

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

November 2005
Vol. 16, No. 1

“Mara” means “bitterness” but she shares a testimony of joy

Mara Giuliana knows that her name means “bitterness.” Bitter is what she once was.

Losing your father at the age of 15 is difficult for anyone, and Mara Giuliana is a living example of how difficult it is. Her father, Mimo died suddenly fifteen years ago after a fight with Parkinson's disease. Both Mimo and Lia (Mara's mother) had come to know Jesus as their personal Savior during this illness, and Mara had some knowledge of the gospel as well. However, at the death of her father Mara turned her back on God, and began looking for fulfillment in life from other places. Her increasing bitterness was testimony of the failure of the search.

Mara's connection to the Mennonite churches in Italy began years ago. While on a vacation from Bari to Palermo, her father became so ill that he could not drive the family home. They heard a radio broadcast that offered a call-in phone number. “Let's give it a try,” Mimo urged his wife. Sue Horst was on the other end of that phone call.

Francesco Sapienza, a Mennonite pastor at Cinisi, and perfect stranger to Mara's family, offered to drive them the 12-hour journey back to Bari. Along the way Francesco shared his own testimony with the family. When they got to Bari, he connected them to Tim and Karen Green. They began attending the Bari congregation and after some time, Mara's parents accepted the Lord and were baptized. Not Mara.

It was difficult for Lia watching her daughter living far from the love of God. During the illness and death of her father, Mara became increasingly bitter and sought relief through seeking worldly pleasure and acceptance from others. Although Lia was not a woman to talk in public settings, each week she would request prayer for her daughter.

Years of a mother's prayers, the care of the family of God, and the invitation of the Holy Spirit finally bore fruit. Two years ago while on vacation with another family from the Centro Koinonia congregation, Mara decided to dedicate her life to Jesus and serve him. Many rejoiced to know that the many prayers had been answered, that “bitterness” had been turned to joy. One year ago, in September 2004, Mara was baptized



into the body of Christ at Centro Koinonia Mennonite Church. Since that time Mara has continued to grow in her faith, regularly attending Bible studies, discipleship courses, and church services. Mara is very talented as an artist and uses her talents to serve the Lord. She has drawn a coloring book for children at Bible school, posters to decorate the church that illustrate the Bible story of the day, designs backdrops for the Christmas skits, and illustrated a children's book that was authored by another member of the Centro Koinonia congregation. She dreams of starting a craft class for children, to illustrate other books, and share this talent with others for the sake of Christ.

Mara shared her testimony with the congregation one evening. “I was looking for fulfillment in the things the world could offer me: fun, friends, parties, and drugs, but Jesus came and changed my life; He saved me!” Mara knows the meaning of her name, and knows that it no longer describes her. Bitterness has been turned to joy!

Mariangela and Mara, two joyful Christians of the Centro Koinonia Mennonite Church.

• Loren Horst and Phil Lehman

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short-term
programs

Broken down walls and torn curtains

The title comes from Matthew and Ephesians. The lesson is this, that in Christ, all may enter the Most Holy Place through the blood of Jesus (that, from Hebrews). We come side by side with others. Others formerly excluded. With those from the other side of the wall. Like us. Ephesians is clear. We too were once outside the curtain, on the other side of the wall.



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

Except that is not what some of us were led to believe. I know it wasn't intentional. Assumptions were there nevertheless, along with actions based on those assumptions. We called ourselves "ethnic Mennonites." Others, if near at hand, were called "from the community." Those further away were called "the mission field." The New Testament uses words like "Jews" and "Gentiles."

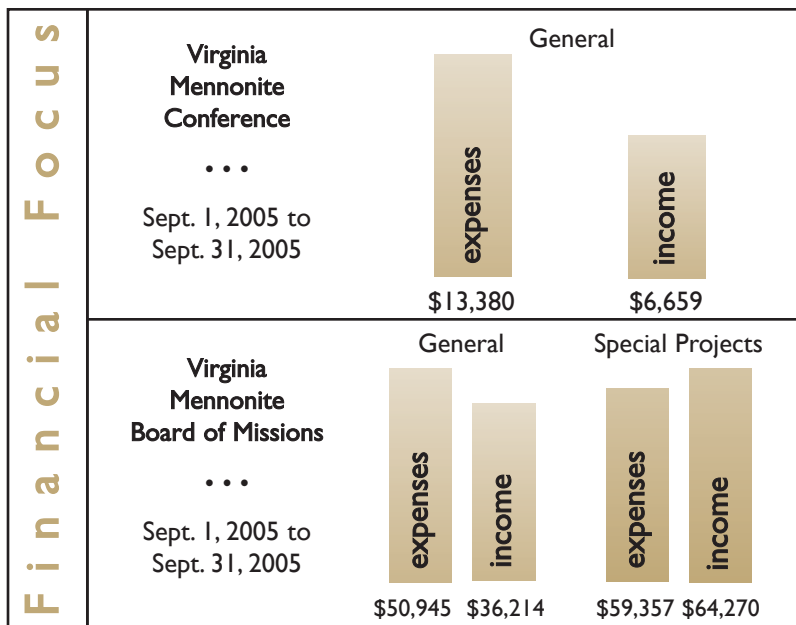
A professor who wasn't a Mennonite once told me, "To the extent Mennonites become missional, they will cease to be Mennonite." To the extent "Mennonite" is defined by those old assumptions, he is exactly right. The fact is however, Christ's church will refuse to be confined to such limits. In our own little area of dominion, we can either cooperate or we'll fight kicking and screaming. That won't change Christ's church much, but it might change our place in it. "Mennonite" will only be a useful term in the future to the extent it mirrors what God is doing in the world.

I am hopeful. I meet Mara Giuliani and am blessed to know that the Mennonite church has lived the gospel in such a way that Mara is now a follower of Jesus. Giuliani is a Mennonite name, but more importantly, a Christian name. I meet Reena Mohammed and am blessed to see her serving as an elder in a Mennonite church. Mohammed is a Mennonite name, but more importantly, a Christian name.

I am blessed to know that nearly 1/3rd of our Virginia Conference members are now members of congregations that have not been "ethnic Mennonite" (whatever that really does mean). Not that I can take much credit—I didn't have much to do with it. But I can celebrate it and note that, more and more, even Virginia Conference is beginning to look like the Kingdom.

The Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community has this motto: "A tradition of Mennonite service extended to all." I think they have it about right, especially the "extended to all" part. That sounds like the intent of the Gospel.

Loren Horst



Connections (USPS 007-205) is published monthly by Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions and Virginia Mennonite Conference to connect congregations with each other and conference agencies.

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Connections is distributed free to each household of supporting congregations. Subscription rates: \$5 per year, 2 years for \$9. Send subscriptions to *Connections* Circulation Manager, 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802

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POSTMASTER Send address changes to 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg, VA 22801.

The trip that changed our church

Mt. View Mennonite Church in Hickory, NC, had a life changing experience when we sponsored a 10-day mission trip to Costa Rica. The team worked on service projects, taught Vacation Bible School, performed dramas in the park and prayed for the community. We were challenged, pulled out of our comfort zones and permanently changed. But the mission trip not only changed the team members—it also changed our church.

Only a year earlier, some in our young adult group resisted the idea of a missions trip. Our congregation had never sent out a team before and people questioned whether it would be possible. Missions seemed like something a bigger and wealthier congregation can do. Our church has always been a small country church without much money. When the very first planning sessions began, it looked like our team would consist of only four brave souls.

But over the months something happened. Our first fundraiser brought in over \$700 and generated attention. People began expressing interest and with each fundraiser, we added a few more people. In the end, our team was not four, but fourteen, participants.

And more miracles happened. Money just seemed to appear in our account. Every single one of our team members got off work without difficulty. A Spanish-speaking church member volunteered to teach us some survival Spanish. Each team member was assigned a prayer partner; the Sunday before we left, the church commissioned us and sent us out with prayer. During our time in Costa Rica, our church covered us with prayer. These prayers opened the door for God to work in the lives of those we were ministering to, in our own lives and the life of our church.

Family and friends from church greeted us at the airport when we returned. The following Sunday our team shared about our experiences, what we had



learned and what God had done. At the end of the service, three people in the congregation made commitments to Christ, and many others were deeply moved.

Now, our church is talking about sending out more teams. Many who couldn't go on this trip are ready and eager to go on the next one.

“This mission trip changed my life” is a statement often made by the team members. And now our church knows that we can do missions. We have come to see that regardless of our age, social or economic status, everyone has something to contribute. This mission trip changed our church. We thank the Lord for what He has done.

• Wendy Hostetter Davis
Mountain View Mennonite Church, Hickory, NC

PIM team members playing jump rope with children (above) and moving concrete blocks (below).



Finding inspiration

The day and time that a lot of us were dreading had finally come. It was time to do our prayer walk, asking to enter people's homes to pray with them. Despite our dread, God worked in miraculous ways. This happened throughout our visit in Canalette, Costa Rica, where God worked a miracle and we participated.

Nearing the end of the prayer walk, our guide took us to a house where we were greeted by darkness. A candle with a flickering flame lit the corner of the room, as if it were a shrine. The walls were covered with pictures of Jesus, the Last Supper, and the Virgin Mary. The house seemed to be filled with God's Spirit.

There was a movement to my left and a girl appeared with a meek expression. My senses seemed overloaded as I reacted to a scream from one of the bedrooms. Who was making those sounds? Our hostess asked us to stay as she entered the room where the scream had come from. She came back eventually with a hunched-over man in his late 30s. His face was distorted as he opened his mouth and tried to communicate. He was missing most of his teeth, but his face was joyous and he seemed eager to see us. Our hostess, an older woman, was comfortable with his behavior and presence, but she could see the bewilderment in our eyes. As we began praying for them—everyone praying at one time out loud—we were accompanied by this man's almost melodic sounds.

During the prayer time, the young girl I had seen was sitting in the corner of the room, almost blending into the darkness, not making any sounds or movements.

We said *adios* and on my way out I touched the girl's shoulder and she responded with a slight smile. I started to cry as I stepped outside. What a strong, wonderful mother that woman was, living in poverty with at least two people to care for, a disabled son who could not look after himself, and a quiet, meek daughter. I reflected back to times I have complained about simple, irrelevant things. Thank you God for opening my eyes.

• Nicole Mosteller
Mountain View Mennonite Church, Hickory, NC

SERVE CHRIST AND THE WORLD.

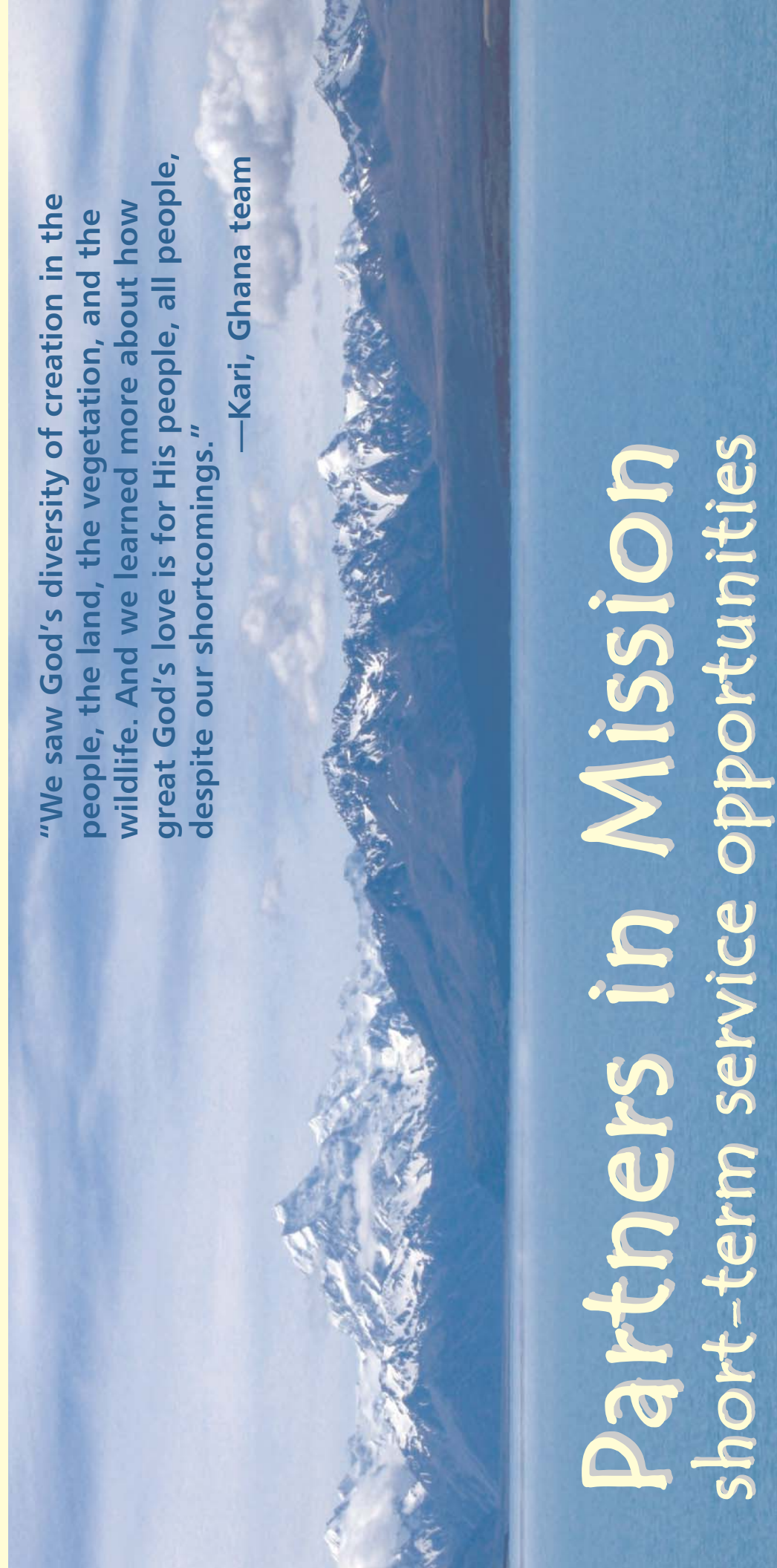


“We saw God’s diversity of creation in the people, the land, the vegetation, and the wildlife. And we learned more about how great God’s love is for His people, all people, despite our shortcomings.”

—Kari, Ghana team

Partners in Mission

short-term service opportunities



albania

evangelism • july 2006

argentina

peacemaking team •
february 2006

belarus

july 2006

belize

work and evangelism •
august 2006

costa rica

serve with pura vida •
july/august 2006

dominican republic

work team • july 2006

ghana

work team • july 2006

gulf states (usa) churches

youth work • summer 2006

haiti

work team • october 2006

italy

youth work • july 2006

jamaica

teach Bible school • july 2006

israel (nazareth)

work team • may 2006

new york city (usa)

inner city ministry •
summer 2006

nicaragua (eastern)

work team • january 2006

philadelphia (usa)

inner city ministry •
summer 2006

puerto rico

work team • july 2006

south africa

work with breakthrough
ministries • july/august 2006

tanzania

work team • september 2006

trinidad

teach Bible school • july 2006

ukraine

teach English • june 2006

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Ken Horst, Director

SERVE IN SHORT-TERM MISSIONS.

Whose responsibility is health security?

by Ronald Yoder

A pivotal question in the Mennonite Church USA's two-year healthcare study is who's responsible for health security? The answer is every American citizen who has financial resources and uses the health care system, including those with limited access and funds.

Healthcare cost per capita in the United States is the highest in the world. A World Health Organization study in 1997 showed the United States was number one among 191 countries in our portion of gross domestic product spent on healthcare, yet ranked 37th in overall performance in the areas of equitable distribution, quality of health of the population and more.

Why is healthcare distributed unevenly in the most powerful and wealthy nation in the world? Apparent reasons are high cost, inadequate personal income, greed, and higher national priorities. Yet, these are not the root causes. The most accurate explanation is our economic ideology and the way most Americans, and many political leaders and lobbyists, view healthcare. Unlike better performing countries, healthcare in the United States is viewed as a commodity, like food and clothing, to be traded.

In contrast, public goods, like education and public safety, are financed primarily through the tax system and viewed as necessary for all citizens to be contributing members of society. Healthcare, also necessary to be productive citizens, is viewed as a commodity to be traded and distributed by the market for profit, resulting in uneven distribution.

Because of this, governments must pass laws to create greater distributive justice and increase access for everyone. The marketplace tends to favor those with greater purchasing power, particularly when the market is driven by high demand, scarcity, and unregulated prices. Most Americans embrace laws that mandate access to public goods, yet many oppose government mandated and financed healthcare, a similar public good and security. The exceptions to this view of healthcare are Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, which were created to distribute health and financial security to older, poor, and disabled Americans with fixed and low incomes.

Americans need to change their ideas about access to healthcare and health security, which is linked to God's vision for all peoples and societies. Jesus said "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19

There is no alternative vision that will increase access to healthcare and create health security. Mennonites have a strong Christocentric faith and embrace the holistic Gospel of salvation, justice, service and mutual aid. At this time, Mennonites have the opportunity to proclaim this prophetic message of hope and healing in our congregations, communities, and nation.

Ronald Yoder is a member of Park View Mennonite Church.

Congregational Resource Center

Preparing for Advent and Christmas services? The fall, 2005, issue of Leader offers Advent 2005 worship services based on the theme "God's unstoppable purpose." Supplemental material for children's stories, crafts, drama, banners and graphics for bulletins are available online (<http://www.leaderonline.org/supplement.htm>). These are also good resources for congregations who may not be using Leader this season.

Church Educator, a magazine of creative resources for educators, is located at the Congregational Resource Center. The September, 2005, issue contains resources for advent including ideas for drama, sermons, prayers and stories. Back issues of Leader, the Builder and Church Educator have ideas for your worship planning as well.

Making Christmas Meaningful is a comprehensive resource for congregational worship. Each worship service includes devotional

meditations for the pastor or worship leader, call to worship, prayers and litanies, sermon ideas and suggestions for music (hymns, praise & worship, choir anthems and solo/ensembles). Designed to start two weeks prior to Advent and last one week after Christmas, this resource provides good ideas and can easily be adapted for your congregations use.

Are you interested in knowing when new materials come into the CRC? Beginning in January, we will have monthly updates for you and your church. Congregations are encouraged to designate one or two people to serve as their resource advocate. These advocates will receive monthly updates on new resource material, resource events, and activities, ideas and tips for your congregation's ministry.

Visit www.emu.edu/seminary/crc to browse our catalog.

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.

November 2005 Prayer Calendar

November 1-5

- Melanie Heatwole, serving 4 months at the Maranatha School, Jamaica, writes that she is learning sign language and finds interacting with the students a joyful experience. Join her in thanking God.
- Nancy Marshall, *transSend* participant, teaches two deaf youth in Sunday school in Orange Walk Town, Belize. More children would attend but they live 30-45 minutes away by bus. Pray with her that a solution to this dilemma will be found.

November 6-12

- “More and more groups of Christians are getting together to pray for a revival among us believers,” Richard Keeler reports and asks us to join them in prayer for revival in Trinidad.
- During September in the Diego Martin Mennonite Church in Trinidad, an additional cell group was started, the MYF was revived and a music class begun. Thank God for this energy and commitment for growth.

November 13-19

- Phil and Marcia Lehman, Bari, Italy, ask us to pray that Centro Koinonia will grow and that each member will get excited about God’s vision to reach the lost.
- November 12 & 13, Willard and Eva Eberly, missionaries on home leave from Italy, are speaking in churches in the Norfolk District. May listeners hear with their hearts and be moved with compassion for the outreach in Italy.
- Norma Teles, Brazilian missionary serving with VMBM in Albania, is on sabbatical, visiting Brazil and Virginia. Her unique ministry with children and youth is dynamic. Pray for God’s refueling for her continued work.

November 20-26

- Lord of all, we raise our hymns of grateful praise for the earth, the sky, the joy of human love, friends on earth and in Heaven, and the Church that offers pure sacrifices of love in every land. Help us to demonstrate this thankfulness.

November 27-30

- Skip and Carol Tobin [in partnership with Eastern Mennonite Missions] in Southeast Asia ask us to join them in prayer for open doors for entry into a closed land. Also praise God for His miracle provisions, including getting through immigration.
- Andrew and Lisa Eggman [in partnership with China Educational Exchange] serving in Chongqing Municipality, China, urge us to pray that they will have wisdom to know who God wants them to invest in with so many persons desiring to learn English.
- The Eggmans have started a Sunday morning worship service in their apartment for the foreign teachers in the school where they teach. Ask God to bless this gathering with the Holy Spirit’s presence.

If you use the prayer calendar in your daily prayers, please tell me by calling 800-707-5535 or 540-434-9727 or sending a message to gloria.lehman@vmbm.org. Thank you, *Connections* editor.



SFIDA Team from churches in Sicily with Maurita Eberly. As a side note, Mara Giuliani’s artwork [from cover story] is in background.

“Happy Week” spreads to new places

Ask the children at Centro Koinonia about “Settimana Felice” (Happy Week VBS) and their faces light up with joy. One little girl told her mother, “This is the happiest week of my life!” expressing enthusiasm for her first-time participation. In answer to prayer, God moved the hearts of four new families to send their children—none of whom are actively involved in church. All of them accepted the invitation because of their relationship of trust with Jason and Donna Martin [former missionaries.] This has become an annual evangelistic event at Centro Koinonia, in Bari, Italy. Two families who now attend regularly were drawn into fellowship through this outreach.

Organizing such an event requires much creativity and hard work since few materials in Italian are available for children’s ministry. Months ahead ideas were “flying” back and forth between Bari and the six-member SFIDA team being sent from Palermo. The theme, “God was, He is, and will be forever—an incredible journey back in time,” came alive through Bible stories, puppets, music, crafts, and fun activities. The original songs and art work created by the believers here especially captivated the children.

Beginning with creation, the children were escorted on a “journey” to see how God worked in and through the lives of people in the past, especially in Jesus. To experience life in Bible times they sat in tents and dressed like Abraham. Some were touched to understand, maybe for the first time, that they’re created in the image of God for a special purpose. Hopefully, they caught a glimpse of how God wants to be real right now in their lives. Some children begged for another week, while others suggested having a “Happy Month” or even a “Happy Year”!

How rewarding to see the investment of time and creative effort in preparing for these Bible day camp events producing fruit in other cities as well!

Announcements

Two new CDs of Mennonite a cappella music are available. A cappella music fans, especially of Mennonite Hour music, will be delighted to learn there are two new CDs/cassettes available for Christmas listening and giving. John L. Horst, a member of one of those vintage Mennonite Hour quartet groups, has compiled two new albums: "Sing Them Over Again," 27

original a cappella recordings by The Mennonite Hour Singers from the early years, and "A Symphony of Hymns," 26 great songs of the church from a slightly later era. The albums are \$12.95 for CD or \$7.95 for cassette. You can see the specific hymn titles on these and many other albums and purchase online at www.mennomedia.org/resources. Enter the title of the album or a song you're looking for in the search box. Or call 800-999-3534 to order or for more information.

Menno folk

The **MennoFolk Festival** begins a new tradition in the Shenandoah

Valley on November 4-6. Over twenty bands and musicians will converge from around the country performing music in downtown Harrisonburg and at Eastern Mennonite High School! On Saturday, gospel, blues, folk, and all kinds of acoustic genres will be included as these performers and songwriters express a heritage rich in music and faith. For details see www.mennofolk.org.

Festival of Praise

The fourth annual "Festival of Praise" will be held on Sunday, November 6, at 4 p.m. in the Park View Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg. Ten men's singing groups will perform, and join together in a mass choir with Jay Hartzler leading. An offering will be received to benefit Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions ministries. Don't miss this worship and praise event!

Pastoral Transitions



Duane Beck is transferring into Virginia Conference from Indiana-Michigan Conference. He will be installed at Raleigh Mennonite Church, Raleigh, NC, on November 6.



Angie B. Williams will be ordained for special ministries at New Beginnings Church, Harrisonburg, on November 6.

called and sent! Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions

Will you serve in one of these places?

Teach in an English School in Lezhe, Albania, and relate to the growing congregation in that town as part of the outreach team. Serve for 2 years, and begin as soon as possible.

Enhance worship and music leading in the congregations of the Jamaica Mennonite Church or the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago. Relate closely to the church leaders and incorporate the cultural worship style and enthusiasm. Teach the use of instruments, train voices and help to develop worship themes. Serve for 1 or 2 years, and begin as soon as possible or in Fall 2006.

Connections (USPS 007-205)
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