

# Connections

Virginia Mennonite  
Conference &  
Board of Missions

October 2005  
Vol. 15, No. 12

## Virginia Conference reaches out to Gulf States Conference

Hurricane Katrina devastates a large geographical area



courtesy of Mennonite Disaster Service

In this issue:

Mission  
*Connections*

Partners in Mission  
teams tell stories from  
around the world

A wind-damaged stop sign  
near Gulfhaven Mennonite  
Church in Gulfport, Miss.

The end of August, pictures and commentary on the national news described tremendous winds, rains, and pressures on levees that impacted the southern edge of the United States. Soon the reality of human suffering in every form was also shown, and our hearts responded with deep concern and sympathy.

Over the years a “sister” relationship between Virginia and Gulf States conferences of Mennonite Church USA has developed. Congregations have visited and leaders are in contact with each other. These bonds encourage us to reach out in concrete ways to our brothers and sisters.

One particular need has become apparent—Pine Lake Camp, Meridian, Mississippi, was not heavily damaged but a substantial source of funding has been destroyed; they will not be able to hold the annual auction which provided operational funds. VMC has committed to raising \$30,000 for this ministry.

Many persons lost all their possessions and are homeless. Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) has assessed the damage of both property and personal lives. MDS is receiving funds for sending assistance in various ways. They are using Pine Lake Camp as their headquarters.

Contributions may be made to MDS for general hurricane relief or to the Pine Lake Camp through Virginia Mennonite Conference. Send your gift to VMC, 901 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Please indicate clearly how you want your gift to be used, either for Pine Lake camp or MDS.

Thank you for standing alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ during this difficult time.

Gulfhaven Mennonite elders  
cook some remaining food  
after loss of electricity at  
Gulfport. Kevin King, MDS  
executive director, observes  
the creativity required by  
unusual working conditions.



courtesy of Mennonite Disaster Service

# Where is God in the midst of suffering?

Following the Tsunami of Christmas 2004 our normally secular media gave a great deal of attention to questions like, “where is God in all of this?” The word 'apocalypse' has been used in connection with the fate of the city New Orleans in the wake of hurricane Katrina.



Owen Burkholder  
Conference Minister

Reflecting on the tragic deaths of Reuben Stoltzfus & his father-in-law, Joe Shenk, some trembling voices asked, “what of the promise of protection?”

A young relative with type A diabetes has accumulated several other chronic diagnoses. Other children are born with HIV infection.

A young adult who was living out of a car while searching for housing in a major city had it parked on a street where several cars were vandalized. She lost all her current personal clothing, and her laptop computer—the backup disc was also in the computer bag!

“Fate,” some would say. “Judgment!” others say. “Part of a plan,” some hope. “Mystery,” others say in resignation.

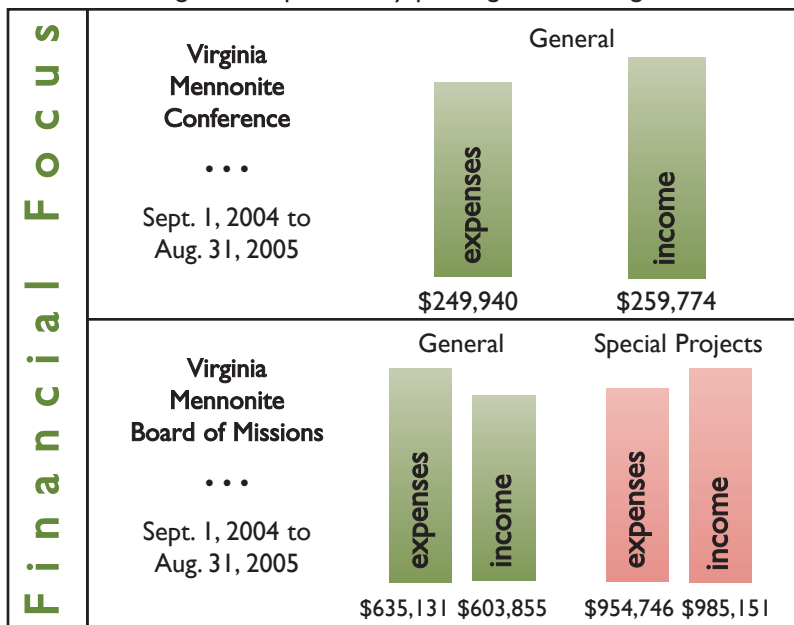
In face of the distress of a community dealing with an untimely death from illness, “Jesus began to weep.” (John 11:35 NRS) On this particular occasion Jesus actually stayed away when a healing would have been possible. “When Jesus saw (Mary) weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.” (John 11:33 NRS)

The remedy in this situation was, of course, the raising of Lazarus. But let us not move to resurrection too quickly. Let us live with the wonder of incarnation. We know a God who shares the reality of the human condition - a God who weeps with us - a God whose very son felt abandoned.

I have a shelf in my mind that has the label, 'Imponderables.' On that shelf are situations that make no sense whatever; items of such complexity that I see no resolution, and questions that have not been answered since the beginning of time. It is an active shelf. Some things come off for conversation with the Almighty—yes, complaint even. Some are resolved over time. Others wax and wane in intensity. I trust God with that shelf. And, I've come to see that God trusts me with that shelf.

Resurrection is our hope. Lament and grief are resources for the journey. So, we hold each other, we cry together, we pray together, and we see what needs to be done next—will it take chainsaws, offering plates, water, food, or companionship? “Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, in prison...?”

These figures are preliminary, pending final auditing.



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## Students take a LEAP



LEAP (Learning, Experiencing And Participating) has three main objectives: vocational call, theological reflection, and cross-cultural experience, but this program was also designed to help high school age teens find their true calling in God's ministry.

LEAP was divided into three parts, two weeks of orientation, thirteen days of cross-cultural experience in another country and three days of debriefing back at Eastern Mennonite Seminary.

There were 29 students participating, all from the United States, except me, from Trinidad. Not only did I have a cross-cultural experience in Israel and Palestine, but in Virginia as well. I was exposed to new cultures, I learned new games, participated in dramas, tried new foods and I also spoke different languages (we learned a little bit of Arabic and Hebrew before we went to the Middle East.)

We were divided into three groups for our cross-cultural trips. A group of seven went to Indonesia, a group of fourteen went to Ghana and our group of ten went to Israel and Palestine. I thank God for giving me this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to walk the land where Jesus once walked! I've always dreamed of being there, and finally it became a reality! Now, whenever I read the Bible, I can relate to it even more because I've been there. Israel was a great opportunity for me to explore what it means to serve God in a different setting. It helped me to understand what ministry really is, especially in a country of such great conflict. We visited many holy sites and places connected with the life of Jesus. We learned about many organizations trying to form peace within the nation and how they're going about it. The entire experience taught us to appreciate a different culture and to adjust accordingly. It also helped us to realize that God is the same everywhere, and although we speak different languages and come from different cultural backgrounds, we are one in the body of Christ!

After our trip, we had a debriefing at EMS. We shared briefly what we have experienced in our trip. Truly it was a great blessing to all of us!

• Avinesh Jaimani  
Charlottesville Mennonite Church, Trinidad

Note: LEAP is seeking nominations for participants in the 2006 program. See [www.leap.emu.edu](http://www.leap.emu.edu) for contact information.

## CHOICES offers alternatives to the military

More than a million men fought in the densely wooded Ardennes region along the German and Belgian border the frigid winter of 1944. Among the American infantrymen in the Battle of the Bulge was Cyrus King.

Because of his experience in World War II, King has tended to oppose all wars and one of his actions for peace has been giving teens at Enloe High School a chance to explore non-military options after graduation.

King's faith and commitment to the United Church of Christ brought him together with Mennonites, Methodists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians to work toward peacemaking in this city with strong ties to the military.

The CHOICES program (Committee for High School Option and Information on Careers, Education and Self-Improvement) at Enloe began forming in 1997 at the initiative of students, Jubilee Peace Center of Raleigh Mennonite Church and Raleigh Peace Action.

Volunteers like King set up a table where students could pass through the foyer and peruse brochures asking such questions as, "Do you know enough to enlist?"

"We wanted to distribute information giving the other side of the military recruiter's story," said Dennis Boos, co-founder of CHOICES in Raleigh and member of Raleigh Mennonite Church.

According to Mauricio Chenlo, urban ministry director for Mennonite Mission Network in partnership with Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions and the Eastern Carolina District, military recruiters who frequent the school target African-American students whose post-high school options seem limited in North Carolina. Chenlo said students are surprised to hear there are alternatives such as the Peace Corps, Job Corps, AmeriCorps and other service organizations.

"They're interested in how in the world you see that Jesus is somehow connected to war or military issues," Chenlo said.

"If our world is ever going to learn to solve problems without violence, we must give young folks the opportunity to have options other than military," Irving said.

Students at Enloe High School sit at a booth sponsored by the CHOICES program.



Photo: Dennis Boos

• Bethany Keener  
Mennonite Mission Network



## Eberlys to begin home assignment in Virginia

Willard and Eva Eberly are shown at left in front of Gran Sasso in the Abruzzi mountains of central Italy. They were attending a week-long family camp in June with six others from Centro Koinonia in Bari. They will be arriving in Virginia on October 19, and return to Italy in early January 2006. During this home leave, they are available to share with congregations, home groups, and persons interested about the progress of the ministry in the Mediterranean region.

If you would like them to share at your venue, please contact Ed Bontrager at VMBM: [ed.bontrager@vmbm.org](mailto:ed.bontrager@vmbm.org) or (540) 434-9727, (800) 707-5535.

## Conference Connections

In an age where individualism abounds and the idea that we should look out for number one seems to be a predominant mindset, a perfect opportunity for parents to teach their children the value of volunteerism is available at the **Gift & Thrift** complex in Harrisonburg. There are many fun things to do: wash off toys; sort through clothing, shoes, and housewares; price merchandise; and so much more. Everything we do helps our community as well as people around the world. Call us at (540) 433-8844 for scheduling a time for your family to serve. Ask for Deb King or Elaine Schaefer.

**June Lantz**, a recent English as a Second Language teacher in Zhengzhou, China, with China Educational Exchange is available to speak in congregations about her experiences. Please contact her at (540) 432-1305 or at [junelantz@yahoo.com](mailto:junelantz@yahoo.com).

**Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA)** has an opening for a church relations manager (CRM) for the Mid-Atlantic region (Virginia, south central Pennsylvania, and other southeastern states.) A CRM is responsible for building awareness of MMA in congregations and conferences. This is done by building connections to MMA services; nurturing the advocate system; and helping churches use MMA fraternal programs. Qualified candidates will have a belief in the mission of MMA and a willingness to gain general knowledge of MMA products and services; good communication and public speaking abilities; understanding of local church structures; significant congregational experience; willingness to travel (50 to 70 nights per year). For more information about the responsibilities and qualifications of this position, please visit our website, [www.mma-online.org](http://www.mma-online.org) and click on "Careers" listed under Quick links. If you are interested in this position, send cover letter and resume to: MMA, PO Box 483, Goshen, IN 46527; Fax: (574) 537-6635; e-mail: [hr@mma-online.org](mailto:hr@mma-online.org).

### Correction

The name Ed Godshall was mistakenly printed in the September issue of *Connections* instead of Ed Stoltzfus, to whom the article referred. We apologize.

# Mission *Connections*

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## Celebrating Short-term Missions



# The Italian Job

PALERMO, SICILY —

God knows exactly what He is doing. From the very beginning we felt, as a team, that God called each of us specifically for this trip to Sicily. By the time we were to leave, we *knew* God wanted us each to be there. Between weaving in and out of traffic, making new friends in Sicily, our team of five focused on doing one thing the entire missions trip, and that was simply letting God have His way in the lives of the youth (and adults) at the Centro Agape Church in Palermo, Sicily.

Our Italy PIM team was made up of Davide and Yanice Picone, Kristen McManus, Emily Huffman, and Jeremy Barb. We originally had another team member, Kledia Shahini, but she was unable to come with us.

We arrived on a hot Saturday afternoon with no luggage, but in good spirits. From that point on our time was spent on long days, late nights and nearly all of it with the youth. Whether it was teaching, translating, dancing, or building relationships, God used each of our strengths to touch and affect the lives of these teens. We showed them, with much help from God, how much He is in love with each of them, how special they are to Him, His forgiveness in their lives, and how to hear His voice.

In the end, our hearts fell in love with Sicily. As we packed up to leave, the feelings we had were bittersweet. We simply did not want to come home, but rather continue the work that had begun. We saw what was happening in the lives of these youth

and that brought joy to each of us, but we felt in our hearts that God wants to do more. However, it was time for us to go and let God nurture what had been planted in the lives of these youth.

■ Jeremy Barb  
Italy PIM team member



(above) A mural painted on a wall at Academia Menonita Betania is a “welcome!” (below) Millyellen and Drew Strayer paint a classroom building.



photos courtesy of Millyellen Strayer

# Service at Betania

AIBONITO, PUERTO RICO —

“Remember Betania in your prayers,” replied Director Ramon Bermudez in response to our asking what Academia Menonita Betania needed most.

Tucked away in the central mountains of Puerto Rico is a devoted Mennonite K-9 school that offers local Puerto Rican children a bilingual education with Christian teachings in a peaceful atmosphere. My husband and I volunteered a few days there in June by painting exteriors, power-washing a couple roofs, and removing old ceiling tiles in the kindergarten building. The school

faces challenges including the need for new structures and updating existing ones. Due to the hot and humid conditions in Puerto Rico, there is a strong desire for air conditioners, not only for the students' benefit but also to keep books and computers from damage. Despite these needs the staff and students were positive and joyful during our visit with them. They know, as we realized, that they present local children with a safe and secure alternative to public schools that are inundated with drugs and firearms.

With all that Betania offers their students, let us offer our prayers to God for Academia Menonita Betania and their needs.

■ Millyellen and  
Drew Strayer  
Puerto Rico PIM team

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# Relying on God

DWEN DWEN BADZE, GHANA —

Some persons present logical reasons against doing short-term missions projects. A large amount of expense is incurred in traveling long distances, including plane tickets, passports, visas, and immunizations. It is hard to establish meaningful relationships, especially when there is a language barrier. And many times the needs are much greater than what can be accomplished. However, these short-term mission projects are a must for those of us who cannot commit to long-term missions. God does not function within the logical, and He is not confined to time. He can work in people's hearts no matter what the conditions. Any member of the mission team from Williamsburg Mennonite Church who went to Ghana, West Africa this July can testify to this fact.

Our mission was to help put a roof on a water tank in the village of Dwen Dwen Badze. We accomplished that mission successfully, but God had other missions involved for each person on this trip. God moved in each of our hearts in different ways during and after our time in Ghana. But one thing He did for each of us was to show us more of Himself. I think God got a little bit bigger for each of us on this trip. We saw His diversity of creation in the people, the land, the vegetation, and the wildlife. And we learned a little bit more about how great God's love is for His people—all people, whatever our shortcomings may be. There is nothing more humbling than to remember, or learn for the first time, that we do not have control and there are some gaps that only God can fill. We are forever indebted to the Ghanaians for this gift. They are forced to rely on God in ways that we are unaccustomed to because that is their only option. Their faith is all they have.

During our devotional time on the trip, and during our debriefing after the trip, we talked about the



courtesy of Ghana PIM team

concept of carrying each other's burdens. When speaking in terms of resources and clean water, it is easy to see how we helped carry the burdens of the Ghanaians from the village of Dwen Dwen Badze.

However, the burdens that the Ghanaians carried for us on this trip far outweigh anything that we gave to them. We did a good thing by going there and helping them finish their tank so now they can have clean water. But, the spirituality, hospitality, and generosity that they shared with us far outweigh what we gave to them. They gave to us out of their need.

Because we carried their burdens for them, they are much closer to having clean water to drink. And because they carried our burdens for us, we have been a witness to what it means to rely on God for daily needs. And because they carried our burdens for us, we can join with them to rely on God—for our daily needs and for theirs. We can be linked together through prayer, even though we are many miles apart. God can speak and move in our hearts even though we cannot communicate with each other. God can fill in the gaps.

The Partners in Mission team that went to Ghana. Sent to finish a roof on a water tank in the village of Dwen Dwen Badze, the team encountered strong faith reliant on God for daily needs and generous hospitality.

courtesy of Ghana PIM team



Partners in Mission team members and Ghanaians put a coat of insecticide on timber beams to prolong the wood's life.

■ Kari McLaughlin  
Williamsburg Mennonite Church

# Seeing God at work in Trinidad



photos courtesy of David D. Yoder

Amber Newswanger and her class of 3-5 year-olds at Vacation Bible School in Esperanza, Trinidad.

## ESPERANZA, TRINIDAD—

Roedersville Mennonite Church commissioned eight adults to serve in Trinidad from July 30 to August 7, 2005. Crystal High, Jean Horst, Marcia Musser, Ryan and Amber Newswanger, David and Shirley Yoder and I went to teach Vacation Bible School in response to a call through Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions from the Mennonite churches in Trinidad.

One Bible school was held in the morning in a rented community hall at Esperanza (Hope), and another under a tent in the evening at Chaguanas. The classes seemed to be a special occasion. Many of the children knew the Bible stories well and quickly answered questions. Some who did not have Bibles wrote the memory verses on paper to memorize for the next class. The students delighted in singing while clapping in rhythm. Their love for beauty was apparent as they decorated their crafts and papers with bright colors, fancy writing and designs. They thoroughly enjoyed the puppet show I was able to present.

Attendance, which increased as the classes progressed, averaged 38 in the morning and 47 in the evening.

Students ages three to fifteen were divided into four groups. Many had perfect attendance. It was impressive to see how students treasured their Bibles, especially when those without Bibles eagerly received one the last day.

The Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago is alive with young people. Some of the leaders are former Hindus who are now being nurtured in Jesus and are able to witness to many who are still without Christ.

The dream of earlier missionaries for a Mennonite church in Trinidad has materialized into four congregations, all under Trinidadian leadership. Leaders dream of new church plants and of introducing more people to the love of Jesus. They, like us, strive to better minister to those around them.

Our help in the Vacation Bible School was appreciated. The churches had very little help to run a Bible



The Partners in Mission team to Trinidad: (back l-r) David D. Yoder, Amber Newswanger, Ryan Newswanger, Marcia Musser (front l-r) Shirley Yoder, Crystal High, Jean Hurst, Debbie Newswanger.

school as many families would hurry home from jobs, prepare meals and get their children ready to attend. Those in charge lovingly gave of their resources, their food and their time to share with us. We experienced real joy in the fellowship with them.

It was a wonderful experience to learn more about a foreign land and of God's people living and serving there. Seeing God at work in this lovely country was truly gratifying and humbling. Yes, we would do it again!

■ Debbie Newswanger  
Roedersville Mennonite Church (PA)

# Bible school despite hurricanes

ST. ELIZABETH, JAMAICA –

As we arrived in Jamaica and got to the Alice House on the campus of Maranatha School for the Deaf at 12:30 AM after a long day of traveling with our three children Micah (6), Adam (3) and Isaiah (1), we found water in many of the rooms due to strong thunderstorms the night before. We were able to find dry beds in the house and with the help of Monica Unzicker and Krista Swartzentruber, began to settle in for our month in Jamaica.

We went to Jamaica to help with the Vacation Bible Schools that would begin at the Ridge, Abrams and Joyland Mennonite Churches and then continue at Salter's Hill, Spanish Town and Bethel Mennonite the following week. My wife, Melody and I were the 'advanced team' for the VBS group that arrived on July 10th. Our group consisted of Greg and Diane Gum from Winchester, VA with their three children Erin (14), Lisa (12) and David (8) and Reuben and Ruth Ann Horst from Dayton, VA.

Our first week as a team in Jamaica was rewarding and challenging all at

the same time as we experienced the joy of working with the children of the three church communities and also dealt with the difficulties brought on by Hurricane Dennis. Despite the delays that Dennis caused early in the week, we were pleased to see more than 180 children attend the VBS at the three churches that first week.

The second week of VBS started with the weekend in the dorm as Hurricane Emily blew through the Caribbean Sea. Emily caused some problems getting to our destinations for the second week but our spirits were warmed as we saw more than 200 children attend VBS.

In the two weeks that we held VBS in Jamaica this year we experienced two hurricanes that could have caused disaster. Instead, we saw communities come together to help each other in times of need. We experienced a closeness as a team that I do not think would have happened otherwise because these two storms brought us together physically as a team.

God moved in many ways during our time together in Jamaica. We saw Him move in nature, felt Him move in

Members of the Jamaica PIM team lead Bible school, one of several that took place all over the island.



us and witnessed His movement in the churches that we were a part of for a short period of time. The beautiful thing is that God is still there, bringing people to Him each day and encouraging His church there to reach out to those around them.

■ Chris Riddle  
Harrisonburg Mennonite Church

# Contentment shows through in Jamaica

ST. ELIZABETH, JAMAICA –

Beldor Mennonite Church sponsored our PIM team to Jamaica to finish the painting and other trim work at Maranatha School for the Deaf, June 25 to July 2, 2005. Randall and Nona Williams, Delbert and Betty Wood, Cory Wood, Jim and Nathan Hershberger along with Grant and Zach Stoltzfus from Zion Mennonite made up the team. We painted the Alice House where Robert and Lois Wenger are living and the student boys dorm. We put up the last guttering and downspout to keep the water tanks full on the main building.

We enjoyed worship services at Joyland Mennonite and Deaf Bible

Church on Sunday morning and the graduation ceremony in the afternoon before beginning our work on Monday morning. We made friendships with students, teachers and staff who were working yet that week. Cory Wood says the most important thing she learned was the contentment she saw in her Jamaican brothers and sisters. They value relationships, she said, and material things are not their main source of happiness.

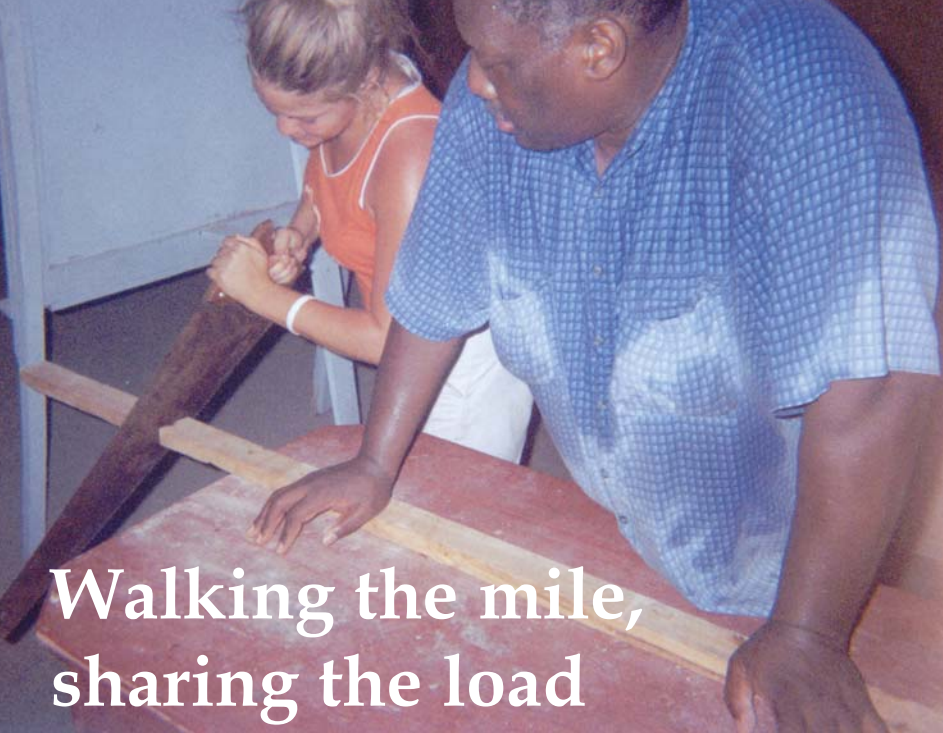
The group varied from people who were well traveled to others who were first time flyers. Our motives differed also. Some of us wanted to see how Jamaican believers live out their faith in another setting while others did not know what to expect. But we grew

together around daily devotions and a shared interest in service in the name of Christ.

On Wednesday the ladies returned to Joyland to paint the house for two blind sisters in the church there. One of the sisters sang, "I am blessed, I am blessed." Our PIM team was blessed in turn by their deep faith.

Would we go again? Betty Wood gives an emphatic yes! She enjoyed getting to know all the people especially the blind sisters at Joyland. "Their faith challenged me to see God's hand in my life all the time, I would go back anytime!" She speaks for all of us.

■ Jim Hershberger  
Beldor Mennonite Church



## Walking the mile, sharing the load

POMONA, BELIZE –

One of the brothers on our mission trip to Belize, Caleb, carried with him a songbook *Old Favorite Gospel Songs*. Caleb would sing with anyone he could talk into singing. It was from this book that he suggested we take our theme song. We all chuckled when he said “theme song,” but the idea stuck nonetheless and most days we would begin the day by crooning these words together:

Sister/Brother, let me be your servant  
Let me be as Christ to you  
Pray that I may have the strength to  
Let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey  
We are pilgrims on the road  
We are here to help each other  
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I believe this theme song helped us to meditate upon the reality that Christ calls us not only to serve, but also to allow ourselves to be served, and to recognize that wherever we are and whomever we are with, God works through those who love Him to reveal to us a deeper understanding of who God is.

At the Christian Community Church in the small village of Pomona, Belize, God revealed Himself to our team through kind and humble people sharing their love for God with testimony and song, through joy in the eyes of the village children, through

loving hands that prepared delicious meals for us, and through the group of men who came together to mix concrete, plaster walls and paint.

At first it seemed that we had come to help the church finish work on a Sunday school addition, but when reinforcements showed up in the form of skilled men from the neighborhood, we lost track of who was serving who. We were all, in a sense, helping each other “walk the mile and bear the load.”

At the beginning of our stay the task seemed too daunting. We imagined that we would only scratch the surface of what needed to be done. But by the end of our two weeks, many brothers, sisters and children had come together and the work became manageable.

We became minor players in work being done for the community by the community. In some sense one could say we were catalysts, perhaps, but really we were mostly brothers and sisters, fellow children of a loving God, serving and being served. In the end, the Sunday school addition was ready for use, the whole building was beautifully painted, and some members of God's family became a little better acquainted, a little more understanding of one another, and thankful for God's blessing that is never simply a one-way street.

■ Ron Copeland  
Belize PIM team



photos courtesy of Belize PIM team

Left: Basil Marin, team leader, assists in sawing boards for a Sunday school addition.

Top: The group in Belize with their Belizean co-workers and friends.

## More than just painting in Albania

LËZHE, ALBANIA –

Of the six members on the 2005 Albania PIM team, five of us (including myself) were returning to a familiar land. Although most of us had an understanding of the culture, we were constantly surprised at the limitless hospitality the Albanians expressed to us as we lived with host families. The first week of the PIM team experience took place on the beautiful shores of Montenegro (part of Serbia) helping with childcare and worship leading at a missionary retreat, but it was the second week, which took place in Albania, that seemed to be the most fulfilling experience for the group. During this time with host families, our eyes were opened to many of God's ways that weren't apparent to us in our home culture.

All of the team members were placed in different host homes in the town of Lëzhe, where a Mennonite church (“Guri i Themelit,” or “Cornerstone”) has had a presence for over 10 years. Our job description during this week was primarily to assist in painting the inside and outside of the church, but it turned out being much more than that. Because all of us were staying in

homes with young adults from the church, we were able to connect in a very real way with the youth of the church. The fact that most of us on the team already knew the local language helped us overcome the barrier of communication rather easily.

The trip wasn't without its struggles. We often struggled with understanding how to speak against unhealthy lifestyles that were prevalent in some of our host homes. Also, because Albania only recently became a nation with religious freedom, many new believers faced struggles within their families about their faith. Although we developed close friendships with many of the believers, it was also hard to get to know them well enough to seem to make a very deep impact on how they lived their lives. However, those effects are rarely immediately apparent. Throughout these struggles, however, it was apparent to us how God was working—many of the young adults were very active Christians, bringing hope of what the Church can be in the future. It was an encouragement to be a part of that, even if for a short period of time.

■ Jon Keener  
Albania PIM team

courtesy of Albania PIM team



Steve Horst (l) plays guitar with Josh Keener (center) and an Albanian youth. Although the team's primary task was painting the inside and outside of Cornerstone Mennonite Church in Lëzhe, Albania, they also led music and singing for young adults and youth of the church.



## The Lord walks with you

courtesy of Harold Wenger

ROCKY MOUNT, NC—

For five of us, the mission trip from Stuarts Draft, Va., to Rocky Mount, North Carolina, proved to be quite an adventure of fellowship, worship, food and sweat. The Fellowship of Christ Church welcomed us with open arms. About twenty church members joined us the first evening, and I knew we were in for a good time. The chief cook, Deacon Geraldine Cherry, devoted herself to our service and made sure we had everything we wanted.

On Tuesday, we painted the exterior of a church-owned commercial building near the Flea Market. By Wednesday, we had finished the job, and the building looked smart in a fresh coat of white. The three shops in it will soon be available for rent. From Wednesday to Saturday, we sweated in the flea market, removing winter clothes from the racks and carrying them up to the hot attic, and repairing furniture and appliances.

At church services we heard the motto recited each time: The Fellowship of Christ Church is a church: "Where Nations Gather Together, Where the People of God Assemble, Where Jesus Christ is Lord, and the Holy Spirit Reigns!" The congregation is a part of Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Va., and each service was full of life.

Jerrel Suter (l) and Harold Wenger (r) paint an outside wall of a commercial building owned by the Fellowship of Christ Church. The rent from the three shops in the building provides income to the church.

During the "Celebrating Recovery Service" especially for recovering drug addicts, a dramatic presentation of the parable of a man set free from a demon was given. On Sunday, a church member celebrated four years of being clean from drugs!

In the early worship service on Sunday, we were thrilled with Sister Gail Jackson's solo "They that wait..." and a powerful sermon by Pastor Ronnie Pride, entitled "A Thorough Examination." The 11:00 service included special anointing and prayer for about 30 people.

We thank God for the relationships formed with Fellowship of Christ Church members and for their generous hospitality. Sherri Stevens came back to Stuarts Draft committing herself to minister to her neighbors. She also testified, "I don't have to worry about going to strange places because the Lord walks with you."

■ Harold Wenger  
Stuarts Draft Mennonite Church

# The importance of short-term missions

by Ken Horst

Director of Partners in Mission and *tranSend*



From September 2004 to the end of August 2005, 23 different Partners in Mission teams made up of over 225 people served in 13 different locations including international and stateside communities. The overall number of teams was higher this year because 13 teams went to St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, in response to the needs following Hurricane Ivan.

However, increased number of teams and persons serving pales in light of the relationships established between the receiving and sending groups. I invite you to be inspired as you read the team stories included in this issue of *Mission Connections*.

The reporter for the team that went to Dwen Dwen Badze, Ghana, evaluated their short-term experience. *"These short-term mission projects are a must for those of us who cannot commit to long-term missions. God does not function within the logical, and He is not confined to time. He can work in people's hearts no matter what the conditions. Any member of the mission team from Williamsburg Mennonite Church who went to Ghana, West Africa this July can testify to this fact."*

For the second year a team went to Costa Rica, this time from the Mt. View Mennonite Church, Hickory, North Carolina. (Their full report will be in the November issue of *Connections*.) They reflected about their experience: *"We did 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 us, it also changed our church."*

Do participants in Partners in Mission teams get involved in other church activities in their home congregations? Congregations are the best place to evaluate this. Participants have stated they are considering *tranSend*, our new one-year program. More people seem to be talking and considering involvement at home and abroad. This is what service opportunities encourage – being a servant wherever God is calling. If you are interested in either Partners in Mission or *tranSend*, there is no better time than now to let your interest be known.

Contact me at (540) 434-9727 or (800) 707-5535 or at [ken.horst@vmbm.org](mailto:ken.horst@vmbm.org). Together we will spread Christ's love in word and action.

# Reflections on a year of service in Jamaica

Jamaica! A little less than a year ago when I thought of Jamaica I would have thought of sunshine, beaches, a wonderful vacation spot. However, after living in Jamaica for 9 months I think of something quite different. A sea of faces now floods my mind when I think of Jamaica-- faces of students, faces of co-workers, faces of friends, faces of people that are now family. It was through these faces that God showed Himself real to me and enabled me to live and love in Jamaica.

Looking back I realize that I went to Jamaica with some unrealistic ideas about what I was going to accomplish. I went thinking that I was going to be helping and people were going to be in awe of what I did. God soon showed me that I was wrong. I'm not any better than anyone else. It's not about what I can do. God made me look inside myself and see all that I needed to work on. But He didn't just show me the negative; He also showed me what I could accomplish when I let Him guide me.

So I started looking around outside of myself and I saw people that I could help, and that those same people could help and teach me. They showed me the meaning of community and pulling together. When fires, hurricanes, funerals, etc. come, they pull together and help each other. And they accepted me into their community. They watched out for me and made me feel welcome.



Krista Swartzentruber teaches a student in the computer lab at Maranatha School for the Deaf in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica.

I saw God working through them even though they didn't all know Him or were aware that He was using them to bless me.

I feel incredibly blessed by God from my time in Jamaica. He brought so many wonderful people into my life that taught me so much. He allowed me to love, to laugh, to cry, to rejoice. He let me live life in a new and refreshing way. Leaving and saying good-bye was so hard. But I rejoice in the fact that for all the people that know the Lord it's not good-bye, but 'see you later.' I thank God for that and rest in His promises.

• Krista Swartzentruber  
Served in Jamaica 2004-2005

## VMBM Partnership Appointments with China Educational Exchange and Eastern Mennonite Missions



**Andrew, Lisa, and Jeremy Eggman** are beginning a term of service China. Andrew is teaching English at the Chongqing Three Gorges College in Wanzhou. VMBM is collaborating with China Educational Exchange.



**Skip and Carol Tobin, and Bethany, Noel** (not pictured), and **Jessamyn** began a term of service in Southeast Asia. Skip works with a variety of agriculture related businesses and Carol is teaching. VMBM is collaborating with Eastern Mennonite Missions.

## Pleasant View's Busch Gardens Adventure

Pleasant View, Inc.'s mission is to serve people who have developmental disabilities by providing support services necessary for them to live in and enrich the community. To assist each individual in choosing and achieving his or her own vocational, family, emotional, and spiritual goals. Pleasant View staff strive to provide quality care for the clients they serve. One way to make learning fun is by having fun together.

On July 13, 2005, a group of Pleasant View's clients and staff left Harrisonburg in search of high adventure. Five staff members, one parent, and four eager clients were up early and on the bus by 7:30 a.m. for the three hour ride to Williamsburg, Virginia's Busch Gardens.

Once inside the gates, the staff members maneuvered the clients in their wheelchairs through the crowds that had gathered for a day of rides, shows, and excitement. "We wanted to ride some of the roller coasters," said Andy, one of the staff members, "but the wheelchairs made it a little difficult." Instead of a roller coaster ride, the group made their way towards Busch Garden's newest attraction, The Legend of Dark Kastle and Cork Skrew Mountain. After enjoying the rides, the group enjoyed two shows. A big hit was watching the water rides, which provided some relief from the 90+ degree heat as it left both PV clients and staff very wet from the splash. Visiting the different countries was both educational and fun. Italy was of particular interest to everyone as they enjoyed the sites and a delicious plate of different pastas. A trip to Williamsburg wouldn't be



complete without posing for "old time" pictures. The clouds had gathered and thunder rolled through the busy theme park. Before long, the rain came. Eager to find someplace dry, the group decided to take shelter and photographs at an old-fashioned picture studio. The theme was cowboys and Indians and everyone posed in full costume to preserve their trip on film.

The rain didn't stop and so it was a soggy group that got back onto the bus at around 7 p.m. It was late and everyone was ready for supper. After a quick stop for burritos from Taco Bell, it was back on the bus and back on the road. "It was raining very hard. You couldn't really see the road very well," said Andy. The bus arrived safely back in Harrisonburg around midnight. In spite of the rain and the long ride home Steve, one of the clients that went along, told everyone "I had fun!" "What fun! We had a ball!"

## Congregational Resource Center

### New at the Congregational Resource Center:

#### Resources from Faith & Life Resources:

**Healing Healthcare:** A study and action guide on healthcare access in the United States.\* Six lessons look at the current situation of healthcare, biblical perspective, Christian and Anabaptist legacy, improving local access, public policy and call to action. Study guide with reproducible handouts and a teachers orientation are included.

#### Second Mile, Pathway D: Walking through the Valley

Fourth in the series. Session topics cover racism, sexism and restorative justice. Includes a leader's guide and study guide. Can be used for adult small group or Sunday School.

#### Sing the Journey, Hymnal: A worship book, Supplement 1 \*

Includes 118 songs and over 50 litanies and prayers. Preview this copy to add more resources to your collection or to determine if you'd like to purchase your own or several for your congregation.

**\*Resources were distributed to adults at MC USA's General Assembly in Charlotte, NC, July 2005.**

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](mailto:crc@emu.edu) to make arrangements for evening use. Visit [www.emu.edu/semisary/crc](http://www.emu.edu/semisary/crc) to browse our catalog.



# Connections Prayer Calendar

## October 2005

### Sunday

**30** Thank God for the saints that you have known through the years. A legacy of love and faith is a tremendous gift!

### Monday

**31** Skip and Carol Tobin interact with a variety of people every day in Southeast Asia. Ask for God's anointing for their work, and for His protection and guidance for their family.

### Tuesday

**"He told them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"**  
Luke 10:2 (NIV)

### Wednesday

**This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by**



**Layman, Digner & Borntrager**  
INSURANCE AGENCY, INC.  
A SURE THING IN AN UNSURE WORLD  
www.ldinsurance.com

### Thursday

**This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by**

*If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, contact*  
[gloria.lehman@vmbm.org](mailto:gloria.lehman@vmbm.org)  
(800) 707-5535.

### Friday

**1** The Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale, which supports the work of Mennonite Central Committee, continues at the Rockingham Fairgrounds today. Pray that there will be a generous outpouring of support.

### Saturday

**8** Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church celebrates 100 years of ministry this weekend. Thank God for their witness in Chesapeake, VA. Pray for Pastor Harold Bergey and the committee organizing the weekend's events.

**6** MC USA's Constituency Leaders Council meets tomorrow in Kansas. Conference Moderator Beryl Jantzi and Anna Janzen will represent us. Ask the Lord to grant these leaders wisdom in their deliberations.

**13** Pray for the 15 congregations and 654 members of Gulf States Menn. Conference; some have been directly affected by Hurricane Katrina and all have been indirectly affected by this disaster.

**5** Today marks the beginning of Ramadan, a month of fasting and prayer observed by persons of Muslim beliefs. Pray that Christians will have wisdom in telling them the story of Jesus' death and resurrection.

**4** Pray for Duane Maust of Meridian, MS, moderator of Gulf States Menn. Conference who carries heavy responsibility for leadership in these weeks of reconstruction after Hurricane Katrina.

**3** Pray for Monica Unzicker, who returned to the Maranatha School for the Deaf, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, in September. She is teaching computer skills to the students and teachers and relating to the Ridge Mennonite Church.

**2** On this Sunday, churches around the world are celebrating the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ by participating in the communion service. Give thanks for the unity of the church through the Holy Spirit.

**9** The Health and Mutual Care Commission meets tomorrow to consider how to promote health care stewardship and access in VMC. Pray for Chair Dr. P.T. Yoder as he gives direction.

**16** Conference Minister Owen Burkholder, and his wife Ruth Ann, are on sabbatical this month. Pray they may enjoy a time of spiritual renewal as they travel, learn, write and reflect.

**10** The women's fellowship of Centro Koinonia, Bari, Italy, began meeting again in September after a break during the summer months. Thank God for the women's enthusiasm and commitment for these nurturing sessions.

**11** Much of the staff of VMC and VMBM will meet tomorrow to continue planning for Conference Assembly to be held at EMU July 6-9, 2006 under the missions theme, "Sent Around the World." Ask for wisdom for them.

**12** Thank God for Reena Mohammed's good leadership of Vacation Bible School held in Esperanza, Trinidad, and the assistance by the PIM team from the Roedersville MC; David D. and Shirley Yoder were the leaders.

**14** Bro. Ramesh Jaimani is the new General Church Council president of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago. Pray for him as he assumes the responsibilities of this role, that he will aid the church in fulfilling their vision.

**20** Richard Keeler asks for us to pray that the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago will have God's wisdom as they follow up on the opportunities in Carlsen Field for Sunday school and another Friendship Bible Coffee.

**15** Samuel Hernandez, from participant, arrived safely at the Nazareth Village, Israel, on September 6. Pray with and for him as he begins leading tours through the Village and working on the farm.

**23** Willard and Eva Eberly, workers in Bari, Italy, arrived in Va. this week for a two-month home leave. As they speak in churches and relate to friends, may they be renewed for the work they have been called to do.

**17** Thank God that funeral wakes provide an opportunity for Christians to witness to Christ's resurrection power and saving grace in Trinidad and elsewhere. In these settings, persons can hear the Biblical stories and discover Christian joy.

**18** Steve and Betsy Dintaman are into another year of teaching in the Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Sustain them with your prayers as they serve Christ by serving others.

**19** Thank God for Richard Good's willingness to serve as interim pastor of Riverside Mennonite Church, Harman, WV, from late August to mid-October.

**21** EMHS in Harrisonburg, is dedicating the new auditorium addition this weekend during Homecoming activities. Thank God for the vision of the planners and His aid in helping to make this a reality.

**22** Aaron and Laura Kauffman and daughter Abigail, from participants, arrived in La Mesa, Columbia and are adjusting to their work settings. Pray for them during this period of transition.

**28** Pray that we may all become more aware of the plight of those persons who suffer from lack of resources; like many of the hurricane victims who lived in poverty conditions, and like many others in our nation.

**24** Melissa Wenger, from participant, in Poarch, Ala., responds to e-mail inquiries from persons offering assistance. Thank God that she can be a servant during this recovery period.

**25** Pray for Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter as he shares his testimony with the congregation of Springdale Mennonite Church during their School for Christian Living Wednesday night.

**26** Pray for Ganes and Risha Kallou, church leaders from Trinidad, who are in Harrisonburg for a year. Ganes is studying at Eastern Mennonite Seminary and Risha is teaching in the biochemistry department of EMU.

**27** Pray for the Riverside congregation as they continue to search for pastoral leadership. The need is for someone who would also have skills in maintaining and promoting Harman Mt. Campground in WV.

**28** Pray that we may all become more aware of the plight of those persons who suffer from lack of resources; like many of the hurricane victims who lived in poverty conditions, and like many others in our nation.

**29** The board of VMBM meets today and tomorrow to discern God's vision for ongoing work of calling and sending mission workers. Pray for clear direction and insight in decision making.

## Announcements

# 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. Downtown Harrisonburg will rock on Friday night, and on Saturday, at EMHS, there will be three stages of performances from 10am to 11pm, with food provided by the Little Grill. On Sunday, November 6, there will be a 2 p.m. comedy performance by Ted & Lee at Court Square Theater and a women's music workshop presented by Jan Garrett of Colorado. For details see [www.menno-folk.org](http://www.menno-folk.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!

Comedy/theater duo **Ted & Lee** along with singer/composer/keyboard artist **Ken Medema** will present a new musical "**Live at Jacob's Ladder**" at the Eastern Mennonite School auditorium, Oct. 19-21. Music, comedy, drama, and improvisation combine in this moving story of Jacob and Esau's reconciliation. Shows are Oct. 19 & 20 at 7:30 pm and Oct. 21 at 8 pm. Advance reserved seating tickets are \$12 gen., \$10 students/senior citizens, \$40 family of 4+. Door: \$15/\$12/\$50. Call (540) 432-4526 for tickets.

**Highland Retreat Annual Fall Banquet** will be held on Thursday, October 27, 6:30 P.M. at Eastern Mennonite High School, Harrisonburg, VA. All who are interested in the ministry of Highland Retreat are welcome. To make your reservation call (540) 852-3226 or e-mail [info@highlandretreat.org](mailto:info@highlandretreat.org).

**Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church**, Chesapeake, Va., celebrates its **100th anniversary** the weekend of Oct. 7-9. The celebration will begin Friday evening with a music program, and Saturday activities include photo and artifact displays, a softball game, entertainment by the Hunt Family Fiddlers and an evening program. After the worship service on Sunday, there will be a noon meal. If you are interested in attending, call the church at (757) 482-2215 for more information and meal tickets.

## Transitions

**Fred Miller** has transferred into Virginia Conference from Ohio Conference as Minister of Administration at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

**Eric Musser** began a pastorate at Huntington Mennonite Church, Newport News, Va., on September 26.

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