



PATHWAYS

WALKING WITH THE MINISTRIES OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE



FALL 2022

Vol. 9, No. 1



INTERIM CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP TEAM NAMED



In This Issue

- 3 from the Moderator
- 4 Response to Repentance & Transformation
- 5 interim Conference Leadership Team
- 6 What's under the surface in your neighborhood?
- 7 Repacking and racial justice
- 8 Faith & Life Commission

- 9 (UN)PACKING
- 10 Trauma-Informed Care-Giving
- 11 Bike Shenandoah Celebrates 25th Year
- 12 Grants and Endowment
Funding for VMC members



Transition and (re)packing

By JON TROTTER

Just like a congregation is not a building but the gathered body within, Virginia Mennonite Conference is a network of people who serve faithfully in so many ways. It is a living organism that changes over time, even as we remain rooted in God's steadfast love and a common vision for mission. Change can be hard and disorienting—it can also be timely and life-giving.

Our recent experiences as a Conference over the last several years, from the challenges of Covid to the resignation in March of our Executive Conference Minister, can function as weight that many of us carry. We are invited in this next season to unpack what we are carrying and repack the essentials for our journey, like a weary backpacker lays everything out and asks, "What do I really need?"

At Summer Delegate Assembly, July 14-16, delegates are invited to examine where we have been and are now, what vision unites and motivates us, and what we can do to restore and strengthen our relationship with God, each other, and creation. We are (re)packing what we have carried and have laid out on the table through vulnerable table group sharing and a mutual love for each other.

As the Conference transitions to a new interim arrangement of leadership with a four-person ministerial team and some expanded staff roles, I announce my own transition to a full-time role with Virginia Mennonite Missions starting September 1. This is my final issue as editor of *Pathways*.

Since 2004, I have shared my time between VMC and VMissions, and I



am excited to be able to invest more time in supporting and communicating what God is doing through the people and ministries of VMissions.

In my role as Communication Manager, you have probably seen me be-

hind a camera taking pictures, shooting video, or helping to set up events. Perhaps you have read articles I have written for *Pathways* highlighting the experiences of Conference Assembly or other events. Almost every printed piece, video, and online post has been from my desk, and I have enjoyed these creative aspects of my work very much.

I am so grateful for the freedom I was given to learn, experiment, and find my visual voice. I discovered a passion in the process for improvement. I was inspired by what other organizations were doing, and I enjoyed discovering my unique design preferences. Every time a blank electronic canvas came to life visually was a fulfilling experience.

I hope that my efforts to tell stories and share life-giving content in an appealing way has been effective and helpful for the members of our Conference.

Over the years, many of you have encouraged me as I have served the church in mostly behind-the-scenes ways, and I sincerely appreciate your words of affirmation.

My prayers are with VMC in this unique time of challenge, restoration and refocus on our common vision.

Jon Trotter served as Communication Manager from 2004-2022.

Pastoral Transitions

FEBRUARY - SEPTEMBER 2022

Beck, Duane: transitioned from retired to active, interim Conference Leadership Team.

Buckwalter, Marian: accepted position at Crest Hill Mennonite Church

Cox, Joshua: licensed to ordination, Pastor at Grace Mennonite Fellowship

Dey, John: transitioned from Warwick Mennonite Church, active without charge.

Frederick, Emma: transferred to Mosaic Conference.

Frederick, J. Mark: transferred to Mosaic Conference.

Hackman, Joe: transferred from Mosaic Conference.

Kanagy, Phil: transferred to Allegheny Mennonite Conference.

Kratz, Clyde: no longer credentialed by Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Kuniholm, Jason: transferred to Central District Conference.

Marin, Basil: passed away unexpectedly June 26, 2022.

Miller, Carmen: licensed for special ministry, Chaplain at VMRC.

Musser, Eric: transitioned to Ordained inactive.

Sanchez, Veronica: Ordained minister, Enciende una Luz and church planter.

Yoder, Don: transitioned to Ordained Retired.

Pathways

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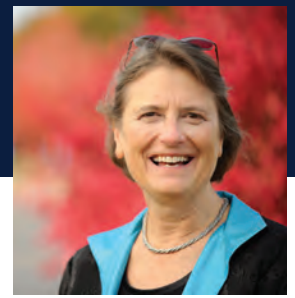
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from the Moderator



Changing Seasons

BY SARA WENGER SHENK

The cooling temperatures and golden, red leaves herald that change is in the air. As much as we might want to hold onto summer—or any season for that matter—we must let go of long, warm, greenly glorious days to stay in sync with what God has in store for us. Thankfully, we can carry the fruits and memories of summer with us even as we embrace the distinctly colorful gifts of fall—a season that I love. Continuity and change.

Like seasons, the church is always changing. We're emerging from the pandemic different than we were before. Many of us are weary and weighed down—and yet resilient in ways we didn't know we were capable of. We're learning to weather leadership transitions. We're asking with renewed intensity who we want to be as a family of congregations who call ourselves Virginia Mennonite Conference. We worry about whether we can hold together the rich diversity of this unique family as we honestly wrestle with differences that make life together challenging. We wonder about how we might better tap into what creates the most vitality, joy and shared mission among us.

In the coming months, we will engage in a patient, conference-wide listening and learning process guided by seasoned, wise facilitators from Gilliam & Associates, Craig Gilliam and Betty Johnson. VMC has experienced a leadership crisis and there are also significant levels of stress and polarization in congregations across the conference. Conference leaders believe these challenges present an opportunity for us to seek to better understand what is working and what is not working well in the conference—and how we could together do better.

Working with the Gilliam facilitators will be a VMC-based liaison team made up of 14 mature leaders from across the conference who have an ear, heart and voice for the good of the conference.* This liaison group will help to design the listening/learning process, which is intended to gather perspectives from many leaders and representatives across the conference to talk about what is and isn't working well. After listening carefully, the Gilliam facilitators will mirror back to us what they see and hear—rather like our family doctor at an annual physical. This is scheduled to happen at our February 4 winter assembly. We will then have decisions to make, to decide what we might do to become healthier as a body—and how, in this new season, we might more wholeheartedly minister healing and hope in our desperately needy world.

We are beginning to see renewed energy in the conference as our new interim Conference Leadership Team (iCLT) steps up to provide accompaniment for district leaders and pastors—along with vision that inspires us to grow into this new season of life together. Thanks be to God.

*Persons who've agreed to serve on the VMC liaison team, listed alphabetically: Andrew Fairfield, Caleb Schrock-Hurst, Chuck Hostetter, Clair Good, David Brubaker, Howard Miller, Jim Hershberger (as link to Hispanic leaders), June Miller, Leslie Francisco, Maren Hange, MaryBeth Moore, Matthew Bucher, Sara Wenger Shenk, Vivian Stevens-Lyons

Sara Wenger Shenk is in her second year as VMC Moderator.

Conference Council Members

Moderator, Sara Wenger Shenk
Moderator-Elect, Vacant
Secretary, James Hershberger
Treasurer, Leroy Kauffman
Eastern District, Craig Wilson
Calvary District, Vivian Stevens-Lyons
Central District, Dale Hartzler
Harrisonburg District, Steve Pardini (co-chair)
Harrisonburg District, Paula Stoltzfus (co-chair)
Northern District, David King
Potomac, Vacant
Southern District, Phil Lehman
TCK District, Vernon Moyer
Mennonite Church USA CLC, Phil Kniss

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VMissions Board, Vacant
Faith & Life Chair, Joe Longacher
Congregational Life Chair, Steve Pardini
Faith & Life Secretary, H. Michael Shenk III

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Executive Conference Minister, Vacant
Minister of Administration and Church Relations, Craig Maven
Church Relations and Racial Justice Leader, Caleb Schrock-Hurst
VMissions President, Aaron Kauffman

NON-VOTING REPORTERS

Gifts Discernment Committee Chair, Glen Kauffman
Eastern Mennonite School, Head of School, Paul Leaman
Constitution and Bylaws Committee Chair, Ryan Ahlgrim
Historical Committee Chair, Elwood Yoder

Response to Repentance & Transformation

A JOINT RESPONSE

Conference leaders from the Faith & Life Commission (FLC), Conference Council (CC) and the interim Conference Leadership team (iCLT) met together on September 10, 2022 in the fellowship hall at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church. For several years now, we have made it a goal to meet jointly, in-person, at least once a year. This meeting, scheduled months ago, was an opportunity for all of us to hear directly from the iCLT, who began as a newly configured team August 1. We also heard reports from all the districts and ministry clusters across the conference. What emerged from that meeting was a strong sense from the gathered group that a joint statement from the FLC, CC and iCLT would be helpful given the many questions and concerns circling through our VMC family in the wake of the MC USA special delegate assembly in May 2022. Several of us agreed to draft a statement, which was then offered to the FLC, CC and iCLT members for feedback and improvement.



Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) leaders from the Faith & Life Commission (FLC), Conference Council (CC) and the interim Conference Leadership Team (iCLT) met in a joint session on September 10, 2022. We listened carefully to questions and perspectives brought by representatives from across the conference prompted by Mennonite Church USA's May 2022 Special Delegate Assembly and action on the *Repentance & Transformation (R & T) resolution* in particular. Based on our shared work, we jointly offer this discerning and visionary guidance:

From discerning persons throughout the conference, we hear these concerns:

The process that brought the Repentance & Transformation resolution to the delegates for discussion and a vote is perceived as not representing the best of what we anticipate from denominational leadership, causing widespread consternation in VMC.

The resolution seemed one-sided, suggesting a lack of forbearance. It did not seem to leave a place for those in the denomination who hold a traditional view of marriage while genuinely loving and seeking the best for LGBTQIA persons.

The resolution lacked crucial theological orientation (other than naming the harm of exclusion) and failed to offer sexual ethical guidelines within a convincing biblical theological framework.

The resolution refers to LGBTQIA as a generic identity without acknowledging the distinct ethical challenges associated with these varied identities.

The resolution does not affirm Christian ideals of reserving sexual intimacy for marriage (or lifelong covenant), sexual fidelity in marriage, or lifelong monogamy, seeming to embrace a secular sexual ethic that has no expectation for celibacy outside of commitment.

The resolution was supported by some in VMC, who also feel conflicted and grieved by church divisions in its wake.

As VMC leaders (FLC, CC, iCLT) we offer these visionary affirmations for guiding VMC forward:

We hear a strong desire that people want to stay together in VMC and don't want to leave the conference. This desire comes with the hope that leaders will provide visionary direction that holds together the rich diversity of the conference by focusing on what we have in common rather than what divides us.

While many feel dismay about some aspects of the R&T resolution, there is also broad agreement that in attempts to be faithful, some of us have contributed to pain, abuse, and traumatization for LGBTQIA persons and families. This recognition leads us to seek ways to genuinely repent, apologize and change our hearts and congregations to more fully reflect God's love.

The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* has and will function as a normative guide for faith and practice in VMC, as will the FLC 2013 polity statement, *Guiding Principles for Suspension of Ministerial Credentials in Event of Conducting a Same-Sex Ceremony*. We also know that God's Spirit actively speaks and so anticipate that as leaders sense tension between the spirit and letter of the law, we will together seek to discern a Spirit-guided, faithful way forward.

We regret that many people are leaving the church, disillusioned by un-Christlike fighting and division about many matters (including sexuality), and that the church has often failed to speak convincingly about God-honoring sexuality. Seeking to be guided by Scripture and Spirit, we commit to hold together the best of the tradition with the best ethical guidelines we can discern to love and care for all God's children.

In the coming months, we will engage in a patient, conference-wide process guided by Gilliam & Associates, to listen and learn about who VMC can be at our best. We believe we have an historic opportunity to find a path forward together that is attuned to where the Spirit of God is calling us as a distinct, diverse and gifted church body—to follow Jesus in our day.

from iCLT

interim Conference Leadership Team

By JUNE MILLER

There are many challenges to team leadership. The interim Conference Leadership Team (iCLT) began with general job descriptions with the goal to fill in the details when we convene. As we begin to feel comfortable in our roles, we understand the need to communicate.

One new initiative is the iCLT News, to be published semi monthly. As we work through our first rotation, each of us will share about our respective positions. If you didn't receive the email publication, you can always find it on our website.

Here is a brief outline of our jobs.

Maren Hange - Minister of Formation and Soulcare (0.25 FTE)



- Congregational Formation or Soulcare, with Duane
- Racial Justice Work with Caleb and Leslie
- Support for youth ministry/ Youth council with Caleb
- Faith & Life Committee with Leslie
- Resourcing Pastors & District Minister with Duane
- VMC Care Support Review with Leslie
- CongregationalLifeC/Enrichment with Duane
- Gilliam Consulting Process

Bishop Leslie Francisco III - Minister of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (0.15 FTE).



- Equity of language, practices and processes
- Inclusion of people of color (POC) in conference life
- Faith & Life Commission
- Anti-Racism feedback on all meetings
- Misconduct liaison
- Task Force Representative (Gilliam)
- Consultant Racial Justice Task Force

June Miller - Director of Administration and Communication (0.75 FTE).

- Administration including assembly planning, Credentials Committee, Leadership Enrichment Committee, Congregational Life Committee, fundraising.
- Finance including AR/AP, Budgeting, and Grants
- Communication including Pathways, weekly bulletin notes, iCLT News, website



Craig Maven - Minister of Administration and Church Relations (0.25 FTE).

- Team convener
- Administrative Coordinator, with June Miller
- Church relations, with Caleb
- MC USA liaison
- Financial/Finance committee
- Conference Council and CC Exec
- VMM Accountability
- Misconduct

Duane Beck - Consultant to Pastoral Leaders and Coach for Local Ministry (0.15 FTE).



- Coach Pastors in strengthening their Resilience and Leadership Capacity.
- Coach Congregations in developing their Local Ministry.
- Resource Pastors.
- Resource District Ministers.
- Consult with Pastors.
- Coach Congregational leaders.
- Collaborate with District Ministers

Caleb Schrock-Hurst - Church Relations and Racial Justice Leader (0.50 FTE).



- Racial Justice and Equity Leadership
- Church Relations
- Youth relations and youth leadership development
- Fundraising and donor relations
- Latino church relations
- Regularly attend (and preach) at VMC congregations
- Plan and lead Racial Justice Events
- Write and release Racial Justice Newsletter
- Network and collaborate with VMMissions staff
- Attend Conference Council and officers' meetings





Gay Street Mission. Photo from VMC Archives

What's under the surface in your neighborhood?

BY MATTHEW BUCHER

What's under the surface in your neighborhood? In Harrisonburg, Virginia, part of the answer would be shale and limestone underneath the rich topsoil. But, examining the stories under the surface of Harrisonburg brings forth glimpses of urban renewal, communal and individual resilience in the face of segregation and structural racism, and ongoing efforts at truth-telling and community building. Harrisonburg's northeast neighborhood provides a rich history with each step. Because Immanuel Mennonite Church is located in the northeast neighborhood, we know that our walk of following in Jesus' Way will involve learning about and being shaped by the stories of the neighborhood. With so much under the surface, we have to move a little slower to hear the stories.

Harrisonburg's northeast neighborhood is the historic African American part of the city. Originally "Newtown," this community was formed by formerly enslaved people after the Civil War. Folks built their own homes, purchased land for a cemetery, constructed churches, and started businesses. The community became part of the city of Harrisonburg in the 1880's. In just over seven years of pastoring at Immanuel Mennonite Church, I have been blessed to hear and learn from so many stories from longtime congregants and neighborhood leaders. Stories of vibrant classroom and community learning at the Effinger Street School, stories of Lucy Simms and Roberta Webb (both long time teachers) and Richard "Earl" Johnson (an Olympic medalist in 1920 and 1924), and the challenge of confronting community fragmentation. From this deep well, I put together a walking tour of the

"... we know that our walk of following in Jesus' Way will involve learning about and being shaped by the stories of the neighborhood."

neighborhood to help orient new members of Immanuel to the stories under the surface of the community. It was my great privilege to respond to an invitation from VMC's Racial Justice Task Force and make this walk available to interested folks in the conference and community. In the past few months, more than fifty people have taken the walk through the neighborhood. The next few paragraphs provide a glimpse of one of the stops on the walking tour.

The second stop on the walk was the site of the Gay Street Mission, the first Mennonite church in the city of Harrisonburg. Standing on that spot, now part of a parking lot, we can look west to route 11 and into the past. Between 1800 and 1850, hundreds of thousands of enslaved African Americans were marched south on that road.

From that same spot, we look east and see a huge parking lot and units of Section 8 public housing. Just 65 years ago, we would have seen the heart of Harrisonburg's African American community: homes with verandas, a community center which contained restaurants and a dance hall, and a number of businesses. But, between 1959 and 1965, these homes and businesses were seized by eminent domain, burned or bulldozed to the ground, and this community was replaced with a shopping mall and its parking lot. Neither the story of forced migration nor the destruction caused by urban renewal is memorialized with a public monument.

Dr. Elise Boulding, a 20th Century peace scholar, noted "the 200-year present." The 200-year present began 100

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTINUED ON PG 7

Repacking and racial justice

BY CALEB SCHROCK-HURST

In February, it will have been two years since the creation of the VMC Racial Justice Task Force (RJTF).

Two years, in the stream of Christian history, or world history, or even compared to the course of a lifetime, is not a particularly long time – and this is something we need to remember even as we make our way forward.

Quaker peace scholar Dr. Elise Boulding encourages us all to place our actions in a 200-year window — looking 100 years back into history and thinking forward 100 years into the future.

In this context, the work of the RJTF remains extremely pressing. The raw wounds of Jim Crow, school segregation, and urban renewal are still well within this 100-year history – as are racially segregated pews, footwashing basins, and communions. There is much work yet to be done when we look at the past.

And what of the future? What will God's church in Virginia look like 100 years from now? Are we building communities where people of every nation, tribe, and race feel welcome and able to connect with God? Are we on the path towards racial equality, or are we content with how far we've come?

With this framing, the idea of repacking is an important one. We as Christians are followers of the way of Jesus, and we need to think clearly both about where we've been and where we're going – and what we're carrying along the way.

Racial justice work is a place where we need to be willing to repack and re-evaluate, and frequently. White people in particular should always be willing to repack as we hear new stories and see new manifestations of racism. Often, we aren't fully aware of how racism has affected communities of color, nor how we have benefited from racialized systems that favor white communities, like redlining. We need to be willing to repack, and that often means taking hard looks at what we've carried so far.

And, I'm happy to say, we have done some repacking as a conference. The letter from leaders of color which led to the creation of the RJTF lists several goals, including asking white leaders to “change their conversational posture from debating and/or dismissing the voices and information shared by persons of color to genuinely listening to understand the experiences and perspectives shared by persons of color.” This is a piece of

repacking we can all commit to and must keep centered.

But we all know we don't just pack once and then call it quits – we constantly repack as we journey forward. We must pray for God to continue to give us open hearts and ears so that we know what we need to let go and where God is calling us forward.

One thing I encourage everyone to let go of is the need to get racial justice perfectly right, right now. We can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good – there is much to be done, and we can all do some of it. None of us can or will fully solve racism in two years, or ten, or perhaps even 100, but we can all commit to repacking, moving in the right direction, and making as much difference as we can.

Through our various efforts as an RJTF – from formal trainings like the Inclusion and Diversity Inventory to informal cultural enrichment events and conversations in and outside of church – we hope to keep helping the conference repack and refocus, at God's pace and with God's help.

Caleb Schrock-Hurst is the Church Relations and Racial Justice Leader at VMC. He is completing a Masters in Church Ministry at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTINUED FROM PG 6

years ago with the year of birth of the people who have reached their hundredth birthday today. The other boundary of the 200-year present, 100 years from now, is the hundredth birthday of the babies born today. Dr. Boulding's framework gives us a lens through which to listen to the stories under the surface in order to clearly name and lament the brokenness, celebrate that which is good and resilient, and to humbly seek transformation that may take more than 100 years. In that hope, I offer the following:

- *How might you listen to the stories with a partner or group, particularly around race and the church, in your neighborhood?*
- *How might learning these stories impact how you and your congregation follow Jesus?*

In sending, please take a walk in your neighborhood (with at least one other person). Go slowly. Listen deeply. Imagine the healing, repairing, and justice the Lord might call us to today...and through the next 100 years.

Matthew Bucher is pastor at Immanuel Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.



What bends our heart toward adventure? Is the ground already shaking and we balance with slightly bended knees? Do our memories nudge us forward or our desires pull us into journeys? What draws us toward that first step? Art work by Maren Tyedmers Hange

Faith & Life Commission

BY JOE LONGACHER

Report: FLC Met on October 13, 2022 (Zoom)

1. Sarah Bixler reported on the Teaching Cluster, comprised of 12 leaders credentialed in VMC and Allegheny Mennonite Conference. The cluster meets monthly during the academic year, and in December is planning for a Zoom session with Caleb Schrock-Hurst, member of the VMC interim Conference Leadership Team, and Allegheny Conference Minister Dave Mishler.
2. Luke Schrock-Hurst, District Minister of the Potomac District of VMC, gave a comprehensive report regarding the 8 churches/ministries within the district, geographically scattered and very diverse in composition and structure. He noted a celebration of 45 years of ministry at Daniels Run Peace Church (formerly Northern Virginia Mennonite Church), with five former pastors sharing in person or electronically.
3. He also referenced a three-year discernment process at Washington Community Fellowship regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion, accessible at Third-Way Approach to LGBTQ Inclusion Amid Differences at Washington Community Fellowship.
4. The Eastern District is preparing to seek a second candidate to succeed David Lehman as their District Minister. David, former pastor at Williamsburg Mennonite Church, will continue to serve until a successor is found.
5. Aldine Musser reported for the Leadership Committee that Ben Bergey will be the resource person 2/17/23 at the annual Minister's Retreat at Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, with stories about compiling Voices Together, and information regarding communion resources.
6. Pearl Hartman introduced a revised version of the Leadership Handbook, developed by the ad hoc committee she chaired (other members: James Akerson and Mike Shenk). The FLC began the line by line process of reviewing the committee's suggested changes, completing the first 18 of 43 pages. Most of the comments related to the nature of pastoral care of congregational members, and the process of selecting District Ministers. The committee will bring alternative wording to our next meeting in November to continue the process, eventually reviewing the full text and developing a final version

Joe Longacher is the chair of the Faith and Life Commission.



Stephen "Tig" Intagliata, current pastor at Daniels Run Peace Church, is pictured with Loren Horst, DRPC's first pastor.

45 Daniels Run Peace Years Church Celebrates

BY LUKE SCHROCK-HURST

On September 25 Daniels Run Peace Church (the former Northern Virginia Mennonite Church), had a special Sunday morning worship service to CELEBRATE 45 YEARS OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE. Former founding pastors Loren and Earlene Horst were present for the celebration, and former pastors Pearl Hoover (Hartman) and Earl Zimmerman brought greetings/memories pre-recorded, and former pastor Karl McKinney joined the live stream to share a few memories. Dr. Robert and Rosalee Hartman Eshleman joined virtually from Richmond, sharing a little of Robert's father, Pastor Harold Eshleman's, early involvement in tending an emerging Mennonite church in Northern Virginia. Current Pastor Tig Intagliata encouraged many of these former pastors to share at this special event, and he brought a message as well. As district minister I did a concluding prayer of blessing. A great celebration meal was shared by all after the service!

Luke Schrock-Hurst is the Potomac District Minister for Virginia Conference.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Officers

Interim Chair, Joe Longacher

Vice Chair, Pearl Hartman

Secretary, H. Michael Shenk, III

Administrative Cluster, Beth Good

Central District, James Åkerson

Calvary District, Leslie Francisco III*

Chaplains Cluster, Pearl Hartman

Eastern District, David Lehman

Harrisonburg District, Roy Hange

Harrisonburg District, Maren Hange*

Southern District, Kevin Gasser

TCK District, Chuck Hostetter

Member-at-Large, Anna Janzen

Member-at-Large, Jean Oswald

Member-at-Large, MaryBeth Heatwole Moore

Northern District, Aldine Musser

Northern District, H. Michael Shenk III

Potomac District, Luke Schrock-Hurst

Teaching Cluster, Sarah Bixler

*VMC staff

FLC Officers issue notice: As of August 1, 2022, Clyde Kratz is no longer credentialed by VMC due to non-compliance with remedial process required for restoration of his credentials following the non-sexual, ministerial misconduct process.

(UN)PACKING

2022 SUMMER ASSEMBLY REFLECTIONS



Photo by Nadia Vynar on Unsplash

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶ And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

Luke 10:1-9 NIV

BY LORI FRIESEN

(RE)ALITY CHECK - *unpacking*

To repack indicates that you have already packed and so to repack one must first unpack and do a bit of a reality check. Look closely at what we have packed, recognizing we may have more things than we need. Noticing things that are irrelevant to our trip, we may need to choose things to leave behind. Take a closer look at verses 4 where Jesus says to “carry no purse, no bag, no sandals.”

We have a tendency to pack for lots of “just in cases” or “what ifs” that might arise during our trip. Sometimes we get so caught up in all the packing and planning that we lose track of the vision of our actual trip. As followers of Christ, as congregations, as a conference, a denomination and the global church body, our mission/journey as Jesus shares in these verses is to share the message that “*the kingdom of God has come near to you.*” What baggage are we carrying that might keep us from or slow us down from sharing this message?

(RE)CLAIMING OUR SHARED VISION

The vision statement of VMC is this: *God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.*

In verse 4, Jesus tells the 72 to “greet no one on the road.” This instruction struck me as being rude until I explored it a bit more. In several sources I read, it seemed to be consensus that this instruction was given to stress the urgency and importance of the message. There are times when you greet a person and you end up in a conversation that delays your



(UN) PACKING, VMC’s 2022 Summer Assembly was held at Zion Mennonite Church in Broadway, Va on July 14-16. Photo by June Miller

journey to the next destination. The conversation wasn’t necessarily wrong, but it may have sidetracked your original plan. Have we as a church become sidetracked? Has our message become less urgent?

These side conversations might sound like: *Should instruments be used in church? Should women have their head covered? Should people of color receive communion from the same bread and cup as white people? Can women be pastors? Should we sing only hymns? Can LGBTQ+ persons be fully included in the church? Should men and women sit on different sides in church? Can a divorced person be fully included in the church?*

These conversations have happened in many churches through the years. Have these side conversations put qualifiers on God’s ultimate message? Have we become the gatekeepers? I’m not saying these questions and conversations are not valid or unimportant. But I’m wondering if we have gotten so caught up in the questions that they overshadow our vision and mission. Are those conversations what people are hearing instead of

“*the Kingdom of God has come near to you.*”

We know that the message we have been given is urgent and we need to take note of the baggage we might be carrying, that we may need to lay down. We need to be aware of these side conversations and their ability to side track us. If we are committed to the vision that “*God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world,*” it seems that we could be well on our way to sharing the message of “*the kingdom of God has come near to you.*”

(RE)NEWING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, EACH OTHER AND CREATION - *repacking*

In verses 7-9, Jesus is instructing the 72 to go to different towns and into different homes that welcome you. Once in those homes, they are to remain there-to eat and drink together and to cure the

UNPACKING CONTINUED ON PG 10

Trauma-Informed Care-Giving

BY BETH GOOD

On September 22, Virginia Mennonite Conference hosted a Leadership Enrichment workshop with Dr. Leah Thomas on the topic of Trauma-Informed Caregiving. Dr. Thomas, is the Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Contextual Education at AMBS. Ridgeway Mennonite Church welcomed 30 participants who were eager to learn more about how to care for those in our congregations and communities who have experienced trauma.

Dr. Thomas, reviewed key principles of trauma-informed care from Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) that include; safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, voice, and cultural consideration. Attendees also participated in exercises that demonstrated various tools for orienting and grounding those who may be experiencing symptoms of trauma.

It was noted that at this time in history, caregivers are often experiencing the same trauma as those we care for as COVID has inundated us with traumatic stress that is “too much, too fast, and too soon”. This leaves caregivers struggling to balance the need to care for others with the need for self-care. Yet, we are still called to care and so need to be aware of ways to balance our own needs with those whom we serve.



Pictured: Matthew Bucher (center), Pastor at Immanuel Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg; Caleb Schrock-Hurst (right), Church Relations and Racial Justice Leader at VMC; on the far left are event organizers Aldine Musser, chair of Leadership Enrichment Committee and MaryBeth Heatwole Moore, LEC Committee member. Photo by June Miller

Dr. Thomas ended with a reference to Somatic Spiritual Exercise which allow caregivers to become more body-aware (self-aware) and deal with our embodied trauma in order to be more empathetic toward others. As leaders of Virginia Mennonite Conference continue to provide care for those in our congregations and communities who are experiencing trauma, it is vital that we take time to care for ourselves. May the Lord bless us with self-care so that we may, in turn, care for others.



Leah Thomas, PhD, blends an academic focus on pastoral care and Christian social ethics with professional experience in hospital chaplaincy, pastoring and nonprofit management.

Beth Good, PhD, is VMC's Administrative/Leadership Cluster Leader, a member of the Faith and Life Commission and of the Credentials Committee. She is the Master of Science in Nursing Program Director at Eastern Mennonite University.

UNPACKING CONTINUED FROM PG 9

sick. In Jesus' instructions he says to cure the sick and then, “say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you”.

Jesus appointed those 72, giving them the authority to heal. And I believe that today we also have the authority to heal. Though it may not look like physical healing from a sickness per se, but the same Holy Spirit that was with those 72 is also with us. Healing can look different for everyone. *Offering a listening ear* can be a healing balm for someone. *Telling someone you're sorry* - whether it be from something you did to them or sorry that they had that experience. Sorry can be a healing word. *Showing up* can be healing. If a person has been disappointed time and again, showing up says that they matter - that is healing. Saying *I am with you* - even in situations where you don't understand, or necessarily even agree, you can still be with someone - that is healing. If we pay close attention there is a good chance we

will be able to see where God has already been at work. We have the privilege to join God in the midst of healing.

I am a woman pastor. My journey into this role has been relatively easy, comparatively, but not without harm and pain. There have been times of healing for myself. Many women have been severely hurt by the church - some of whom have walked away, some still wait to be offered healing.

Reports of sexual abuse and abuse of power continue to be brought forth regularly in the church. Healing has happened in some instances, but we should be weeping at the brokenness that remains. 2018 & 2019 studies by The Trevor Project* amongst LGBTQ+ youth that found that the youth whose parents did not use religion to speak negatively about being LGBTQ+ were half as likely to attempt suicide. How can we offer healing in these spaces?

We say “the Kingdom of God has come near to you” but what does that actually mean? I envision God standing, extending an arm, inviting us to be near to God. Inviting us to be in relationship with God, into a space that is safe and freeing, into a place of being where God is the authority and ruler of hearts and minds, into a relationship we haven't earned but a gift we accept, into a place where we freely choose to follow God and allow God to have authority in and over our lives, into a relationship that offers ultimate healing. Until that time let's be that community of grace, joy and peace that allows God's healing to flow through us as much as possible now.

*<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/research-briefs/religiosity-and-suicidality-among-lgbtq-youth/>

Lori Friesen is Minister of Care at Zion Mennonite Church, a congregation with diverse theological perspectives. Lori served on the Vision Planning Team for the assembly.

Bike Shenandoah Celebrates 25th Year

BY JON TROTTER

From the one year old riding in a bike seat with her dad to the 81 year old who rode the 50K route, all 84 participants of the 25th anniversary Bike Shenandoah enjoyed their time on the road and in community on September 17, raising money for six local organizations.

The event was a resounding success, raising a total of approximately \$28,000.

In addition to the funds raised to help support six local organizations engaged in services and ministries with both local and global impact, this ride continues to be a fun and accessible event for people of all ages. The goals are to build community and create friendships around a common cause and a common interest.

Bike Shenandoah had some exciting additions this year. It was a special treat to have two of the beneficiary organizations include their own groups

of participants in the ride. Eleven youth participated in the 25K ride as the first of many adventures to come as they begin their year-long journey with SLAQ (Servant Leadership Quest), a ministry led by VMissions worker Ken Wettig. And for the first time, children from the Roberta Webb Early Education Center also participated in a “bike rodeo.” Approximately 15 children and their families (who benefit from the funds raised by Bike Shenandoah) joined in the fun.

Prizes were awarded to those who increased the impact of their ride by engaging their friends as sponsors. Les Graber, Maren Hange, and Christine Carpenter all received gift cards to Shenandoah Bike Company for bringing in the most sponsorships. Dr. Paul Yoder won the prize for the “most mature” rider at 81 years old.

A highlight for riders of Bike Shenandoah is often the snack table at the Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church rest stop, and

the energy bars made by Sonya Eberly. Former board member Steve Carpenter has heard rave reviews of these bars for years, but has never been able to pull himself away from ride day duties until this year. Upon returning this year from his 25K ride, he reported that, “They were everything I hoped they would be, and better!” The event organizers are very grateful for Sonya and all our volunteers who make this event special, year after year.

All of the organizations who benefit from the Bike Shenandoah event, including VMissions, are grateful for all of the business and individual sponsors, and participants in this annual ride. Their generosity helps make the work possible as these agencies and organizations serve their neighbors near and far.

Jon Trotter is the Communications Associate for VMissions.



Pictured are SLAQ (Servant Leader Quest) participants. Ken Wettig (far left) is the initiator and director of SLAQ with VMissions transForm program. Ken is also a Pastor at Early Church in Harrisonburg, Va. Photo courtesy of VMissions



VMC LEADERSHIP ENRICHMENT EVENT

Worship, Singing, Scriptures & Prayers

FEBRUARY 17-19, 2023

WILLIAMSBURG CHRISTIAN RETREAT CENTER

with Ben Bergey

Assistant Professor of Music at Eastern Mennonite University

Music Editor for Voices Together

Our hope for this weekend is to focus on God and remember that God’s presence surrounds us at all times, to be grateful and loving people to each other and our neighbors, even when we are going through challenging times.

**Registration
OPENS
November 1**



Pathways
Virginia Mennonite Conference
601 Parkwood Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2498
info@virginiainconference.org

Grants and Endowment Funding for VMC members

Ministerial Training Trust Funds (MTTF)

Virginia Mennonite Conference (VMC) is pleased to offer financial assistance for ministers in Virginia Mennonite Conference seeking financial assistance for education and training from a qualified and certified institution. Recipients may include pastors, congregational lay leaders, mission workers, post-high youth sensing a call to Christian ministry, and others. Funds are provided through several Ministry Training Trust Funds (MTTF) grants established by former VMC church leaders and/or their families. Following the parameters of the designated endowment fund that confers this grant, the MTTF grant requires that applicants be active members of a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation. Please click on the link below for an application form; instructions for applying are on the form.



"Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road." Luke 10:4.
Art work by Maren Tyedmers Hange

Church Worker Assistance

A grant for licensed counseling services available to eligible church or agency workers, dependent on funding available through an endowment managed by Virginia Mennonite Conference. Prerequisite: Applicants must have membership in a VMC congregation and the approval process must be done in advance of services being rendered.

Retired Church Workers Aid & Enrichment

A program to provide some financial assistance for eligible retired church, agency or mission workers, or their surviving spouse, due to financial hardship for either aid or enrichment purposes.

First Generation Leaders Endowment

MTTF grant available to First Generation Leaders, who have immigrated to the United States and is serving in a congregational leadership role as an elder, pastor, or church planter. This grant includes course work in English such as Intentional English Programs.

Ministry Inquiry Program (MIP)

The Ministerial Inquiry Program (MIP) is an exciting opportunity of the Mennonite Church USA for college-age young adults to explore pastoral ministry. The program offers you the opportunity to experience first hand what ministry is and to test your own gifts and sense of call. Participants work under the supervision of a pastor and are involved in many aspects of a minister's life and work. Effort is made to place you in the congregation or congregational setting of your choice—urban, rural, large or small. For students of mission, an overseas assignment can be considered. mennoniteusa.org/mip

Applications for grants (except MIP) are available at virginiainconference.org/resources. Select the "Grants" tab. Or email grants@virginiainconference.org

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Save the Date
COMING IN 2023

VMC Winter Delegate Assembly
February 4

Worship, Singing, Scriptures & Prayers: a retreat for Pastors and Credentialed Leaders with Ben Bergery
February 17-19

MennoCon '23 in Kansas City
July 3-8

VMC Summer Assembly
July 13-15

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Stories of God at work: Congregants, congregations, conference ministries, and conference related ministries may submit articles to June at info@virginiainconference.org by January 5, 2023.