



# PATHWAYS

WALKING WITH THE MINISTRIES OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE



SPRING/SUMMER  
2026

Vol. 11, No. 2



*Big Spring Mennonite  
Church, Luray, Virginia  
Photo by Elwood Yoder*

## SMALL CONGREGATIONS

# BIG IMPACT

**FROM THE  
CONFERENCE  
MINISTER 3**

**MINISTER OF  
EQUIPPING  
HIRED 3**

**CONFERENCE  
COUNCIL CHAIR  
REFLECTIONS 4**

**REFLECTIONS ON  
WINTER DELEGATE  
ASSEMBLY 5**

**STORIES FROM VMC:  
SMALL CONGREGATIONS,  
BIG IMPACT 5-11**

From the Conference Minister

## SMALL CONGREGATIONS, BIG IMPACT



In mid-January, I found myself listening to a group of leaders as they met for their quarterly Northern District Council meeting. As a way of helping me get to know the churches of Northern

District, each person in the circle was invited to share something about how God is at work in the context of their congregation.

As I sat and listened, I was amazed at the many different ways every one of these congregations—which were mostly quite small—was having an impact on their communities. Neighbors were fed and clothed, deep connections were made, prisoners were cared for, and in a whole host of ways the light of Christ was shining in ways that seemed small, but were life-changing.

Everyone around the table was encouraged, and I found myself thinking that we need more opportunities for all of us to hear these amazing stories. I shared a couple of brief examples in my comments at the Winter Delegate Assembly, but it seemed like it would be good to share more stories with more people.

And so it came about that we invited small congregations from throughout Virginia Mennonite Conference to share stories for this issue of *Pathways*. We didn't hear back from all of our small congregations, but I believe the stories shared here are enough to encourage us about what is possible, inspire our imagination about what we might try, and renew our hope in the God who takes tiny grains of faith and transforms them in amazing ways.

Thank you to each congregation that submitted an article. May these stories be just the beginning of our storytelling, and of our acts of living out our faith in our many communities.

**Kevin Goertzen**  
Conference Minister

## MALVAEZ HIRED AS NEW MINISTER OF EQUIPPING

**BY KEVIN GOERTZEN**  
Conference Minister

I am excited to share the news that Juan Carlos Malvaez has rejoined the Virginia Mennonite Conference Ministry staff in the quarter-time role as Minister of Equipping. Many of you already know Carlos, because he served on the VMC Ministry Team from September 2024 to August 2025. He began his new role in April and has hit the ground running.



In his new role, Carlos has responsibility for four main components of ministry: congregational health and vitality, community ministry and outreach, congregational equipping, and team leadership. He consults

with and trains pastors, lay leaders, and congregants to embody health, vitality, healing, and hope as followers of Christ and are strengthened in their witness to neighbors near and far.

Carlos also assists with regular training events in cooperation with the districts of VMC and District Ministers which are relevant for the growth and challenges of VMC's diverse member churches and changing cultural contexts.

He writes, "I respond to this calling with great humility and a deep sense of responsibility to contribute positively to the vision of those who came before me. I am glad to report that the mission of VMC continues: to equip and to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far. It is an honor to serve the body of Christ through a conference that has been my home for 24 years."

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## REFLECTIONS ON MY TERM OF SERVICE



STEVE PARDINI

in, through, and among us as we do the work that pleases God, brings glory to God, and advances the cause of Christ.

My term in office began in fall 2024 after a series of events that created a vacuum in conference leadership. When Conference Council members gathered for a scheduled meeting with no one to chair it, Ervin Stutzman recommended that I lead the meeting, so I did. At the following meeting, I nominated a person for the position of Chair, but she declined and instead made a motion to appoint me as an interim Conference Council facilitator, which was unanimously approved. Later, the Gifts Discernment Committee proposed a team leadership model for the Conference Council until a Moderator could be appointed, but this proposal was rejected by Conference Council, which decided to continue with me as the interim Conference Council chair.

I must admit that I initially felt vulnerable. I had no pastoral experience, very few connections with others in the conference, and, in light of the recent situations, wondered whether I would be made a scapegoat. I spoke privately with Ervin about these concerns. He was convinced I was the right person and encouraged me to continue.

The Conference Council began meeting monthly. Needs were identified, prioritized, and addressed. As we moved into problem-solving mode, everyone became involved. The Council was not a rubber-stamp committee. The first order of business was to approve the 2024-25 budget. The proposed budget showed a deficit of nearly \$60,000. It was noted that several churches had left the Conference and that membership had declined.

I am grateful to God for the many gifts and talents given to members of Virginia Mennonite Conference. God blesses us with gifts and talents so the faithful may do the work God has prepared for us. During my time in office, I have sensed the Holy Spirit working

in, through, and among us as we do the work that pleases God, brings glory to God, and advances the cause of Christ. It was decided that VMC needed to live within its means. Full-time equivalent (FTE) reductions and other cuts reduced the budget by \$40,000. At the same time, a Fundraising Task Team was formed. Generous donors encouraged giving with matching grants; and leaders and delegates contributed. Fundraising appeals were sent. By year-end, there was a slight surplus.

The Conference Council, Conference Ministry Team (CMT), and Faith and Life Commission (FLC) issued a joint statement regarding the recent events that led to the leadership vacuum. A Personnel Committee was formed, and work on a VMC Human Resources Document began. A Conference Council Apology Letter was drafted and submitted to the Delegate Assembly.

A Conference Staffing Task Team was formed in 2025. In June, Fonda Weaver was hired as the 0.75 FTE Office Administrator. The Task Team then shifted its focus to hiring replacements for the Conference Ministry Team, whose terms ended in August 2025. Kevin Goertzen started as a 0.75 FTE Conference Minister in October, and Carlos Malvaez began as a 0.25 FTE Minister of Equipping in April 2026. This reduced FTEs from 2.0 to 1.75. The outgoing CMT was contracted to cover conference duties during the transition. They took on many office duties until the Office Administrator was hired and provided vital assistance in the transition to the new CMT.

The sudden and unexpected passing of Ervin Stutzman in June 2025 left us grieving. He contributed to the work of FLC, CMT, and Conference Council in vital ways. He was full of wisdom and courage. I felt a deep loss; his support and mentorship were immensely helpful in guiding my work with Conference Council.

In the midst of all this, VMC celebrated the 500th anniversary of the founding of the Anabaptist movement. The book, *People of Peace: A History of the Virginia Mennonite Conference* (co-authored by Steve Nolt and Elwood Yoder), was released in time for the Summer Assembly. The Historical Committee raised funds to help cover the VMC's annual archive costs with the EMU library.

**Conference Council** continued on page 4

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee updated the Bylaws to reflect the shift from the Conference Minister to the Conference Ministry Team, added the newly formed Personnel Committee, and made numerous other minor changes.

An Endowments Task Team was formed to identify, develop, and implement ways to use the Conference's restricted assets and reserves more effectively. The work resulted in the "Seeding Pastors Fund" and the "Cultivating Pastors Fund." A Ministerial Training Fund Committee has been formed to administer the "Seeding Pastors Fund," which provides grants to those seeking a pastoral certificate or a seminary degree. The Conference Ministry Team will administer the Cultivating Pastors Fund grants to support the continuing education and development of current leaders.

A Moderator/Moderator-Elect Task Team was established to evaluate and present the Gifts Discernment Committee with a prioritized list of candidates for positions. These lists were further refined by Conference Council and the Task Team to a list of 18 women and 20 men, which was submitted to the Gifts Discernment Committee, which began interviewing candidates for each role and is working to finalize the selection of nominees and submit them to Conference Council for approval. Once Conference Council approves the GDC recommendations, the nominees will be sent to the Delegate Assembly for a vote.

The Conference Council approved the formation of four task teams, each with a stated purpose, goal, timeline, and resources. In addition to the Conference Council members, each task team included at-large members from across the conference. In total, 14 additional people were added to help complete the Conference Council's work. These at-large members brought skills that greatly enhanced the task teams' performance. Task teams were dissolved once their goals were achieved.

The Conference Council has become more gender equitable, and work is underway to bring in younger, more diverse members to the Conference Council and its standing committees.

VMC is in a better place today than it was a couple of years ago. We now meet about every two months in a more "routine" operating mode. The Conference can focus more of its energy on its mission to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far. It can also continue to advance equity and diversity and welcome fresh, young minds with hearts of service and a commitment to the Conference's goals.

## A WELL-WATERED GARDEN

### Reflections on Winter Delegate Assembly

BY STEVE PARDINI

**O**n February 7, 2026, Virginia Mennonite Conference delegates gathered at Springdale Mennonite Church for Winter Delegate Assembly on the theme "Becoming a Well-Watered Garden," based on Isaiah 58:6-12. We enjoyed great hospitality from Springdale and volunteers.

Opening with prayer, worship, and scripture, delegates engaged in table-sharing time with the prompt to share a verse, a person, or a story from the Bible that sustains your faith. Table members got to know one another through this exercise.

Three congregations were released from VMC membership after being presented and voted on: Iglesia Shalom Nuevo Comienzo (Staunton, VA), Waynesboro Mennonite Church (Waynesboro, VA), and Iglesia Esperanza de Vida (Harrisonburg, VA).

- Juan Carlos Malvaez was hired as the 0.25-time Minister of Equipping on behalf of the Hiring Task Team.
- Larry Miller shared about the "Seeding Pastors" fund, to provide significant resources for seminary scholarships and student debt relief.
- Steve Pardini provided an update on what the Moderator/Moderator-Elect Task Team will do to discern and nominate candidates for positions.
- Craig Wilson, Chair of the Personnel Committee, provided an update on the HR document.
- Pearl Hartman, interim Chair of the Faith and Life Commission, reported that the FLC is reviewing the 2013 statement titled "VMC Pastoral Response to Same-Gender Relationships."
- Aaron Kauffman, President of VMissions, also updated the Assembly participants on the agency's board-approved name-change process.

After lunch, MaryBeth Heatwole Moore led a guided meditation on the theme of becoming a well-watered garden. There was time for table discussion and an opportunity for tables to share.

Kevin Goertzen provided an update on the start of his new position. He has been visiting churches across the Conference, and he loves hearing stories from VMC churches and seeing the Isaiah passage come to life in our congregations in many ways.

## ACTS OF LOVE

**M**ountain View Mennonite Church may be a small, rural congregation, but we are committed to finding meaningful ways to serve our community and reflect the love of Christ.

One of the primary ways we do this is through our monthly hot lunch and clothing closet outreach. At each gathering, we offer a warm, home-cooked meal along with free clothing to those in need.

Our clothing closet (a converted trailer on our property) has become a welcoming space where individuals and families can “shop” for clothes with dignity and care.



*Mountain View Mennonite Church, Hickory, North Carolina, serves a monthly hot lunch to members of their community.*

For example, we are occasionally able to offer free haircuts through the generosity of a volunteer stylist. In addition, we have hosted larger events such as a community Thanksgiving meal, where many came together to enjoy good food, meaningful fellowship, and an important reminder that they are not alone. Also that there are people who care for them, and most importantly, a God who loves them.

We have seen that even small churches can make a meaningful impact. As children of God learning to love and be loved, we simply seek to be faithful in small, consistent acts of love, trusting that God uses them to bring hope, healing, and connection within our community.

These gatherings are about more than meeting physical needs, although that is very important. They provide opportunities to build relationships, share conversations, and create a sense of connection in a relaxed and friendly environment.

Through something as simple as a shared meal, neighbors become friends, and our church becomes a place of belonging.

We are also continuing to look for ways to further bless our community during these times.



*Members of Crest Hill Community Church deliver breakfasts to people in their cars during the town's Food Pantry.*

## COMMUNITY CARE

BY MARIAN BUCKWALTER

**S**ince I became pastor of Crest Hill Community Church four years ago, I have been learning many things about this body of Christ in Wardensville, WV.

First of all, the word “community” in the church name means we focus on the Wardensville community. I notice caring, prayer, and generosity. Church members care about their neighbors, and during our prayer time share about health issues, a death in a neighbor’s family, or other special needs that arise.

We pray for these people throughout the community. There are names of people I don’t know yet, but many in the congregation do. And then, depending on the need, someone might suggest giving a gift to a family—groceries, or a gas card. Generosity abounds.

On the third Saturday of the month, when the Food Panty takes place on the town’s festival grounds, we are there. We set up shop in another building where a few people prepare egg sandwiches and hash browns, others pack them, along with a muffin and fruit, into to-go boxes delivered to each car waiting in line.

Delivering the breakfasts to people in their cars is my favorite part. Often, I hear what’s going on in their lives at the moment. Sometimes I pray with them.

I enjoy greeting Bruno, the tiny dog with a big bark; the single dad parenting his four sons; the brother and sister duo who take care of each other since he became disabled. I also look forward to the camaraderie of the church group who are working together.

We trust that the light of Jesus shines through us to one another and to each person in the car line that morning.

*Marian Buckwalter serves as the pastor of Crest Hill Community Church, Wardensville, West Virginia*



Members of Iglesia Pentecostal Tabernáculo de Restauración and the Immigrant Support Task Force of Daniels Run Peace Church.

## CARING FOR IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORS

### DANIELS RUN BUILDS CONNECTION WITH HISPANIC CHURCH

BY ADAM BRENDE AND STEPHEN “TIG” INTAGLIATA

**L**ike many churches, Daniel’s Run Peace Church, Fairfax, Virginia, has maintained an outdoor food pantry for members of the community in need. This past October, our congregation decided to take this ministry a step further.

In response to the fear and cruelty experienced by immigrants due to the activity of ICE, our congregation felt compelled to connect this ministry more directly to an Hispanic congregation that rents space in our building, Iglesia Pentecostal Tabernáculo de Restauración.

We re-oriented our Immigrant Support Task Force (ISTF) to focus on our relationship with this congregation. As we met with their leadership, we found that one area of need is food insecurity, partly caused by reduced income as a result of fear of going to work or fear of going shopping.

We developed a plan to support the efforts that their congregants already had underway.

Each week a different member of our congregation prepares a grocery list of fresh foods, purchases these items, and stocks the shared pantry. The congregants of Iglesia distribute these items to immigrants in need, both in their congregation and in their circles of contacts.

One of the priorities that the ISTF identified is the importance of not just providing charity to Iglesia Pentecostal Tabernáculo de Restauración, but to develop community with one another.

Our pastors, Stephen “Tig” Intagliata and Sergio Gonzalez, were already regularly having fellowship together. This past March, representatives from both churches met to get to know each other better. We shared Easter traditions from our childhood, discussed how we can better support our neighbors in crisis through the food pantry and other means, and prayed together.

One outcome of the meeting was the decision to expand the items we stock in the joint pantry, providing more fresh vegetables and hygiene products.

Our two congregations hope to continue strengthening our ties with each other as we share our building and share joys and challenges together.

*Adam Brendle serves as the Immigration Support Task Force chairperson at Daniels Run. Stephen “Tig” Intagliata is Pastor of Daniels Run Peace Church.*



Members of Beldor Mennonite Church, Elkton, Virginia, play bluegrass concerts as a gospel outreach to the community, a ministry of the small congregation that has continued for decades.

# THE BELDOR MENNONITE NICHE

BY JAMES ÄKERSON

Small congregations can be tempted to focus on what they lack. People, resources, and energy to do important works all seem to challenge us. In the past, Beldor fell into that pit. We wondered if hospice was the next step for our shrinking numbers.

It was through appreciative inquiry that we began to be thankful for who we are and what God has given us to date. By listing the things that we appreciate and have been thankful for, we were able to take a deep breath and keep walking forward. It wasn't (and isn't) a method to become a mega-church, but it allows us to joyfully use and do what God has already given us.

We found that there were two things we were especially good at: we visit and support one another in good times and bad, and we enjoy incorporating bluegrass gospel music into our worship and outreach.

A feeling and actual status of isolation has grown in America. Each person has been taught to be strong and independent. That is not bad. But when combined with a generalized fear of other people, each of us suffers from being alone and not knowing how to change. Visiting one another goes a long way toward breaking down artificial walls. It's the way of neighbors. It's the way of delighting in knowing and being friends.

The tyranny of time is at first is the biggest obstacle, even more than the awkwardness of meeting. We're taught to fill our days with commitments and fun.

Though work and chores must be done, the narcissistic focus of busyness has to be held in check. Some folks at Beldor can go, knock on a door, and start talking. Others use a medium, like coffee or eating, to break down what separates. The result is joy, friendships, and an overall friendly feeling. It gives one a sense of hope.

Our ministry of bluegrass gospel concerts has been going on well over 30 years. For us it's a well-oiled machine. We've declared first-Sunday evenings to be our outreach nights. In all the years, we may have garnered a few new attenders to our Sunday worship.

Like Vacation Bible Schools, the actual result of new attendance or new conversions is low. We do it for the joy of meeting other Christians interested in the musical genre. It's ecumenical. We see Pentecostals, Catholics, Baptists, and United Methodists to name a few. There's an appropriate song that goes, "The Lord will be at my church today, But he'll be at your church also. You go to your church and I'll go to mine, But let's walk along together...." These days we have more to gain by joining hands than finding reasons to keep apart.

Beldor Church plugs along with an average of about 20 people attending worship, but our impact on our neighborhood and in a three-county area is great. We serve the God of hope (Romans 15:13) and are finding joy as we walk.

*James Äkersson is pastor of Beldor Mennonite Church, Elkton, Virginia.*

# SPRINGDALE SHARES THE PRESENCE OF JESUS THROUGH FELLOWSHIP & HOSPITALITY

BY NANCY STOLL

**W**e often take basic needs of life for granted—food, water, shelter. But for many among us, gaining access to these necessities is a constant source of struggle and stress.

For a one-week period each year, members of Springdale Mennonite Church (Waynesboro, VA) are honored to provide meals, overnight housing, funds for laundromat usage, and transportation for members of our local unhoused community through a program of the Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry (WARM).

But beyond these fundamental needs, we desire to share the love of Jesus with our guests through fellowship, another vital aspect of a healthy life. Through recreation, listening to their stories, scripture reading, and sharing

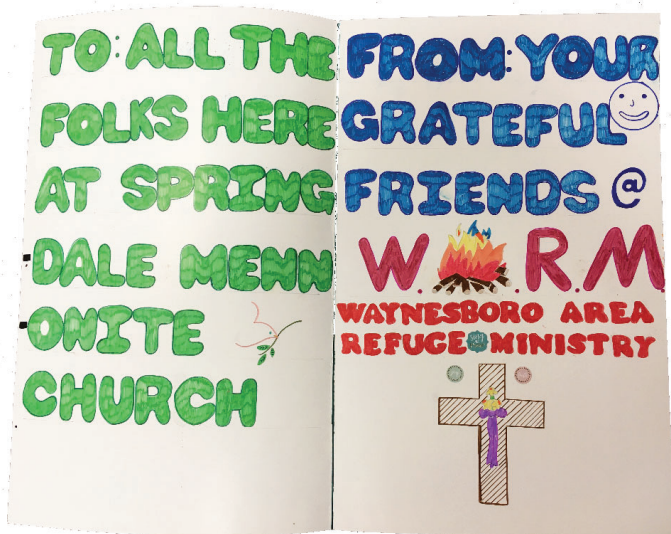
from our own life journeys, we hope to remind each guest of their worth as a son or daughter of the King of Kings, regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves (a good reminder for each of us, as well).

Providing this temporary refuge for 30-40 guests requires significant congregational buy-in, a lot of prayer, generous giving of

time and finances, and the support of other local churches and people working alongside our smaller congregation.

As these weeks come to a close each year, we may be physically tired, but our spirits are always blessed by the interactions, the presence of these guests in our worship services, and sometimes, even by longer-term relationships. And while the connections may be fleeting, we pray for “God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose (Phil. 2:13),” both in our lives and in the lives of those we encounter.

*Nancy Stoll serves as Administrative Assistant at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Virginia.*



Each year, Springdale Mennonite Church hosts people in need of a warm place for a week through the Waynesboro Area Refuge Ministry (WARM).

# HOPE AND FAITH FOR THE COMMUNITY

BY KARALYNN MILLER

**W**illiamsburg Mennonite Church is making an impact in our community by being there for people who need us. If someone in the community needs prayer, we all pray for that person. If someone just came through a hardship we provide food and care for them. If there is an opportunity to give someone in the community hope, then we try to do that. The community is a form of the church and we strive to provide hope and faith to others.

Anytime during the week we have a prayer chain open and people in our church community submit a prayer and it gets sent to everyone. Then, we pray about what was requested and bring updates to the next church service.

In our church there have been many surgeries and births and each time we make food and bring them to the family that needs them at the time. We have fall festivals on the church property and invite the community, which gives hope and faith to others.

Many in our church community have also gone on mission trips. I went on one such trip to Maui, Hawaii, to help rebuild houses destroyed during the fires that had raged on both sides of the island. Being able to talk to the locals and bring hope to them was very uplifting, and I felt the presence of God in our midst.

*Karalynn Miller is a member of Williamsburg Mennonite Church, Williamsburg, Virginia*



*Members of Williamsburg Mennonite Church enjoy opportunities to connect with their community.*

# GRAINS OF SAND THAT BUILD UP THE CHURCH

BY JIM HERSHBERGER

**I**n the years that Ann and I lived in Nicaragua, we frequently heard and used the Spanish expression, *poner la granita de arena*. Literally, it means to put in your grain of sand.

More broadly it means to do our part, to contribute one's share. It conveys the idea that I can't do it alone but if we all work together, our small contribution can make a big difference. When each member of a church brings their part we can do great things for God.

An example of many working together in small ways to make a big difference is our support for the recovery program, Resurrected Ministries, that Nathan Carr and Leah Wolfe lead.

It began some years ago as Nathan's experience in jail led him to a deep encounter with Jesus. He experienced a wonderful release from the habits and hangups that plagued his life. Upon his release from jail he was baptized and began to attend the Celebrate Recovery program at the First Church of the Nazarene in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Many Mount Clinton Mennonite Church members came together to form support groups to share information, read scripture and pray together. God gave Nathan a strong vision for a men's recovery program, and so many of our members worked together to raise funds and help establish this ministry with VMissions support. Currently many of us support this ministry with Bible studies, food for meals, financial support and many other ways.

The power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel of Jesus are the foundation, of course, for the many men and women who are finding new life in Jesus in this ministry. Nathan and Leah give much time, effort, and prayer as many men and women are finding a new life in Jesus.

And the rest of us contribute our grain of sand. In all this God is working to save and transform people who respond to his call. We are grateful we can each contribute our part to God's work in our community.

*Jim Hershberger is pastor of Mount Clinton Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Virginia*

# GOD HAS GUIDED WARWICK RIVER MENNONITE CHURCH THROUGH CRISIS AND BEYOND

BY STEVE WIEBE JOHNSON

In cooking and baking, the two main variables are time and temperature. You can bring together any number of ingredients, but the outcome—delicious food—is achieved by working with the time, temperature, and mix. Too little heat requires a lot more time, too much heat can burn things quickly, but increasing the temperature for a short time can be just the right thing.

The past 10 years have been particularly full of change for Warwick River Mennonite Church in Newport News. The building—more than 50-years-old—needed work and was becoming unsafe. The offices, sewing room, archives etc, were relocated to the school building. The congregation began meeting in an adjacent chapel used by the school.



*Warwick River hosts a Trunk or Treat for families in the community.*

In the office hallway there is a photograph from 2016-2017. There are perhaps 20 people in the photo with a drawing of the proposed building project. There is a lot of energy, optimism and enthusiasm in the photo.

The congregation was full of life and energy and focused on a new future. They were looking at a building project for which they had gathered a wide range of members and were raising funds for a bright future, but the project was expensive.

They had begun worshiping in the chapel. Around the same time there were issues on other levels that tore at relationships. Membership and participation were declining, mostly by natural means like death, but also some people were relocating related to their work or for other reasons.

From certain angles, it looked like things were falling apart and it was unclear if the congregation would make it.

However, God was not finished with WRMC. It was a crisis, not just a phase. As time goes on, we are seeing a new “mix” that is slowly but surely taking shape.

- Weekly prayer outside the school is a safe public space.
- “Threads Together” is a welcoming place for far reaching sewing ministry.
- The relationship with the school has been redefined and has a different shape.
- We have been meeting in the renovated building for over a year now. We meet in the fellowship hall and have been making the sanctuary available for special times of worship, funerals, and programs.
- We have far fewer committees than we used to, because we have fewer programs and participants.
- Our weekly attendance is lower than it used to be but continues to have faithful attenders. We have people that join us on Zoom and many that we visit in their homes.
- The chapel we used for worship is now rented out to another congregation.
- A few other people join us for fellowship meals, so we see them once a month.
- A vision for using space in ways that serve the surrounding community is being explored.

We have a good “mix” of ingredients and time will tell what the results will be. There are pots on the stove and dishes in the oven. We are being patient in working with the temperature. God, the Chef, is bringing things together and the aroma is good.

*Steve Wiebe-Johnson serves as the interim pastor of Warwick River Mennonite Church, Newport News, Va.*



# A LITTLE CHURCH WITH A BIG HEART

BY ELWOOD YODER

**A** “little church with a big heart” describes the hospitality you’ll experience at Big Spring Mennonite Church. Four miles north of Luray in Page County, Va., this VMC congregation marks 65 years since its beginning in 1961.

Announcements and energetic catching up on the week began the service, with 30 in attendance. Sharing is informal, spontaneous, and genuine. Pastor Pearl Hartman asked all to gather around and lay hands on a woman who was battling cancer, and she prayed for her.

Everyone gets to participate in a Sunday service at Big Spring. On the first morning I attended, a laywoman from the congregation led the entire service, and Pastor Pearl didn’t know what her parishioner had planned. It was a beautiful service, with hymns sung from the Voices Together hymnal, sharing joys and concerns, and a peace story about Barbara Johns, who led a 1951 high school walk-out protesting segregation in Prince Edward County, Virginia.



*Pearl Hartman, pastor of Big Spring Mennonite Church, shares a message on May 10, 2026. (Elwood Yoder photo)*

Big Spring members practice peace in Luray. They partner with local churches to support a backpack food assistance program for local children. Children at the public school near the church battle food insecurity, and backpacks provide food over the weekend when they aren’t in school. Church members support Page One, a significant Luray humanitarian mission that provides family assistance to those in the community. Big Spring is a host congregation for a branch of Weekday Religious Education in Page County.

Jacalyn Shirk Lee raised her three children at Big Spring and has attended for 28 years. A social worker, she uses her gifts to serve folks in the community.



*Members and attenders of Big Spring Mennonite Church on Sunday, May 10, 2026. (Elwood Yoder photo)*

At a church potluck meal, Jacalyn said, “we are a local family to each other.” Even though Jacalyn’s children have moved elsewhere, she intentionally lives near the church. For her work at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, Jacalyn drives a considerable round-trip distance each day over the Massanutten Mountain.

Big Spring is a blended congregation from a variety of backgrounds that have chosen to worship together. Several are involved directly in Virginia Mennonite Conference. Pastor Pearl serves as Interim Chair of the Faith and Life Commission. Jean Rissler is Treasurer for the Northern District. Kathy Yoder, an ordained minister in the Mennonite Church for about 30 years, is on the Credentials Committee of the FLC.

But the moment in the worship service that moved me the most, on both Sundays that I attended, was a lighting of the peace lamp. The lamp was a vital part of the planned events, and I couldn’t help but focus on the simple lighting of a wick and the desperate need for peace in our world. The little church in Luray, a local family to one another, continues to light a vibrant peace lamp in their Page County community.

*Elwood Yoder is an author and historian of Virginia Conference history, and a retired Bible teacher.*



**Virginia  
Mennonite  
Conference**

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Mennonite Church USA

601 Parkwood Drive  
Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2498  
info@virginiacconference.org

# Who Is My Neighbor



## SUMMER ASSEMBLY 2026

THURS, JULY 23 - SAT, JULY 25

LINDALE MENNONITE CHURCH  
6255 JESSE BENNETT WAY, LINVILLE, VA 22834

Thurs., 7:00 p.m. - Worship Service  
Fri., 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. - Delegate Session  
Sat., 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. - Family Fun Day

**Early Bird by July 6 - \$75**

Starting July 7 - \$100  
Please register by July 19.

**Virginia Mennonite  
Conference**

**Family Fun  
Day**

Get ready for a day packed with games, laughter, and family bonding! Bring your whole family and enjoy fun activities, tasty treats, and a live Bluegrass concert.



Free refreshments and snacks

Two water slides

Live concert by "TIDE SPRING"

Corn Hole-Face Painting

**Saturday  
June 25**  
9:00 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.  
LINDALE MC.

**FAMILY FUN DAY  
INFLATABLE WATER SLIDES**  
generously sponsored by

  
**tremeX Painting**  
**EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS**  
**RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL**  
**540-478-2562**