Bible School for Hebron Church just before blackberries ripened, because the children would pick berries for extra money, and wouldn't attend her meetings.

Serving on a District Committee, Elizabeth and others called youth from home base churches like Trissels, Zion, and Lindale, to spend their summers in service teaching children stories of the Bible. Young adults responded in droves, believing that when their church called, they should go. They served for weeks teaching in the mountain communities of West Virginia and northern Virginia. They took campers or tents, cooking equipment, teaching materials, and positive attitudes, hunkering down for two week teaching stints. Most gave up summer employment opportunities. The committee that Elizabeth organized sought out trained teachers, especially those with a high school degree or some college.



Pleasant Grove Summer Bible School, Ft. Seybert, W.Va., in the 1940s. Elizabeth A Showalter collection

Elizabeth gave diplomas to students who finished their curriculum.

Elizabeth dedicated a creative and energetic decade of her life in order to help raise up a Mennonite youth movement to the mountains. They had to deal with gas rationing and limited supplies during World War II, but carloads of Mennonite youth streamed into the mountains unabated. Their church called on them, and while

tion and write materials for a growing Bible School movement across the country. By the end of the 1940s most of the Shenandoah Valley Mennonite churches had their own Summer Bible School.

Elizabeth graduated from Harrisonburg Normal School (James Madison University) and earned an MA in journalism from Syracuse University. She taught at Iowa Mennonite School, Goshen College, and Eastern Mennonite College. Elizabeth edited the popular Words of Cheer and began a "Books Abroad" project to furnish donated used books for institutions and persons overseas. But her most creative energies as a young woman went into the summer Bible school movement to the highlands.

A teacher who responded to the church's call to serve remembers that one summer in the early 1940s she taught five Summer Bible School sessions of two weeks each. The teacher visited community homes in the afternoons and evenings. At mealtime on one occasion, with three teachers, "one got a spoon, one a fork, and one a knife."



Summer Bible School Diplomas in Northern District, 1940s. Elizabeth A Showalter collection

men populated the Bible School Committee in the District, Elizabeth's energy, commitment, and tenacity opened the doors for cross-cultural mission to many.

By 1945 Mennonite Church leaders had noticed Elizabeth's writing abilities and organizational skills with the Summer Bible School movement. She was invited to Scottdale, Pa., to work for the denomina-



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

# Building intercultural competence, a VMC priority

By CLYDE G. KRATZ



Harrisonburg, Virginia, is known as “The Friendly City.”

Andrew D. Perrine, writing in *The Washington Post*, cited the following:

*Students in Harrisonburg City Public Schools come from a variety of nations. Among limited-English proficiency speakers, only 55 percent were born in the United States. The second-largest segment of the LEP population by country of origin is Iraqi. Then there are the Hondurans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans and Mexicans. The Congolese, Ethiopians, Jordanians, Ukrainians and Syrians are represented, too. As of January 2016, Harrisonburg City Public Schools are attended by students from 46 countries.*

A study by the Brookings Institute places Harrisonburg and Rockingham County in the top ten places nationwide that have the highest share of refugees. The article reports that 7.2 people per 1,000 are impacted by the immigration executive order that limits refugee immigration.

As followers of Jesus in the 21st century, how are we intentionally engaging the stranger among us? Almost half of Virginia Mennonite Conference constituency is located in the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County and surrounding areas. The immigrant, the refugee, and the Muslim are in our neighborhoods.

Yet too often, even people who have moved into Harrisonburg from other predominately white communities do not always feel accepted and welcomed. Many of our members in congregations are open to a multi-cultural congregation, but participants remain mono-cultural.

The ways we conduct worship, engage each other in relationship, and practice leadership may be obstacles that prevent meaningful relationships.

Virginia Mennonite Conference is planning our annual Conference Assembly (July 20-22, 2017) at Park View Mennonite Church around the theme “Neighbors: Strangers No More.”

It is my hope that Bible study leader and accomplished Old Testament scholar Wilma Bailey will reintroduce us to the Old Testament practices of engaging the stranger. Our evening presenters are Saulo Padilla, Mennonite Central Committee US Immigration Education Coordinator, and César García, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference.

They will provide an inspirational framework and insights about moving from stranger to friend. Not only will the Bible study and the keynote speakers provide us with a challenge, our workshops will also focus on practical ministry ways in which strangers can become friends.

One of the priorities of Mennonite Church USA is intercultural competency. This priority is a leadership initiative to undo racism and advance intercultural transformation within MC USA and its organizations.

As a Conference, the Faith and Life Commission held two workshops that gave leaders an opportunity to learn more about the systemic framework of racism and brought additional awareness of ways our relationship systems can exclude people.

This recognition is the first step as we work toward changing patterns or structures that are exclusive or unhelpful.

VMC’s Conference Council and the Faith and Life Commission are being invited to consider leadership training in this area as a way to build greater ownership and make this a priority.

It is true that leaders can not lead where they are not willing to go. Therefore, our leadership bodies are seeking to explore ways to increase our competency in this area of communal life, not only with our key staff and officers, but also the two key leadership groups of our Conference.



In Harrisonburg, Va., a city of about 53,000, 7.2 per 1,000 people are refugees. Many more are immigrants from all over the world. How can we better connect to those outside our religious or ethnic group?

While we are building capacity in this area of our leadership, I welcome congregational leaders and congregations to begin examining their own roadblocks to building relationships with people of other cultures in our region.

If Harrisonburg and surrounding areas are to remain friendly communities, it will take all of us working together to embrace the people coming into our region through immigration, refugee resettlement, and relocation.

Let us respond to their presence and particular needs with empathy, compassion, and a desire to love and serve our neighbor. In this way, the love of the One we serve can be shown and known. May God continue to open our eyes to see that which we have not seen as we respond in faith.

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 or quarterly, as well as past bulletins in many cases. Contact [harold.huber@virginiacommunity.org](mailto:harold.huber@virginiacommunity.org) or call (540) 432-4169.

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# Neighbors: Strangers No More

**Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly**

**July 20-22, 2017**

**Park View Mennonite Church  
Harrisonburg, VA**

*No importa de dónde eres,  
estamos contentos que seas  
nuestro vecino.*

No matter where you are  
from, we're glad you're  
our neighbor.

لا يهم أين ولدت، و لكننا  
سعداء انكم جيراننا.



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