

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

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Learning what to do in Albania

What do you do when, after church Sunday morning, four teenage boys tell you they are coming to your place for lunch? You mix four cups of rice in seven cups of boiling water. Then add tomato sauce, water, and a pack of hotdogs to left-over bean soup cooked the day before. Have plenty of bread on hand as well as Dutch Blitz, Uno, and Phase Ten card games. By 5 p.m., the rice will all be gone, the bowl of mandarins and apples empty, and the games put away. Although there were accusations of “hile” (cheating) during the games, they all part in peace with a deep satisfaction from being together.

What do you do when it is your turn to preach this morning and you planned on quality time yesterday but you had a visitor for lunch and then more visitors in the afternoon and evening with one staying for supper and overnight and breakfast? You pray and pull your thoughts and notes together an hour before church starts. But what do you do (especially as a modest Mennonite) when a member tells you it was a good message? You ask what was good in it for him and discover that the Spirit had communicated the message to him a way you had not intended, and that you are blessed by an insight into the impact of the gospel in this culture. (Like the Israelites in slavery in Egypt in Exodus 6:9, the Albanians have been through such difficult times that they do not listen to God's words of hope because of their discouragement.)

What do you do when the boys have all left and you go out for a walk but you feel prompted to go and visit the home of a believer friend whom you haven't seen lately? You go, enter his home, and find yourself in a room full of nominal Muslim extended family with the father lying on the couch. You learn that he is facing surgery on his lung on Wednesday. Before leaving you ask if you can pray for the sick one in the name of the Messiah Jesus who is referred to in their Koran. You grasp his hand, and pray, not knowing what all the Spirit is up to. You leave, escorted the whole way home by your friend who now has tears in his eyes as he



Courtesy Allen Umble

Allen Umble (bottom left)
with one of his English
classes in Lezhë, Albania

tells you the true condition of his father, which the doctor has kept hidden from his patient.

Now I don't know how you would have responded in those situations, but those were my responses. Or how might you respond when you take the boys from your weekly Bible study to the beach for a hotdog roast and for roasting chestnuts and two of them start to throw aerosol cans on the fire? (You lie down on the sand and put your face to the ground when you hear a “ka-boom!”) Or when two English students each hand in a composition exactly the same, even with the same mistakes? (No credit due to either one!) What do you do when four former English students this past week open their returns from the official TOEFL tests they took and find good marks that meet the standards for English in an English speaking university? (Congratulate them, of course!)

What do you do as you approach the end of your term next month and you learn that no one has become available to finish teaching the current course for the twenty eager students who meet in two groups three hours each week for learning English from their Cambridge books? You pray,

What do you do? continued on page 4

What went out comes back around

Not long ago I sat at a dinner in Asheville, North Carolina, and heard James Fyffe from Kentucky talk about his recent experience on a VMBM mission team to help with hurricane repairs in Jamaica. I believe this was his first such experience. James is a building contractor and came home so excited that he told me after the meal that he would consider taking a couple more of his employees down in the near future to help get the job done.



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

He started his testimony, though, by talking about his father, Direl. Many years ago, Christian workers came from Virginia Mennonite Conference to their area of Kentucky to share the good news of Jesus Christ. It was through their ministry that his father became a Christian. James then told us that he has long had a desire to do some kind of mission service out of gratitude for what others had done for his family. Direl became a Mennonite pastor and, along with his late wife, Polly, has ministered to that community in Kentucky for well over 40 years. For his part, James has now become a cross-cultural missionary. What went out many years ago has come back around.

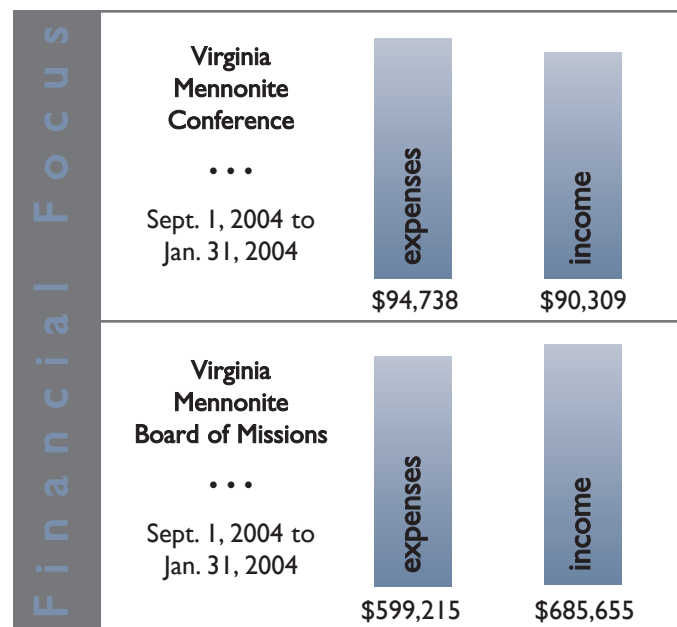
I've wondered about the recent urgent calls for workers in the church. Congregations need pastors. New church development is hobbled by lack of willing

workers. Mission assignments remain unfilled due to lack of persons willing to serve. How do we nurture a church culture of call, the question goes?

Among other things, it begins with a deep sense of receiving God's grace and benefiting from the ministry of others who have come to us and gone before us. All who are Christians have such a heritage. Further, it awakens in many of us the desire to respond to God's call to be an ongoing part of the Christian story. Grace multiplies grace. Witness multiplies witness. Recipients of God's grace are called and compelled to share God's grace with others, who, in turn, pass it along to still others. And on it goes. That is the way the Spirit has worked for 2000 years.

I was interested in the story James told about his father and about Jamaica. Thirty-nine years ago this coming summer, I spent two weeks on a mission trip teaching Bible School in Crockett, Kentucky. James' father, Direl, was the young pastor of that church. James was one of the young students. In a small way, I too have been connected to James' testimony. What went out has come back around.

Loren Horst



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Keeping in touch with persons in service

Sometimes the work of our mission workers can be lonely. Being hundreds or thousands of miles away from home, church, family, and friends brings about some anxiety and uneasiness. What can we do here at home to show that we care? Many of us give financial support, but what are some other ways to back them up?

At this time we are connected through cyberspace by email, and so contact this way takes just a few minutes. If we decide to send something in the mail it will take a few more minutes. So whatever way you choose, here are some tips of meaningful touches you could give.

- After the usual chit-chat, comment on points in their letter or prayer needs, and tell them that you are praying for them.
- Share a meaningful Bible verse, or a devotional thought.
- Share an answer to prayer in your own life or a friend in church.
- Include family news.
- Write about politics or local or national happenings. With CNN and the BBC, missionaries have quick access to worldwide news. Therefore concentrate more on the local highlights.

What to send in the mail:

- Provide articles out of the daily newspaper.
- Include church news, church newsletter, bulletins, if these things are not accessible on a web site from your church.
- Send some small gifts that fit into a manilla envelope for the children, and adults as well.
- Remember special days—birthdays, anniversaries, holidays—by sending a card.

What else?

- Make sure that when they come back you plan to host them for a day or two when they come to your church.
- Invite them to your small group in order to encourage others to remember them too.
- Send a small sales catalog just before the missionary comes home, which may help them to know about some of the styles and the latest bargains.
- Plan a trip to visit them in their own setting!

• Ed Bontrager

VMBM Director of Development and Church Relations

Tara Stoll, writer of "Growing up as a modern day Anabaptist" published in the February 2005 issue, attends Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, Va.

Arson fire damages First Mennonite Church, Richmond

An early-morning fire, which investigators believe was deliberately set, damaged part of the new building at First Mennonite Church on Jan. 18. The fire remains under investigation amid a series of other church fires in the region.



Ken Wermuth

Pastor Barry Loop said Jan. 21 that damage is estimated at \$120,000. The blaze was confined to the church's education wing.

Passersby alerted authorities of the fire after they saw flames shooting from the wing's roof about 7:30 a.m. Jan. 18, according to church member Randall Miller.

Miller said Henrico County firefighters returning from another call arrived within minutes and quickly confined the blaze, which heavily damaged a classroom, bathroom and nursery.

Loop said church services will be held in the building despite the fire, which did not damage the 82-member congregation's sanctuary. Loop said only the church's education wing was seriously affected by the blaze.

The building was practically new, with services having begun there in November.

Loop said authorities were carrying out an extensive investigation and had determined that the fire was deliberately set.

Six other church fires, which authorities believe may be linked, also have occurred in the region since July 2003. Four have occurred in Henrico County and one each in two neighboring counties.

Four of the blazes are known to have been deliberately set, and the other two are deemed suspicious.

Loop said authorities told him they are pursuing several leads in the church arson cases.

A view of the fire damage which heavily damaged a classroom, bathroom, and nursery in the church's education wing..

• Mennonite Weekly Review staff

Miracle at Mountain View (NC) Mennonite

On November 14, 2004, Pastor Chuck Hostetter announced a prayer meeting for the following Saturday evening. "We want to do everything in our power to prevent the devil from stopping the good things God is doing," he said.

Chuck sensed the need for spiritual warfare. The following Sunday, eight people would be baptized and nine would join the church. Some had recently accepted Jesus. Others, we'd prayed for, for decades.

We were especially amazed that one of the new believers had a completely healed liver - after being sent home from the hospital to die. It was a time of rejoicing at Mtn. View.

But before the week was out, we were grieving. Late on Friday night, a young member of the congregation was riding on the outside of a car with friends. She fell. As Saturday dawned, stunned family and friends gathered - waiting and weeping - whispering prayers of fearful hope. The surgeon reported brain damage and so much swelling that he'd removed part of Holly's brain in order to put her skull back together. "Holly may not live," he said.

That night, the congregation gathered as planned, praying first for our new believers. Then we focused our prayers on Holly. We begged for another miracle.

One of Holly's childhood friends drove from Virginia Beach to pray by Holly's side. Word spread and around the world prayers went up in her behalf.

By Thanksgiving, as doctors brought her out of the induced coma, Holly responded to questions by hospital staff. Her parents reported daily miracles. She moved her limbs upon request. She smiled. She talked. She fed herself and in less than two weeks she walked. Two weeks from the day of surgery, Holly went home.

The next day, as I opened our Sunday service with scripture, I noticed that the congregation wasn't listening. All eyes focused on a miracle as Holly walked in with her family.



courtesy Joyce Moyer Hostetter

Holly Lowman and Chuck Hostetter discuss plans for Holly to share her testimony with the congregation.

Holly is singing with our worship team again. Back at her waitressing job, she shows her scars, telling customers how God is healing her. In a recent checkup her doctor said, "You have a story to tell."

Yes, said Holly. "It's all because of God."

Holly's healing and her renewed faith give our congregation the courage to ask for more miracles — all kinds.

• Joyce Moyer Hostetter
Mountain View Mennonite Church, Hickory, NC

What do you do? continued from page 1

and then you say, "I'll come back and stay until May."

What do you do when you tally the cost of an extension to your term? You trust in God and in those who have faithfully given in the past. Now I could have used the first person pronoun "I" or "my" in this letter, but if you take "our" and add the letter "y" it becomes "your." Through your faithful prayer and financial support you, too, have participated in the above stories, and I am grateful.

• Allen Umble
Lezhë, Albania

Eleven VMBM workers ending service this year



Jason and Donna Martin and family are returning to Ontario this summer after serving 5 years in Italy.



Omar and Dolores Beiler are ending 6 years of medical service in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica in May 2005.



Allen Umble is returning to Pennsylvania after teaching English classes and assisting with church development since 1996.



Dan and Mary Hess and family are leaving Albania after working with agriculture and church development since 2001.

Workers needed!

These transitions leave holes that need to be filled with God's servants! Can **you** serve in any of these places?

What does it take to serve?

- a willing heart and mind
- a clear nudge from God for service
- skills that are needed in these places
- a support team that discerns, encourages, and assists with financial resources

Without persons to serve, English classes will be discontinued, friendship evangelism will go undone, medical check-ups and medications will be lost, and deaf students will miss enriching activities! Is God calling you to fulfill one of these roles?



Monica Unzicker and Krista Swartzentruber are returning to the US in late July after serving for nine months as teaching assistants at Maranatha School for the Deaf.

Contact Beth Brunk or Gloria Lehman at Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions at (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535. To see a complete list of opportunities, go to www.vmbm.org/serve.

EMS hosts Leadership Training

Jim Bishop



Glen Guyton (left) and Steven Brown describe the leadership style of Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Va., the largest congregation in Mennonite Church USA.

A sense of expectancy pervaded Martin Chapel at Eastern Mennonite Seminary as the annual School for Leadership Training opened on Jan. 17.

The conference theme, “Dwelling in God’s Space and Time: Core Practices for Transforming Leaders”

was developed by Patrick Keifert, president and director of Church Innovations in Minneapolis, Minn., a consulting organization that assists congregations in moving from a “maintenance” mode to a “mission-driven” mindset.

The capacity crowd of 320 registrants—some persons had to be turned away—were invited to “dwell” on the biblical text, Luke 10:1-12, repeatedly during the four-day gathering. The scripture recounts Jesus sending out His followers in pairs to spread the good news of the gospel, declaring that “the Kingdom of God has come near to you.”

Each of Keifert’s plenary sessions opened with representatives of three Mennonite churches that have undergone significant transformation telling their stories, including Calvary Community Church of Hampton, Va., a Virginia Mennonite Conference congregation. The speaker drew from their experiences in identifying essential practices for becoming transforming leaders and congregations.

Calvary, now one of the largest congregations in Mennonite Church USA with more than 2,000 members, has experienced rapid growth precisely

because of its clearly-defined vision for mission that everyone commits to.

“We have a non-traditional leadership style and a multicultural, cutting-edge ministry,” said Steven Brown, a member of the church’s pastoral team.

“We seek to be Christ-centered, seeker-friendly, excellence-propelled, community service-oriented and family-focused. We are called to be risk-takers, to move beyond the four walls of the church building,” Brown said.

Glen Guyton, the church’s youth pastor, added: “We must be vulnerable, lead from outside our comfort zones and trust God to lead the way. God has given us a vision, a mission to fulfill,” he told the assembly.

Worship, a litany of commissioning and a mass chorus of participants closed the conference, as persons left the meeting place two-by-two, just as Jesus sent out the 70 in pairs to go into the world.

“To be honest, the highlight of the week for me was hearing stories from ‘30 years on the road’ by EMU President Loren Swartzendruber,” said Clyde G. Kratz, lead pastor of Zion Mennonite Church, Broadway, Va. “I appreciated Loren’s humor and insight and his declaring that ‘if we can laugh together we can also cry together.’” Kratz, a 1986 EMU graduate and 1989 M.Div. graduate of the seminary, said he attends the conference every year “to reconnect with my colleagues from across the church.”

Cassette recordings and videotapes of the plenary sessions are available by contacting EMU’s learning resources department at 540-432-4231; e-mail: kingmg@emu.edu. A photo gallery from the conference and student reflections of workshop sessions are available online at www.emu.edu/seminary.

• Jim Bishop

Public Information Officer, Eastern Mennonite University

Congregational Resource Center

Lent, Easter and Pentecost

The winter, 2004/2005 issue of LEADER features worship services for Lent around the theme, “Marvelous in our eyes.” Monologues and additional material is available at:

<http://www.leaderonline.org/supplement.htm>. (You may want to check it out even if you don’t plan on using these resources for Lent.)

The spring, 2005 issue of LEADER features worship resources for the period between Easter and Pentecost. “Unbound,” is the theme, and eight people from Virginia Mennonite Conference were a part of the team that developed the material.

Saturday, March 5, 1:00 - 3:00 p.m., writers from the Easter-Pentecost worship resource team will be at the Congregational

Resource Center. Kevin Clark, Brian Martin Burkholder and Kris Shank Zehr will walk people through the worship services, and be available to answer questions and offer additional suggestions for these seven weeks of worship.

Please RSVP to Jill Landis at the CRC if you or anyone else in your congregation would like to attend. This would be great for pastors, worship leaders, people who work with visual arts and anyone else who will be assisting with worship.

The Resource Center is open 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact Jill Landis at 540-432-4219 or crc@emu.edu to make arrangements for evening use.

Visit our website at www.emu.edu/mcrc to browse our catalog.

March 2005 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by **Park View Federal Credit Union**, which provides full financial services to the Mennonite community with commitment to our shared values of mutual aid, integrity, efficiency, service, and innovation.

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pvfcu@pvfcu.org • www.pvfcu.org

6 Several Mennonite musicians will be part of the BlauRock Cafe at the Court Square Theater in Harrisburg. Pray for them as they witness to their faith through their music Monday night.

7 Many of the VMC churches are examining and working at ways to hear more clearly and follow more faithfully God's call to mission. Pray for pastors, elders, and church councils as they discern the winds of the Spirit.

13 Pray for Pastor Flimm and Karen Ranchod at Calvary Community Church Chesapeake as they labor to grow their congregation and enlarge Christ's church. Their work, in the former Deep Creek Mennonite Church, began about 2 1/2 years ago.

14 Pray for Jodi Hertzler of Mennonite Media and respondent for Third Way Café, www.third-way.com, as she answers questions and gives direction to people seeking help and information about Mennonites.

20 A concert of prayer is being held at 3:00pm today at JMU Convocation Center, site of Springfest in the Valley. Please pray about your participation.

21 Pray for Christopher Kennedy who lead the Abrams Mennonite Church in rural Jamaica. They face many challenges in this small congregation, but there are also many blessings.

27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and on the earth again shall stand; I know eternal life He gives, that grace and power are in His hand.
Alleluia!

28 A March for Jesus is being planned in Lezhe, Albania, on May 21. Pray that this visible presence of Christians would draw people to Jesus.

Tuesday

1 Thank God for the work of Ed and Irene Schrock from Colorado Springs, CO, who have coordinated the work teams for hurricane reconstruction at the Maranatha School for the Deaf, Nov.-Feb. They have blessed many people there.

8 Richard Keeler writes that January was an encouraging month for him and Margaret because there is good growth in numbers and spiritual discipleship. Join them in thanking God for renewed interest in the Gospel and Bible study.

15 Omar and Dolores Beiler helped organize construction to rebuild Sis. Perline's house with her family members in Jamaica. A work team from Mt. Vernon MC, Grottoes, Va., assisted for a week in Feb. Thank God for this effort.

22 Allen Umble brings six years of ministry to a conclusion in May, 2005. Pray with him as he senses the urgency of bringing closure to many things before his departure.

29 VMBM staff work hard at the work to which the church has called them, often giving hours and effort far beyond their pay. Pray for wisdom and guidance as they meet tomorrow for the annual planning day.

Wednesday

2 Six men from the Mennonite churches in Trinidad went to Grenada in February to work with YWAM for a week of reconstruction after Hurricane Ivan. Thank God for their willingness to serve in this way.

9 A 300-member choir is being formed for Springfest in the Valley on April 8-10. Practices begin on March 15 for this area. Pray about your participation in the Springfest Choir.

16 The Health and Mutual Care Commission will meet tomorrow at VMRC. Pray for Chair, Dr. P.T. Yoder and the other members as they consider how to address the health care access issues facing us.

23 Monthly men's and women's meetings that take place at Bari, Italy, are excellent times of sharing about the joys and struggles of everyday life. Pray that these meetings will continue.

30 Nelson and Jessica Okanya returned to Harrisonburg after working at the Theological College in Tanzania for a year. Thank God for their service there, and ask His guidance as they look ahead at further training and service.

Thursday

3 Pray for Conf. Youth Minister Kimberlee Greenawalt and local church youth sponsors as they gather together at EMHS for a 30 Hour Famine to support World Vision. They will study scripture, play and pray together while fasting.

10 Monica Unzicker is teaching computer classes at the Maranatha School in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica. The students enjoy this learning tool and are making progress. Ask God to grant Monica patience and insight for this role.

17 Many older persons serve in essential roles as volunteers---what would we do without them?! Name some of these in your prayers today, and ask God to bless them abundantly.

24 Many Mennonites gather this night and wash each others feet in remembrance of Christ's example with His disciples. Pray that humble, servant leaders will be raised up in our midst.

31 The new VMBM program, *tranSend*, is developing with good interest by pastors and young adults. Pray for Ken Horst as he gives direction to this endeavor; and pray for the participants as they prepare for this one-year internship.

Friday

4 This weekend, the Jamaica Mennonite Church is holding the annual Conference in Kingston. The theme is "Jesus Heals and Forgives." Ask God to make this a time of spiritual refreshment for JMC.

11 Mennonite Men are gathered at the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center this weekend for spiritual renewal. Pray for Bishop Leslie Francisco as he brings insights from the Word.

18 The Hope Mennonite Church, Esperanza, Trinidad, leadership team started monthly visitation as a team in January. The church is building bridges of faith in this predominately Hindu village. Pray for these visitations and interactions.

25 Today the Shenandoah Valley Men's Chorus gives a concert of sacred music in the new auditorium at Eastern Mennonite High School. The offering will benefit Phil and Marcia Lehman's ministry in Bari, Italy.

Saturday

5 The VMBM board requests your prayer as they help give leadership to our conference mission vision. They meet this weekend for a combination of work and retreat in Williamsburg.

12 The war in Iraq has altered the political landscape of the Middle East. Mission workers there request prayer that God will give wisdom and grace to political and religious leaders in the region as they seek to guide their people.

19 Hunt Family Fiddlers perform tomorrow at 4 p.m. in the EMHS auditorium, Harrisburg. This family provides refreshing entertainment that all ages can enjoy.

26 Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? Sometimes it causes me to tremble...

**"Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life."
—John 4:14 (The Message)**

Announcements



The Virginia Mennonite Conference Youth Office will host a **30 Hour Famine** at Eastern Mennonite High School, March 4-5. The 30 Hour Famine is a program of World Vision, and the proceeds will help supply food to children in some of the world's poorest countries. Youth are encouraged to be a part.

A **Conference-Related Ministry Events Calendar** is now online! Visit www.vmconf.org/calendar for the latest information on the events taking place in Virginia Mennonite Conference and its related ministries. To submit Conference-related events or to alter information currently on the calendar, please send e-mail to info@vmconf.org or call Rachel Swartzendruber at (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535.



Hunt Family Fiddlers, Chesapeake, Va., will perform on Sunday, March 20 at 4 p.m. in the EMHS auditorium. An offering will be received to benefit Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions support of NewBridges Immigrant Resource Center.

Warwick River Christian School Inc., a growing Mennonite sponsored school with 350 students from K3 thru G8, is seeking one or two qualified applicants for Administrator and Director of Development to replace Gordon Zook, who plans to retire summer 2005. A vision for Christ-centered education and relevant experience in education, administration, and/or development is required. Contact: Mr. Lynn Showalter, 252 Lucas Creek Rd., Newport News, VA 23602; or LJShowalter@aol.com

Come hear several Mennonite musicians perform as part of the **BlauRock Cafe** at the Court Square Theater in Harrisonburg, March 7. Music will begin at 7 p.m.

The **Hymn Sing for Peace** is scheduled for April 9 at 2 p.m. in Lafayette Park, Washington, DC, just across from the White House. Held annually, singers gather to share songs of peace with one another and as a witness to those who pass by. This event is sponsored by the Anabaptist Peace Center, Washington, DC. Visit www.apcwdc.mennonite.net.

Pastoral Transition



Byron J. Peachey was licensed for ministry for his continuing role as associate campus pastor at Eastern Mennonite University. He is a member of the campus ministries team, formed in August, 2003, that includes Brian Martin Burkholder and Julie A. Haushalter.



An introductory *transSend* DVD is available at no charge from VMBM. Contact Laura Moyers at (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535 or laura.moyers@vmbm.org.

