

Connections

Virginia Mennonite
Conference &
Board of Missions

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The believers church grows in Montenegro

by Marta Lukovic (not her real name)

In 1991, when a Serbian missionary came to live among the people of Montenegro, there was not even one organized evangelical church in the country. During that first year he got acquainted with an elderly couple who were believers and began meeting with them for prayer. After three years of praying, 2-3 persons were converted. This missionary began offering a seminar he called "Religion, Occultism and True Faith in God." I accepted the invitation to attend it because I, like many in Montenegro, was deeply involved in the occult.

I came from an atheistic home and studied biology at the university. The occult had attracted me because I was seeking for truth. The seminar had a powerful impact on me and motivated me to begin reading the Bible. During that time my Dad died, causing me to ask many questions about life after death. I found the answers in the Bible. My mother bitterly opposed having a Bible in our home, while at the same time allowing pornographic literature. But as she observed the dramatic change in my life, her attitude softened.

The little group of believers that gathered around that Serbian missionary now numbers 34 members with as many as 50 attending our church. I serve as an elder along with two pastors; we give full time to the development of the church. In the first years we faced much opposition and threats, many times



Marta Lukovic (L) and Eva Eberly share in conversation.

instigated by traditional religious leaders and hostile relatives of new believers. We've learned that it's more effective to work quietly through personal relationship rather than using public methods of evangelism. Those who live in the area around our church, who once harassed us with acts of vandalism, are now our friends. We won their respect and trust by sharing material aid with needy families and reaching out to them through non-threatening activities.

(Bottom left) A Finnish missionary couple listen to two Montenegrin youth share their faith testimonies.

We have a vision to build a new church facility that will also serve as a training center from which missionaries are sent to evangelize our country. Presently, there are about 100 believers in three churches in all of Montenegro (total population 700,000). Three missionaries work alongside these churches--two from Finland and one American of Montenegrin background. We invite others to join us in reaching Montenegro for Christ.

Footnote: One of the exciting outcomes of this delightful meeting was the interest expressed by these believers to connect informally for fellowship with leaders and believers from other ethnic groups in the Balkans. Is this not the spirit of grace that could overcome the spirit that darkens hearts with division and discrimination? —Eva Eberly



• As told to Eva Eberly
VMBM Mediterranean Regional Assistant

The cross

An instrument of capital punishment is a strange symbol to hang at the front of our churches. Neatly stained, varnished and highlighted with soft lighting, it invites peaceful meditation at the beginning of a worship service. Usually it is quite attractive. Maybe it shouldn't be.



Loren Horst
President of VMBM

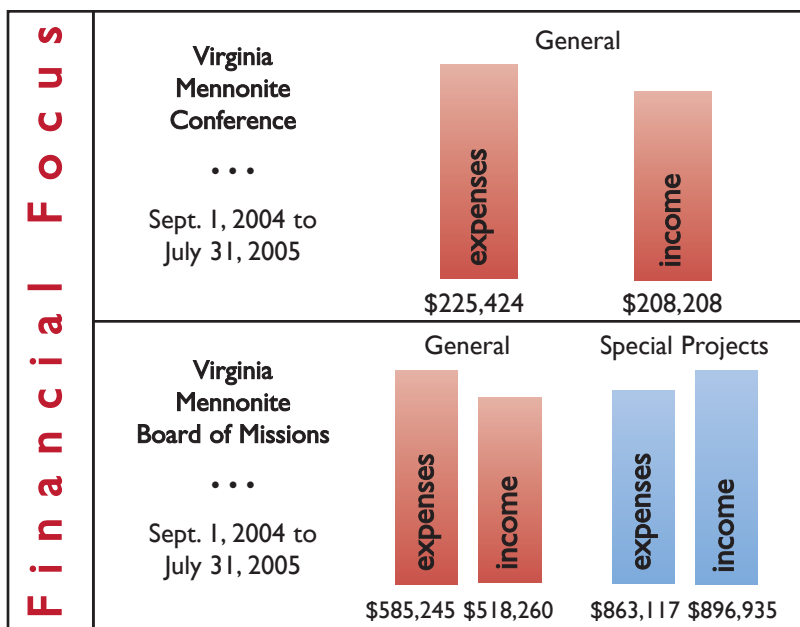
Following Jesus is a costly venture. Just recently, Joe Shenk lost his life while doing just that in Tanzania. So did John Hertzler in Thailand. We're left kind of short-handed at a time when mission agencies and churches around the world are redoubling their efforts to recruit workers into God's work. At the same time we are recruiting, many, many Christians around the world continue to pay the ultimate cost of following Jesus. The church recruits them. The church loses them. It's kind of a strange business.

So, how can we recruit workers into mission? Indeed, how do we invite anyone to be a Christian when the costs seem so high? Recently, First Mennonite Church celebrated 50 years of following Jesus in Richmond, Virginia. In his message that day, Myron Augsburger quoted Dr. Glover from a previous century, "The early church grew because it out-thought, out-lived, and out-died everyone else around them." Let's put that on our recruitment posters. Let's include that in our evangelistic invitations. Let's remind ourselves of that at each baptism and commissioning service.

Jesus once said, "If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourselves, take up your cross and follow me." That is how Jesus recruited, and from that day to the present, millions have answered the call, that clear and unmistakable call to "take up your cross!" If Joe would have known how things would end, he wouldn't have changed his mind. John either. They knew the cost. They counted the cost. They've paid the cost, at least their share of it.

I attended the funeral of Joe Shenk at Weavers Mennonite Church, along with more than 500 others here in Virginia. A phone connection transmitted the service back to many more in East Africa. It was an event of grief that reminded us that Joe was killed tragically and left us before we were ready. But a strange thing also happened. In the midst of grief there was laughter. In the presence of sadness, expressions of joy. In the face of death, there were voices of great hope. We experienced again the ironic, wonderful, profound mystery of the cross. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. It is our honor to follow Him.

Loren Horst



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Helping COs

Since March of 2003, the Military Counseling Network has worked with US military personnel stationed in Germany who wish to leave the military or deal with their rights under military law. MCN counselor David Stutzman, a member of Immanuel Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, has had the opportunity to work with 15 COs, two of whom have received approval for discharge.

Applicants must write a conscientious objection claim outlining their change in beliefs with regard to violence and war, and the basis for discontinuing military service. MCN counselors assist COs in the documentation and procedure according to Army regulations. According to MCN's experience, soldiers in Iraq who see war every day and can speak about it from a personal experience, likely will not get discharged under conscientious objection. The two who have received a discharge have never been in Iraq.

For a CO whose case has been denied by the Army, the options are either to start the process over again and file a new conscientious objection claim or to appeal the decision of the army in federal court. Edgar Aguilar's* CO claim was denied last summer while he was in Iraq. His beliefs about war and the use of violence grew out of his experiences in basic training and Army life in general. His year-long deployment to Iraq only reinforced his commitment to peaceful solutions and non-participation in war. The notification of the Army's denial of his CO claim was a low moment for him. He had worked so hard on the process and endured harassment from his command and his peers.

Aguilar is now appealing the Army's decision to a federal court. The legal costs of the proceedings will be significant. Because the Aguilar family does not have the savings to cover the costs, they are raising money through the Military Counseling Network, who has set up a legal fund for conscientious objectors.

The military counseling network is partially sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee. MCN acts as an advocacy organization for US soldiers in Europe and Iraq. For the military, it makes a difference if a soldier has serious ethical problems with killing. Edgar Aguilar hopes that with the proper legal assistance, he can convince the military of his strong belief against war and violence. If you or your church would like to support him in this effort, make checks payable to The Center on Conscience and War, Attn: MCN Legal Fund" and mail to The Center on Conscience and War, 1830 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009.

*not his real name • Submitted by David Powell, VMC Peace Coordinator

Mediterranean missionaries meet in Montenegro

With curiosity, we strained eagerly to take in the unfamiliar sights before us—rugged mountains, lakes, enchanting villages and seascapes. This was our first visit to Montenegro, a land of incredible natural beauty.

Don and Jane Knopp*, who are developing a meat-packing business in an isolated, economically depressed agricultural area in the north, had urged us to consider Montenegro for the setting of the annual VMBM missionary retreat this year. For the missionaries working in the Balkan region, this is a central location. One disappointment, however, was that Norma Teles could not attend the retreat because of complications in obtaining the necessary visa that Montenegro requires for Brazilian citizens.

Our hotel conference room overlooking the Adriatic Sea became a sanctuary where the Holy Spirit revitalized our souls thru worship, fellowship and stimulating studies from Galatians led by George Brunk III. The theme, "Grace and our Ministry," drew us to take a deeper look at what is truly important in our lives and ministries: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Gal. 5:6); a living trust in God's grace that expresses itself through acts of love!

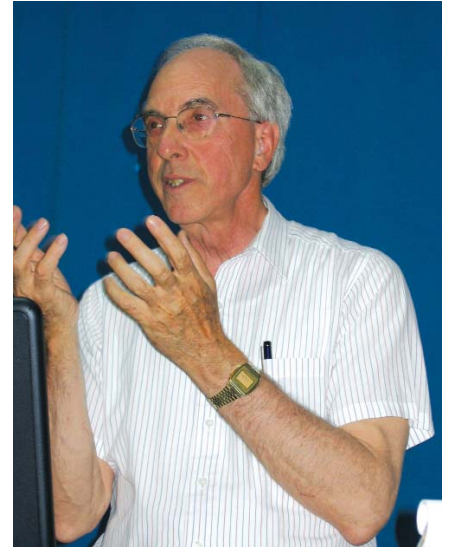
Responses of missionaries:

- "It was a new thought to me that grace is not only a call to salvation but also to vocation."
- "I was challenged to realize how easy it is for me to discount grace."
- "Seeing grace as the active power through which God in Christ touches us and flows through us enriched my understanding of grace and how it is key to effective ministry as missionaries."

A special highlight of the retreat was having an evening of fellowship and pizza with a group of believers from the capital city, Podgorica, arranged by the Knopps. This exchange opened a window for us to also catch a glimpse of Montenegro's spiritual "landscape." (See Marta's story on cover)

*names have been changed

• Eva Eberly
VMBM Mediterranean Regional Assistant



George R. Brunk, III, from Harrisonburg, Va., gives a lecture in Italian on the theme of "Grace and our Ministry" from Galatians.

Sent! 2005 Conference Assembly Across the Street

Delegates, members and friends of Virginia Mennonite Conference gathered for the 95th annual Assembly at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, July 28-30.

Those attending Assembly got a chance to hear about missions at home and abroad. The theme "Sent! Across the Street" identified the mission needs at home and in our communities as an integral part of our being a missional church.

Three speakers brought the message of

being "sent across the street" each evening for worship: Beryl Jantzi, moderator of Virginia Conference, on Thursday, Pastor Natalie Francisco of Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Va., on Friday, and Lynn Miller, stewardship theologian for Mennonite Mutual Aid on Saturday. Many mission workers attended Assembly, including Omar and Dolores

Beiler, recently returned from medical ministry in Jamaica, Richard and Margaret Keeler, long-time workers in Trinidad, Allen Umble, recently returned from Albania, and Phil and Marcia Lehman, on home leave from Bari, Italy. They shared many inspiring stories that affirmed the missional work of Virginia Conference.



Dan Wessner, associate professor of international and political studies at Eastern Mennonite University, leads a workshop on "Christ-shaped ethics in international development" on Friday.

Family, church members, and friends surround **Kimberlee Greenawalt**, Conference Youth Minister, during a prayer for her ordination to ministry on Saturday evening.



Loren Horst (R) leads a prayer of blessing for **Rawl and Linda Gunpath**, president of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago, as **Joe Bontrager** (L) participates.



Omar and Dolores Beiler, recently returned mission workers in Jamaica, share at a storytelling session.

Delegate sessions were held twice daily on Friday and Saturday. Delegates received reports from Conference agencies and committees and affirmed the work of Conference Council and others. Owen Burkholder, Conference Minister, led Bible studies on the Assembly theme. In the afternoons, participants could choose between a total of 12 different workshops over two days.



Owen Burkholder, Conference Minister, led Bible studies on Friday and Saturday on the theme "Sent! Across the Street."



Hoyt Maulden (L) received a Peace Mug from **David Powell**, VMC Peace Coordinator for his work at sharing stories of peace.



thirstborne played a concert in the Theater Saturday night. They have been touring the past year as a service assignment with Mennonite Mission Network. Left to right: Jeremy Kempf, Erin Kempf, Kyle Baker, Neil Richer, Jason Fisburn.

After evening worship sessions, attendees enjoyed music with a Blaurock Café on Friday and a *thirstborne* concert on Saturday.



P.T. Yoder, Wayne North, and Ed Godshall enjoy an exercise in describing spirituality through a candy bar at a delegate session on Saturday.



Kids enjoyed activities and games in a space set apart for them. Vivian Hertzler coordinated children's activities with Sheila Schaefer and with the Girls Club and Youth Group of Powhatan Mennonite Church.



Mission workers affiliated with VMBM were supported in prayer at the Saturday evening worship service. Foreground left to right: **Lois and Robert Wenger**, starting a term in Jamaica, **Margaret and Richard Keeler**, longtime workers in Trinidad, and **Linda and Rawl Gunpath**, leaders of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mennonite Women of Virginia gathered for a breakfast Saturday morning. **Dolores Beiler** (L) spoke on the theme "God's purpose accomplished in Jamaica." Joining her is **Sylvia Helmuth**, Dolores' sister, **Marian Mininger**, MST chair, and **Deb Pardini**, president of MWV.



Members of the new VMBM one-year mission program, *tranSend*, were commissioned Saturday evening. They are (l-r): **Nancy Marshall**, deaf educator to Belize, **Melissa Wenger**, children's and youth ministries in Alabama, and **Samuel Hernandez**, to Nazareth Village in Israel.

The Tree of Memories: an opportunity to remember our loved ones

In the insightful book *Don't Take my Grief Away from Me*, Doug Manning shares these words, "Don't let anyone take your grief away from you. You deserve it, and you must have it. If you had a broken leg, no one would criticize you for using crutches until it was healed. If you had major surgery, no one would pressure you to run in a marathon next week. Grief is a major wound. It does not heal overnight. You must have the time and the crutches until you can heal."

When we experience the death of someone loved, we grieve. As broken and bereaved individuals, we need the support of others to help us embrace our grief and express our feelings. We also need to find ways to remember our beloved dead.

At the new Shenandoah Valley Grief Center in Harrisonburg, we have created an avenue for people to remember their loved ones. With the generosity of the local artist P. Buckley Moss and the craftsmanship of Arcam Construction, a Tree of Memories has been placed inside the grief center. When individuals make a donation to the grief center for \$250 or more, a gold leaf can be placed on the tree with the name of your loved one. With a donation of \$100, a silver leaf can be added.



The Tree of Memories

On Sunday, August 14 at 3:00pm, the Family Life Resource center celebrated the dedication and grand opening of their new community initiative, the Shenandoah Valley Grief Center. This was the first community viewing of the Tree of Memories.

P. Buckley Moss was present to sign the tree and to greet the community. For more information about the grief center, go to www.flrc.org

• Cynthia Long Lasher
Grief Specialist, Shenandoah Valley Grief Center

Mennonite Mission Network Appointments with VMBM



Steve and Betsy Dintaman are beginning another term of service at Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda, a city on the Baltic Sea. VMBM will be partnering with Mennonite Mission Network. Steve, previously an interim theology professor at EMS in Harrisonburg, teaches theology. Betsy is a librarian and an English teacher and tutor. They are the parents of two young adult children.



Aaron and Laura Kauffman, and daughter Abigail are beginning a 28-month service term in La Mesa, Colombia, beginning Sept. 1. Aaron will be teaching English and Laura will work part-time as a nurse/community health advocate. They will be appointed through the *tranSend* program of VMBM, in partnership with Mennonite Mission Network. Aaron and Laura are both graduates of Eastern Mennonite University.



Connections Prayer Calendar September 2005

Sunday

“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.” Luke 12:1-2 (NIV)

4 Tomorrow is Labor Day. Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28. Pray for all workers who struggle to make ends meet financially.

11 The Congregational Resource Center Advisory board will meet tomorrow under the leadership of Barbara Moyer Lehman. Pray that they may be successful in providing congregations with practical ministry resources.

18 Melanie Heatwole is living and working at the Maranatha School for the Deaf in Jamaica for this semester. Pray that she will show Christ-like love to the students and the youth in the community of Ridge District.

25 Willard Eberly fills multiple roles as Mediterranean Regional Director. In addition to his administrative work, Willard encourages believers in their Christian walk. May God provide everything he needs for this work.

Monday

5 Pray for Regina Fritz from Pennsylvania who has returned to Albania for a one-year internship with EMM in Lezhe. Pray for rapid acculturation and language learning.

12 Pray for adequate funding for Phil and Marcia Lehman to return to their home in Bari, Italy where they serve the Centro Koinonia congregation. They visited many churches in Va. and Pa. during home leave.

19 Some Virginia Conference members will attend MMA's Planned Giving Conference in Lancaster, Pa., this week. Pray that they may have wisdom in helping others manage God's gifts.

26 Noelle, Melody and Jessamyn Tobin are adjusting to boarding school in Hebron, India, while their parents, Skip and Carol, are working in Southeast Asia. These are difficult and exciting times for this family. Pray mightily for them.

Tuesday

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by the children of George R. II and Margaret Suter Brunk, married September 20, 1933, who gave their lives selflessly to the work of evangelism and education in the Mennonite Church.
If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, contact gloria.lehman@vmbm.org, (800) 707-5535.

6 Pray for the Mennonite elementary schools connected with Virginia Mennonite Conference as they begin this new school year. May the teachers be inspired and the students energized as they learn together.

13 The staffs of VMBM, VMC, and the Virginia Mennonite Aid Plans will gather for an end-of-fiscal-year picnic tomorrow. Pray for all who work and minister in these roles.

20 Obtaining a property for the Hope Mennonite Church, Esperanza, Trinidad, is becoming a possibility with a piece of land that is available for sale. Pray that God will remove any obstacles for this transaction.

27 The Albanian Mennonite Mission Foundation meets today in Albania. Pray for discernment as Albanian and missionary representatives make decisions regarding issues relevant to the work in Albania.

Wednesday

1 Four new families sent their children to the summer Bible school activities at Centro Koinonia in July. Pray for the follow-up with these families, for their ongoing connection to the church and believers.

8 Families are adjusting to school and athletic schedules. Pray that teachers will not be short, and that Christ's love will flow through family members to each other and to the people that they meet each day.

15 Thank God for the Partners in Mission teams that served this past summer in various locations, doing a variety of work. May the benefits of mutual service bear fruit in each person's life.

22 The Nurture Commission meets tonight at Park View Mennonite Church. Pray for wisdom as Chair Sandy Snider guides the committee in their work to help nurture faith in our congregations.

29 Norma Teles returns to Brazil in late Sept. for an extended "sabatical" following 7 years of missionary service with VMBM in Lezhe, Albania. Pray for safety and refreshment as she prepares for a future term of service.

Thursday

2 A new season of Friendship Bible Coffees opens this month. Ask God to give Margaret Keeler a special portion of His strength and insight as she directs these clusters of women to learn God's Word with study and discussion.

9 The new church year engages new Sunday school teachers in the important work of Bible instruction in the congregation. Thank a Sunday school teacher in your congregation and support them with your prayers regularly.

16 Students and staff of Eastern Mennonite University and Seminary have the opportunity to engage in academic studies integrated with Biblical principles. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide them during this school year.

23 Tomorrow the annual charity ride, Bike Shenandoah, takes place in Harrisonburg and surrounding areas. Pray that funds will come in generously for the four benefiting agencies and that the participants will ride safely.

30 The Va. Mennonite Relief Sale, in support of Mennonite Central Committee, begins tonight at the Rockingham County Fair Grounds. Pray that many will attend and that they will be generous in their buying.

Friday

3 Phil, Marcia, Crystal, and Christopher Lehman are ministering tomorrow at New Life Church in Virginia Beach where Sam Scaggis is pastor. Thank God for their willing spirit to share in numerous congregations this summer.

10 The Lehmans, missionaries in Bari, Italy are sharing tomorrow at New Hope Fellowship. A recent church plant, New Hope, with pastor Kirk Hanger, is providing a Christian witness in Alexandria, VA.

17 Pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit as Carol Duerkson, editor of *With* magazine, speaks to the junior high youth at VMC's Smith Mt. Lake retreat. The theme is "The Radicals: Adventures with the Anabaptists."

24 Richard Keeler nudges and nourishes the new and growing Christians to whom he relates. Ask God for a special portion of His Spirit to guide and energize him.

Saturday

Announcements

Plan to attend the **Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale**, September 30-October 1 at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. Come and enjoy auctions, crafts, and delectable foods, and help raise money for MCC! The relief sale will happen from 4-9 p.m. on Friday and 7 a.m.-3 p.m. on Saturday.

the **radicals**



The VMC **Junior High Youth Retreat** will be held at Smith Mtn. Lake 4-H Center, Sept. 17-18. The theme will be **The Radicals: Adventures with the Anabaptists**. Registration is due Sept. 1. Contact (540) 434-9727 or email kimberlee.greenawalt@vmconf.org.

Experience the Shenandoah Valley in the eighth annual **Bike Shenandoah 2005 Cycle for Service** on Sept. 24. Register now: call Laura Moyers at (540) 434-9727 or visit www.bikeshenandoah.org. If you can't ride, shop at Ten Thousand Villages in Dayton Farmers Market on Sept. 24 and a portion will go towards sponsoring Bike Shenandoah!



Death



Joseph C. Shenk died on July 21 in Nairobi, Kenya from injuries sustained after being struck by a truck while jogging. He and Edith had been serving at the Mennonite Theological College in Tanzania. Joe and Edith had served as co-pastors of Weavers Mennonite Church. Joe also served in our Virginia Conference as Overseas Director for VMBM, Assistant Moderator of Conference, and as Campus Pastor at EMU. On Sunday, July 31, over 500 persons grieved, remembered, and celebrated the life of this dear brother and servant of God.

Transitions



Joe Bontrager, USA Ministries Director, resigned effective July 31. Joe and Gloria moved to Delaware to give more immediate assistance to the care of his aging parents. Joe served nearly seven years with VMBM, most recently sharing his time with the Raleigh Mennonite Church (NC) as interim pastor. Joe served with vision and energy in calling and enabling our conference to explore the new ways that God is at work among us. New Bridges (immigrant resource center in Harrisonburg) and Hickory Hmong Mennonite Church are two of the ministries in our conference which emerged through support of Joe's leadership.



Kimberlee Greenawalt was ordained to youth ministry at Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly on July 30. She is Conference Youth Minister for VMC. She and her husband Tedd have two daughters.



Rachel Swartzendruber resigned as VMC Administrative Assistant to resume her education at Eastern Mennonite University.

Sherah-Leigh Gerber joined the staff of VMC as Administrative Assistant in July.

Mark Hodge began as Associate Pastor at Waynesboro Mennonite Church.

Mark Schlonger was ordained at Springdale Mennonite Church, Waynesboro, as lead pastor.

John Stahl began as Associate Pastor at Immanuel Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg.

