

Chenlo hopes to help cultures connect



courtesy of Mennonite Mission Network

In Raleigh, N.C., a program for immigrants in a Catholic parish grew to enroll 300 people after three years. Because of the English-teaching program, many of Raleigh's immigrants—mostly Hispanic—now see Catholicism

as the faith that has welcomed them.

The program, started by a Filipino Catholic woman with a heart for outreach, got Mauricio Chenlo wondering: How can the Mennonite Church expand its reach into the Hispanic community?

In his new job, the Raleigh pastor will be a resource person to help the church stretch.

In January, Chenlo began as Hispanic mission training academy program director, a new position created through a partnership between Iglesia Menonita Hispana (Hispanic Mennonite Church) and Mennonite Mission Network. Chenlo joins the Mission Network's U.S. Ministries team, allowing the North Carolina-based pastor and church planter to work with conferences, congregations and partnerships to help them develop Hispanic programs based on their individual strengths.

North America and North American Mennonites, Chenlo said, are increasingly multicultural. New church plants must adapt to the demographics of a country that now boasts the third-largest Hispanic population in the world, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and a denomination where Hispanics are the second-largest ethnic group.

Chenlo hopes to help the Caucasian portion of Mennonite Church USA adapt their ministries to Hispanic culture (and the cultures of other ethnic groups) as well as develop new Hispanic churches.

"Somehow in this global village, we have reali-

ties that function quite differently but we treat them all the same," Chenlo said. "One of my gifts is to bridge realities and connect resources and people's interests."

He hopes to spend his first year on the job meeting with leaders from the denomination, conferences and congregations to dream about how to better serve a multicultural congregation. Answers, he added, will vary drastically according to location and context, but ministry must always start with the heart.

"If you have a heart for ministry, then you start looking for resources and tools," he said. "My role is to find effective ways to (connect) intentions with the right tools."

A native of Argentina, Chenlo said children of first-generation Hispanic immigrants are being educated in the United States through high school, college and seminary, bridging gaps between home cultures and North America. He believes that promoting leadership programs for young adults who have the language and cultural skills to thrive in traditional multiple ethnic cultures will be key to the future of the church.

While the Instituto Bíblico Anabautista (Anabaptist Biblical Institute) offers biblical and theological training, Chenlo said churches "also need a set of tools to organize a group of people to plant a church,"—his mandate is to help provide those tools.

Chenlo is associate pastor for youth at Raleigh (N.C.) Mennonite Church and an urban ministry director for Mennonite Mission Network in partnership with Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions and the Eastern Carolina District. He has worked with church planting and multicultural urban ministries across eastern North Carolina, including *Building Together Ministries*, a racial reconciliation program and community peace clinic. He spent four years in Ecuador as a mission worker with Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network.

• Ryan Miller
Mennonite Mission Network

In this issue:

Mission
Connections

Signs of God's presence

When we use the missional church language to say that God is on a mission in the world and is inviting us to participate in it, just what do we mean? What can we point to and say, "that's what God is doing"? There is, of course, no proof. Jesus himself offered no proof, only signs.



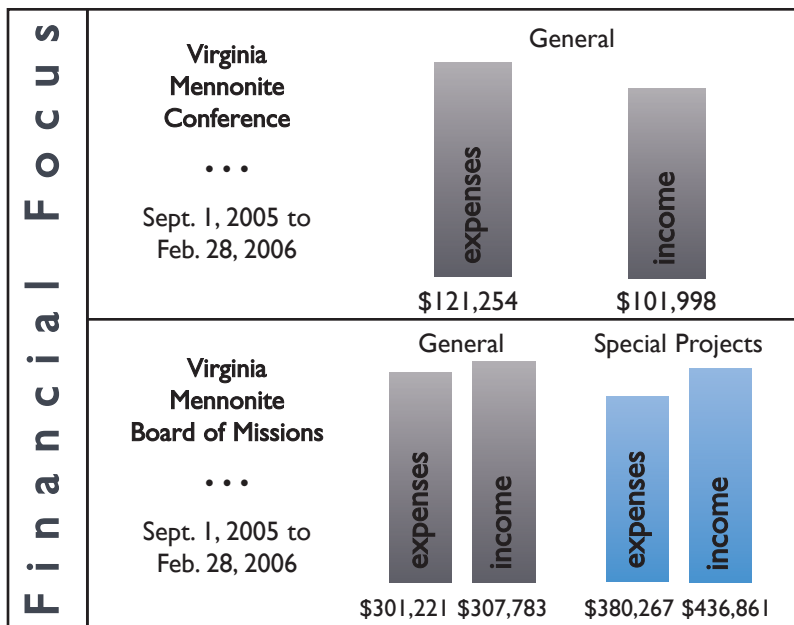
Owen Burkholder
Conference Minister

So, what are the signs of God's presence now? I offer two, maybe three:

1. Faithful pastors. What a privilege it was to share with the pastors in the recent ministry retreat. (See the report in this issue). How could persons possibly be shaped by such love and compassion for the whole family of faith but by the calling and sustaining work of the Spirit of Jesus? Some of these faithful servants have experienced devastating losses personally and in their families. Some could have had careers that offered much greater financial returns. Yet, here they are, finding joy in being instruments of grace in the lives of others. They are signs of God's presence.

2. African-American Christians. Why should persons whose ancestors were enslaved have anything to do with the God of their captors? Somehow the Spirit of Jesus was able to show them a deeper reality. They have come to know that the Jesus who suffered is the Jesus who has been resurrected. They are doing business with the living Jesus now. They are signs of God's presence. [Similar things could be noted for Native American Christians...]

3. You and me (maybe). You and I, dear friend, have a great opportunity. As we approach this resurrection season we come to the sign that reveals God's deepest desire for our world: life out of death—life with God. The Spirit of Jesus is present now to transform our lives. As we submit our awareness of sin to this Living One, we can know forgiveness. As we offer the imponderable places to this Unfailing Presence, we will experience growth in character and love. As we enter into the suffering of others, we will come to know this Gracious One. We may be signs of God's presence.



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Boys to men (nonites)



The Peace House members: Cory Suter, Matt Yoder, James Weaver, Luke Keller.

Not so long ago, a young James Madison University student spent a lot of time living under the protection of his parents. Upon hearing about a new intentional ministry being dubbed “the Peace House,” he immediately dismissed it

because life was too good for a significant change. However, as the summer wore on, God began to impress upon him the relevance of an intentional community bridging the gap between James Madison University students and the Mennonite church. “Besides,” he thought to himself, “it’s about time that I left behind the comforts of the past and embrace the potential of the future.” And that is how I came to be at the Peace House (retold in rather dramatic style).

Though it will certainly leave a significant mark on my life, living at the Peace House has never been easy. The responsibility involved in planning events, participating in community service, and genuinely trying to be a good housemate all add to the stresses of life. This goes without mentioning the massive amount of homework that my teachers feel is their duty to impress upon me. Though it may sound like I am complaining, I have nothing but acclamation for this past year at the Peace House. My learning experiences include finding significance in the humble beginnings of the Mennonite faith, realizing that all people truly want to be loved, and even embracing the process of cooking without relying on the microwave. My housemates have unintentionally taught me how to be responsible, creative, caring, and honest. Though one of us holds the title of “leader” at the Peace House, we all have contributed leadership qualities to the Peace House. This community strongly adheres to the mentality of teamwork. The Peace House would not function if it were run by only one individual. By bringing all skills and talents together under one roof, God has the tools

Boys to men continued on page 4

Super SOOP in Phoenix

I recently returned from a SOOP service assignment in Phoenix, Arizona. What a fabulous time I had! The weather was ideal: each day a carbon copy of the one before, just bursting with brilliant sunshine. When I stepped off the plane upon my return to Virginia and was greeted with cold, fog and rain, I wondered, “Why, oh why, did I leave Phoenix!”

The SOOP Program in Phoenix is currently hosted by Dottie and Roland Yoder. For the nine volunteers involved during my three-week stay in January, the Yoders mixed in lots of fun and educational experiences while also carefully coordinating our service assignments.

On the first night of my arrival we took in “Glendale Glitters,” the last big celebration of the Christmas season. Balloons, bands, street performers, and of course, lots of good food—what an introduction to Phoenix!

During those service weeks we tucked in a two-day trip to Tucson, stopping to visit the Sonora National Park where we were introduced to all the plants, animals and birds of Arizona. Supper at the Organ Stop Pizza House on our return trip brought amazing entertainment from a huge electronically-linked one-person orchestra, and the pizza was great, too.

An antique car auction, a storytelling event at the library, a Phoenix Coyote hockey game, dinner in the homes of several members of Trinity Mennonite Church, mountain hikes, evenings at home filled with games, stories, reading, jokes, uproarious laughter—all added to this SOOP experience.

Dottie knew of my lifetime hobby of memorizing scripture and story. So part of my personal “labor” was storytelling. In all I told 25 stories (counting repeats) to eight different audiences. One Sunday evening I presented the entire Old Testament “Story of Joseph” at Sunnyslope Mennonite Church. The ex-prisoners living next door at House of Refuge were part of the audience. Afterward, several thanked me saying it was the first time they had heard this story.

I spent a few days helping to clean and paint a house for Goldensun, a place recently purchased by a church member for mentally-challenged men. Most of my volunteering was done at the West Side Food Bank – working on an assembly line packing food boxes, helping on the “cash and carry” line or delivering food boxes to elderly persons living in federal housing projects. I believe that food box was the highlight of the month for them.

SOOP continued on page 4

Living above the media flood

“How can we be faithful Christian witnesses and engage the messages that we find in media?” “How can we nurture our children to know and to serve Christ when every day they are bombarded with words and images that seem contrary to the gospel?” “Does the Bible have anything to say about our use of the internet, television, and video games?” “How can we as Christians speak with a voice that can be heard when so many voices constantly vie for attention?”

In January and February 2006, Springdale Mennonite Church hosted six class sessions addressing these questions as a part of its winter School for Christian Living. The theme for this class was “Maintaining the High Ground in a Media Flood.” Organized by Harvey Yoder, Counselor at Family Life Resource Center, each of the six sessions focused on different aspects of the media.

During the six weeks of this class, Yoder outlined the development of information technology through the wide sweep of history. Jerry Holsopple facilitated a discussion among both youth and adults about the influence of video games. Steve Carpenter talked about movies and ways in which we might evaluate them as “children of light.” Addressing the role of television in our lives, Melodie Davis showed several clips from popular television shows and asked how they might be consistent with or a distortion of God’s desire for us. Curt Stutzman spoke about mass marketing and how it blurs our Christian focus. In the last session, Harvey Yoder discussed computer pornography, and Larry Heatwole provided practical ways in which we might protect ourselves and loved ones against temptations to use it.

In the past hundred years, rapid changes in technology have dramatically increased our access to and use of the media. These changes continue to evolve, and we still don’t know where they are leading or how they might be affecting us. As people of the Word, however, we as Christians are called and enabled to think carefully and intentionally about how we use media even in fluctuating times. Each of the six sessions provided practical ways in which we can “maintain the high ground in a media flood.” “We don’t need to live a life of guilt,” Curt Stutzman said, “but we do need to recognize when we’re being sold a bill of goods that is not Christian.”

• Mark Schloneger
Pastor, Springdale Mennonite Church

Boys to men continued from page 3

He needs to leave a positive influence on the community around us.

God has taught me a valuable lesson through this pivotal experience in my life. I have learned to leave behind the comfortable circles of my influence and have embraced a new-found commitment to discovering what God has in store for my life. The verses of I Corinthians 13:10-11 perfectly reflect the feelings I have of my time spent at the Peace House. “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.”

• James Weaver
Peace House member

SOOP continued from page 3

For me personally, one of the most meaningful aspects of the SOOP experience was the privilege of living with other people. It was a real blessing and a lot of fun to share life with some very wonderful SOOPers!

If you are age 50 or older and long for a little more purpose in life mixed in with fun and excitement, try some SOOP. I can absolutely, positively guarantee you won’t regret it!

Service Opportunities for Older People is a joint project of MMN (Mennonite Mission Network), MARP (Mennonite Association of Retired Persons) and Mennonite Central Committee Canada. The assistance of SOOP volunteers serving “in Jesus’ name” is welcomed at 70 locations throughout the U.S. and Canada. MARP Director, Helen Lapp can be contacted in Souderton, Pa. Tel. #: 215-721-7730; E-mail: marp-soop@juno.com

• Millard E. Showalter
Lindale Mennonite Church

Notes of thanks to VMC

Dear friends at Virginia Mennonite Conference, Thank you so much for your donation of \$25,723.46 to Pine Lake Fellowship Camp. We are amazed and so blessed by your generosity. Cheryl Landis, Co-Director, Pine Lake Camp

Gulf States Mennonite Conference received the check for the amount of \$25,000. Words cannot really express how much we appreciate this but on behalf of the conference I do want to thank you for this very generous gift. Emma Myers, Treasurer, Gulf States Conference

Mission Connections

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Meeting needs

BARI, ITALY —

Eva has been invited to speak to a women's group in the Pentecostal church. This group was started through the influence of our women's group at Centro Koinonia. Several of these sisters visited our group, were touched by how we conduct women's ministry, and so now are beginning a similar group for women in their church.

Willard taught a course on basic principles of caregiving skills in the Centro Koinonia congregation during the month of February. This consisted mostly of Sunday messages, leading mid-week studies, and practical skill building sessions. We pray that as a congregation we will be prepared to minister to the hurting people that we meet, listening carefully to them before giving counsel, and then praying for them. Some of these people are beginning to attend the Centro Koinonia congregation.

On Valentine's Day we began a new adventure! We can hardly believe that we have begun to teach English! For some time we have had the desire to offer English classes as an outreach ministry of Centro Koinonia but have not had the persons to help with the task. When some of our neighbors recently asked us to teach them English we took that as an indication from the Lord that we needed to launch out and do it! Six enthusiastic students ranging from ages 13 to 42 showed up for the first lesson. Actually, it was a lot of fun and we are planning to continue meeting weekly until the summer.

Since returning to Italy from Virginia, we discovered that the book *Exploring Worship*, which Eva and others translated into Italian last year was given the "bestseller" title for 2005 as most read and appreciated evangelical book of the year! We were astounded! Praise God that He led us to a book that evidently met a real need among the Italian churches!

■ Willard and Eva Eberly
VMBM Mediterranean Regional Director/Assistant



Expanding the dinner table

ST. ELIZABETH, JAMAICA —

"Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished." (1 Chronicles 28: 20)

These words from David to Solomon have been both a blessing and a challenge to the three of us, serving at Maranatha School for the Deaf, since we discovered them recently. There are many times when we wonder just what impact our labors are having and yet we have the assurance of God's constant, abiding, enabling presence.

We reflect over the past weeks and marvel at the many ways in which our lives have been blessed by being open to the needs of those around us. Our kitchen has provided a place to bake cakes for several special occasions and homemade bread as gifts. Our table expanded to

include dinner guests, some of which arrived as we were ready to eat or after we had already started our meal. The antics of little friction wind-up cars initiated much hearty laughter. Puzzles, coloring books and dominos provided fun and good interaction. Hair was braided into a work of art and aprons were sewn to the delight of the recipients. Students enjoyed creative crafts and were taken along on excursions that, otherwise, would have been unavailable to them.

Jesus said, "When you have done it unto one of the least of these, my brothers, you have done it unto me." At times it is truly a cup of water we share, at other times the "cup" holds other gifts of service. Our prayer is that the recipient will always experience the love and presence of Christ and thereby be blessed.

■ Monica Unzicker,
Robert & Lois Wenger
Teaching assistants



Skip and Carol Tobin with their family.

Tobins keep busy in Asia

THAILAND —

Our "Life Enrichment Church" leaders have asked us to spend the first six months of 2006 living in the town of Buntarik where John Hertzler, EMM worker, died in 2005. Locating here, even if temporarily, fulfills our desire to work in a way that brings blessing to the church and it helps the church realize their desire to see life come from this place of death. Being a Thai/Lao border town, many farmers come into town everyday for medical attention and for employment.

With the help of church leaders, we found a house and are now getting settled. Perhaps our willingness to make a start in Buntarik will inspire someone else to come along behind us!

Beyond that, came another surprising request. Eastern Mennonite Missions Asia director, Glenn Kauffman, had begun a 6-month sabbatical leave, and we were invited to be regional representatives during the time of his absence. So, we've agreed to provide oversight for the work in Thailand and Cambodia. We'll also walk closely with another couple who are soon to locate in Laos. They will study language, teach

English with a registered agency, and research future ways for our agency to have a legal identity there. This is a happy development, as it means that Skip will spark vision and facilitate others, two endeavors that are very close to his heart. For now, that's enough!

■ Skip and Carol Tobin
VMBM workers in partnership with
Eastern Mennonite Missions

Hope church purchases land

ESPERANZA, TRINIDAD —

At the end of 2005, a plot of land was finally purchased in Esperanza, Trinidad, a village where there has never been an established evangelical church. The members of Hope Mennonite Church are very excited. On February 19 in the afternoon, a ground-breaking and ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on the location. It was well attended with more than 40 persons, and many of the neighbors were standing near the street looking on. Thank the Lord for this good beginning and for the interest the neighbors are showing. As soon as the new deed is available, the building committee will design building plans, get clearance from various agencies, etc., so we are cleared for beginning construction.

The land is 90% paid for and we trust it will be fully paid off with local funds by the middle of the year.

On the fifth Sunday of the month, the congregations of Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago hold a "joint service" with all the congre-

gations attending. On January 29, there was a wonderful joint service in Sangre Grande, the first time all five congregations got together. This was held at the Gospel Lighthouse Mennonite Church, the group that has been "adopted" into the Mennonite Church when their leadership person needed to retire. Folks in all congregations were really anticipating this service. The church was packed and some were standing. An estimated 225 - 250 were present. Pastor Rawl Gunpath brought a very good message. Both the Charleville Mennonite Church and Gospel Lighthouse Mennonite Church presented short dramas. Communion was shared and then the installation of the interim pastoral couple, Richard and Margaret Keeler, was held. Following the little more than two-hour service, a fellowship meal which all congregations helped prepare was enjoyed, but even more, church members from all the congregations enjoyed getting to know each other.

■ Gloria Lehman
VMBM Director of Public Relations



The Gospel Lighthouse Mennonite Church in Sangre Grande, Trinidad.

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Discovering Jesus, the better way

PALERMO, ITALY –

The children huddled around her bed, all 7 of them (6 girls and 1 boy), watching their mother lying motionless. Anger welled up inside them. Alcohol had again taken control, turning their father into a monster, causing deep pain, hatred, and fear, and leaving their mother scarred for life. Growing up in this atmosphere took its toll on their lives. Several of the girls eloped and got married, trying to escape their painful past. But somehow it didn't work. There had to be another way.

God surely heard their cry. Franca, one of the married daughters, learned that an evangelical pastor was coming to their neighbor's house for a Bible study. She asked if she and her husband, along with her younger sister could come. Although the neighbor was sick in bed, missionary Floyd Blosser came and shared the Gospel with them anyway. At the end of the evening together, they asked if they could accept Jesus into their hearts. All three of them prayed. Concetto and Franca then invited Floyd to begin a Bible study in their new home, certain that more of her family would also want to come.

Thus began a ministry to the Costa family. Each week new family members came to the Bible study: Franca's parents, younger siblings, and married sisters with their husbands. At each meeting, their open hearts received the Gospel and new persons prayed and invited Jesus into their lives. One day they said, "Our younger brother who is 16 is an atheist. He refuses to come." We began praying that God would move in his heart. The following week, he came and accepted Christ.

Inviting Jesus into their hearts was only the first step. The heartache, anger, fears and anxieties in their lives were creating anorexia, out-of-body experiences, deep-rooted bitterness, unreasonable demands in relationships, marital difficulties, vio-



The mother and daughters of the Costa family.

lent outbursts, nightmares, etc. These did not automatically dissipate. Janet Blosser began weekly Bible studies with the women, spending many hours listening to their stories, praying, and helping them toward healing. Understanding forgiveness and offering that to those who'd wronged them was almost unthinkable. But this was Jesus' way to freedom. It was a long, tedious road of struggles and tears, of reliving painful moments, of feeling the anger and bitterness, but also of confession, repentance, and surrender. They were often tempted to give up. Yet they persevered in hope. "We're doing this for our children so they can know a better way and avoid the suffering we experienced." God was there, molding and transforming their lives into new creations.

Dad Costa recognized his alcohol problem, vowing to never touch wine again. But damage from the past can never be undone, it can only be forgiven and healed. The scars remain. The Costa family today is an overwhelming testimony of God's restoration in broken lives. It is the greatest

miracle I know! Mom Costa, with all but one of her daughters, continues walking toward wholeness and freedom. Leaning on God for daily strength, she cares for her family with unconditional love, in spite of handicaps and pain.

As the living room in which we met with this extended family became too small, they pleaded for a church facility in their area of Palermo, so others could know Jesus and His transforming power. Thus a new church was born that moved beyond this family nucleus to share the hope of new life with their community. Today Shalom Mennonite Church is pastored by Pino and Rosanna Arena who provide strong leadership for an enthusiastic, growing group. God still hears the cry of those longing for a better way!

■ Janet Blosser
Weavers Mennonite Church



trans

a one-year mission

(left) Aaron Kauffman teaches an English class at Colegio Americano Menno. (below) Samuel Hernandez draws water from a well at Nazareth Village, Israel.

Kauffmans enjoy new responsibilities

LA MESA, COLOMBIA —

After a four month “adjustment period,” we began our responsibilities at Colegio Americano Menno at the beginning of February. The interactions with the students and teachers are very fulfilling and enjoyable for us!

Aaron teaches the top 12-15 English students from 6-11th grade. The focus of his class is conversational English, which is hard to do in the typical 40-person classroom. He also enjoys his weekly English class for the professors of the school. They are a bright, motivated group and aren’t afraid to ask questions and try to speak English.

Laura often comes to the school at 10:00 with Abigail. Occasionally there are children who have head or tummy aches that she checks over. She was surprised to learn there’s a “health club” of sorts, made up of upperclassmen who have taken first-aid with the local Red Cross and help stock and run the nursing station. Laura’s also been in a few meetings helping to plan the sexual education curriculum for the students.

The Mennonite church asked us to help re-start and participate in youth activities. So two Saturday

evenings a month we will be involved with the “Youth with a Purpose.” We’ll be part of a team, which is exciting, and seems more sustainable than if we just did it ourselves. The first event was Saturday, Feb. 25th. We had a delightful time deepening our relationships with the thirteen youth who came. The youth sang, played get-to-know-you games and Aaron talked about the 5 purposes for the group. Then we watched “Racing Stripes” and had a discussion about the themes of the movie.

Once a month we will lead the adult Sunday School lesson. Weekends will sometimes be quite full, once Aaron starts teaching Saturday mornings at the Theology School, and Laura travels to Anapoima to do health workshops. So our “day of rest” will be Monday, when Aaron does not have classes, and we can relax around the house without any commitments. Please keep our family in your prayers as we balance our work responsibilities in La Mesa and our time together as a family.

■ Aaron and Laura Kauffman
Zion Mennonite Church



Hernandez blessed by interactions

NAZARETH VILLAGE, ISRAEL —

It is almost the end of the winter and spring is upon us. The Nazareth Village fields are painted with green, yellow and purple. It truly is a breath-taking sight to see this first century village with all of its colors in the midst of modern Nazareth, Israel. We welcomed eight newborn lambs in the past three weeks.

It is an amazing experience to be able to witness in this town where Christians are a minority, and to offer



Melissa Wenger plays a game with the youth at Poarch Community Church, Atmore, Alabama.

a first-hand experience of the teachings of Jesus to all of our visitors. As a tour guide, I have the honor to present this experience to people from all over the world, in Spanish to Latin Americans and in English to others. In the New Testament, Paul tells us in I Corinthians 1 that the message of the cross is foolishness for the Gentiles, a stumbling block for the Jews, but for those who believe, it is the power of God. I have found this to apply in my tours; for some it is just another site, but for some it is a blessing that reinforces their faith and refreshes their spirit. The blessing carries a long way, and persons have blessed me.

I read through my journals and realized how blessed I am. I met an 83-year-old lady in my tour yesterday; she climbed up the hill in between the terraces with us, and endured the entire walk. She came to talk to me and told me of how blessed she was by these teachings. At the end she said that the tour was the best of her entire trip and even invited me to visit her when I return to the U.S. These encounters are common in my work; they reinforce my faith and refresh my spirit. They also remind me of the new life we have in Jesus Christ. They are a reminder of the need to spread the news of this new life. We are doing just that in the Nazareth Village by offering the teachings of the "New Life Giver" in a first-century experience.

■ Samuel Hernandez
Mt. Vernon Mennonite Church

God is faithful in Atmore

ATMORE, ALABAMA –

Every morning I wake up and anticipate the activities of the new day. What should be done first? Do I need to run some errands? Preparing lessons for Children's Church on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening takes priority. For some weeks, the Sunday lessons have centered on the "fruit of the Spirit" with a large paper tree "growing" a variety of fruits. The children love to decorate and cut out the different fruits. Our tree is full of apples, grapes, oranges, pears, watermelon slices, and other fruits. This unique tree represents the life of a young Christian, who, when they demonstrate these Christ-like characteristics, will be unique and beautiful themselves.

Another priority is assisting with the planning for Native Assembly 2006. A group of Native Churches representing about 20 different tribes meets every two years for fellowship and worship. This meeting will take place in Atmore on July 24-26, 2006. Approximately 400-500 people will participate. It takes many people working together as a team to make sure that the arrangements for lodging, meals, transportation from the airport, and other logistics are done. A group from Harrisonburg Mennonite Church will provide

activities for the children. Youth activities will also be planned. There is great excitement anticipation for this major event.

Please pray that the details for this meeting are covered, and that it will be a blessed time for all participants.

I treasure the time that I have spent in the *transSend* program. There have been times when I have been challenged and stretched. But that leads to growth. There have also been times of great joy. Through it all, I know my God has been with me. I am reminded of the lesson we had in Children's Church yesterday morning. We were talking about "Faithfulness." The story we talked about from the Bible was the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace. We talked about how when we faithfully serve God, He is faithful to us.

■ Melissa Wenger
Poarch Community Church

Marshall teaches signs with love



ORANGE WALK TOWN, BELIZE –

It must be hard to grow up with everyone around you thinking that you are “stupid.” Luis spent two years in a regular classroom. His family and teachers wondered why he was not learning. He still was not counting to 10 at age 8 and could not follow directions. He was becoming a behavior problem. He must be a slow learner, they thought. Luis adopted the slow learner mentality and acted silly and immature. In November his observant Belizean teacher recognized that maybe the problem is that Luis is hard-of-hearing. His speech was slurred and he dropped final consonants. They asked me to go to his home and determine if he is deaf. There was no audiometer available so I just went and observed him. I asked him to identify in English or Spanish four common animals. He couldn’t do it. I taught him the signs and he learned the names of all animals in 3 minutes. His father was shocked and said, “Luis is bright!” Several tests and finding the mother had rubella while pregnant with him, led us to conclude that Luis is a very smart hard-of-hearing child. Two weeks later he joined my class.

Luis quickly picked up sign language but liked the reaction he got from others when he pointed his middle finger at them. Several times a day another child would come to me complaining that Luis had “shot them the bird.” This went on for weeks. He had learned throughout his 8 years of life while being called stupid, he could regain “power” by being mean. Not talking clearly, the finger seemed to work every time. It was a hard, very “reinforcing” habit to break. One day while praying, God gave me the idea to substitute it with the “I love you” sign. So I



Nancy Marshall with two of her students.

taught him to say ILY in sign language instead of using “the finger,” at the same time I taught the kids in the class to smile every time Luis said ILY. It worked! When he is grumpy he still uses the middle finger but most days he is signing ILY instead.

One day I was telling the story of Jesus calming the storm to my class. We acted it out. Then I passed out the Bibles that VMBM had sent through Books Abroad. The Bibles have great pictures in them that are perfect for the children who cannot read. When Luis got his Bible he was so excited. He flipped through it trying to find the pictures for the story I had just told. When he found it, he began to sign the whole story again from what he remembered and what he could understand from the pictures. God is working to transform this child from “failure” to friend. What a blessing to get to watch it all.

■ Nancy Marshall
Orange Walk Town, Belize



Three of Nancy’s students: Edgar, Hipolito, & Ginelli.

Reaching out to children

BARI, ITALY –

On January 28-29, four young people from Centro Koinonia participated in a weekend seminar for people that desired to serve God in the areas of evangelism for children and teenagers. Michela Piccolo from “Open Air Campaigners in Italy” led the seminar on “Presenting Christ in every way and everywhere.” Special teaching was about how to tell a story, the use of sketch boards, balloons, and games to creatively teach children and teenagers about Jesus. For several years God has given us the desire to reach out to children. We have also been amazed by the creativity and talents that God has brought together at Centro Koinonia, one being a very good artist, another able to write songs and stories for children. Three years ago we had a PIM team come to help lead children’s games and activities in a park here at Bari. That same summer we began holding Summer Vacation Bible School, and we invited a team from Palermo to come and help. God has blessed these experiences and events – others are catching this vision! We have seen how those who came from Palermo to help have now begun holding Summer Vacation Bible school in two of the Mennonite churches in Palermo. God continues to lead us to reach out to children and we are forming a team of persons who will be trained and ready to do events in the park and piazzas. We are just in the idea stage, but many different ideas are being suggested including: balloons, games, puppets, music, sketch board and art, drama mime, and clowns. Of course the vision is always to reach and introduce new people to Jesus Christ. Please pray with us as we seek to serve the Lord in this new way.

■ Phil Lehman
VMBM mission worker, Bari, Italy



take a more active approach to problem-solving; they show more initiative.” Steve said.

Another important focus at the college is academic integrity, crucial in former Soviet-bloc countries where bribery, plagiarism and other forms of cheating are very common in higher education. The hope is that students will take this heightened sense of integrity out with them into the larger society.

Suzanna will need those skills when she returns to Belarus, where, unlike most of her peers from that country, she plans to return upon graduation. “I feel called back,” she says. “I don’t love the things that are happening in my country. I don’t love the government. But I see the need for spiritual freedom. I think it’s possible that things can get better and I’m willing to invest in that. People in Belarus are so open to spiritual things.”

Suzanna is grateful she’s been able to attend the college of her choice to help her develop her faith for the task that lies ahead. “LCC is special because of people like Steve who come here and are so willing to give,” she said. “It’s not just their knowledge. It’s the passion for their faith.”

She will need to keep that passion alive in her own heart when she returns to Belarus. Bringing faith to her troubled homeland will require more patience and energy than most people are willing to devote to the task. But just as she once refused to give up on herself, Suzanna is not ready to give up on Belarus, either.

■ Adapted from Mennonite Mission Network article written by Ann Graham Price

Dintamans teach and encourage students at LCC

KLAIPEDA, LITHUANIA –

Suzanna Krivulskaya grew up in Minsk, Belarus, and attends Lithuania Christian College (LCC) in Klaipeda. Attending college is a small miracle she owes to the encouragement of Steve Dintaman, head of the theology department at LCC, where she is currently a second-year student. Steve and his wife, Betsy, currently provide a strong presence at this liberal-arts college. They serve with Mennonite Mission Network in partnership with VMBM.

“In Belarus, if you don’t get into a university, everybody gives up on you,” Suzanna says matter-of-factly. Even though she didn’t get accepted at the local university, she didn’t give

up on herself. She wrote to Steve and told him how much she wanted to attend LCC. He wrote back and strongly encouraged her to seek financial aid through scholarships that were available. She did – and she was admitted and received a full scholarship.

“The first two months I was here, I couldn’t stop talking,” she says. “The freedom – the ability to think critically and to say what we think – is something we are not given back home.” One of the goals of LCC is to develop critical-thinking skills that shape students to become agents for change in their respective cultures, according to Steve, who has served there since September 2002. “They



(above) Steve Dintaman at 2005 graduation ceremonies at Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Flowers are a large part of celebrations in Lithuania.

(left) Mara Giuliana beside a sketch board that is used to teach children about God at Centro Koinonia. She is a talented artist who has done many art projects at Koinonia.

The challenge of planting churches

by Ed Bontrager

Director of Development / Church Relations / USA Ministries



For a while as a small child I didn't go to a church. I went to a fire station! Our home was too small for all the neighborhood children who wanted to come to our "living room" Sunday school. But the community fire hall was just down the street. So for several years we met there.

My parents saw a need, took a risk, invited the neighbors, and launched out into ministry. Today the Harris Hill Mennonite Church located just east of Buffalo, N.Y., is still a viable congregation after some 65 years, and a member of the New York Mennonite Conference.

Virginia Conference has begun many churches since Trissels was started in 1822. Just within the last 20 years, we have begun 34 churches, but we have lost 36. Twenty of those who left VMC are still active congregations today.

Why should we plant new churches? 1) A new church encourages reproduction. Established churches often lose their thrust for reaching new people because they often get bogged down in their own programs and close-knit fellowship. However, the drive behind the risk for new church planters is to reach the people around them. That's the reason for their very existence. 2) A new church forms its ministry around those who are not churched. Those pioneering new fellowships ask the question, "What ministries do we need to have that will attract a post-modern, secular type of people?" 3) A new church can effectively reach a new ethnic group. Established churches find it hard crossing the hurdles of new friendships, language or culture. A new church, however, faces this challenge up front.

It is gratifying to know that at this time various districts in VMC are working at a number of new church plantings initiatives. The Stephens City Korean Community Church began in January. A group in Graham, N.C., has been assembling, which includes 20-30 persons. The goal of "The Table," a new church plant in Harrisonburg is to "advocate in the public sphere on behalf of her poor and marginalized..." and to reach those who may not be attracted by the traditional type church. In southeast Virginia the pastors of three districts are working together to plant a new church somewhere in the Tidewater area.

If your district or congregation would like to talk about planting a new church, you may contact me at ed.bontrager@vmbm.org or give me a call at (540) 434-9727.



The developing Korean church that meets at Stephens City Mennonite Church.



James Rhee, his wife, Sharon, and children Jason, and Jenny. James Rhee is developing a church for Korean persons in the Winchester, Stephens City, Front Royal area, using the facilities of the Stephens City Mennonite Church, meeting in the afternoon on Sundays. He is a recent graduate of Eastern Mennonite Seminary. Though he resides with his family at the present time in Harrisonburg, it is his intent to move to the Stephens City area in June 2006.

New Beginnings Hosts Big Game Hunt Banquet

What does it take to kill a black bear with your bare hands? About 120 people heard the fascinating but true story of such a feat at the New Beginnings Church's 2nd annual Big Game Hunt Banquet held at the rustic Mt Solon Barn on Saturday, February 25, 2006. Pastor Ed Heatwole helped plan the banquet as an outreach event. They advertised heavily in the

local newspaper and on the radio in an attempt to attract new people to this non-threatening church event. Those present enjoyed a catered meal of pork tenderloin, venison, wild goose and deer bologna. Each table was decorated with animal tracks and chocolate candies resembling bear, deer, turkey and elk droppings.

After a sumptuous dinner, 77-year-old Rev. Bobby Lowther, a small man with big tales of his hunting escapades and God's hand on his life, enchanted us with his escapades. Hailing from Elkins, W. Va., Lowther spent 57 years in ministry, including 20 years in Haiti. He began his address with a disclaimer, "I'm not an entertainer, I'm a preacher." He then proceeded to captivate his audience by recounting his greatest hunt, tackling a bear in the mountains near his home and killing it with his bare hands. His reenactment of that momentous day kept the audience riveted to their seats. When he spotted the bear, he had only four shots in his rifle. Three shots sailed wide of their mark, while the fourth shattered the bear's right rear leg. That's when the story got interesting. He and his hunting dog Dan pursued that bear for more than an hour. They chased it up and down trees, across creeks, and along steep embankments before trapping it in a tree. Lowther recalled telling his canine companion, "Dan, we've got ourselves a bear if we can just get him killed." Using stones he pummeled the cornered animal until it fell to the ground on its rump, stunned. Dan attacked the bear from the front. Lowther thought, "If I could only get my arms around that bear's neck I could chock it to death." That's when he came at it from behind and locked his arms around its neck. "Preacher, you've done it now. If you let go he'll eat you for sure," he thought. So Lowther



Rev. Bobby Lowther with a large game animal he has just killed.

held on for dear life. Eventually the bear went limp and Lowther realized his ordeal was ended. At 47 years of age he had killed a 140-pound bear with his bare hands. He had the animal stuffed and has been retelling the tale for 30 years. "I'm being gun barrel straight about this," he assured us.

After the meal more than two dozen hunters, including men, women and young children, stood and recounted the animals they had hunted and killed this past year. Some used rifles, others bow and arrow, but none could match Lowther's exploits with his bare hands.

• Steve Carpenter
Conference Coordinator

VMBM Appointment



Roy and Joanne Hunsberger from the Asheville (N.C.) Mennonite Church have arrived in Charlieville, Trinidad for six-months of service. They will be involved in cell groups, Bible studies, prayer meetings, children's and women's activities, outreach in Carlsen Field, and in the construction of the Hope Mennonite Church building when that gets started.

Pleasant View clients make a difference

Connie and Junior, two Pleasant View clients, volunteering at Gift and Thrift, Inc.



Volunteering in the community is something Pleasant View clients, with assistance from staff, do on a weekly basis. Giving back to the community is high on everyone's list of priorities. Our clients, in spite of their disabilities and limitations, give to their full potential and enjoy the gratification of knowing their efforts make a difference.

The staff in charge of taking clients out into the community and to volunteer sites are called transitional staff. In this job, no two days are the same. The 26 clients who participate in the program and the transitional staff average up to 70 outings per month.

"I look forward to Tuesdays when Joyce comes with her crew to volunteer. Connie and Junior, two of the faces we see here often, perform tasks that are very important to the smooth operation of our non-profit organization. All of us here at Gift and Thrift are so grateful for folks who enjoy volunteering and are able to come over every week. We share lots of smiles!" said Deb King, store manager. "I very much appreciate Joyce's interaction with the clients. Joyce is a transitional staff working for Pleasant View, "...she always gives concise directions and speaks gently, but firmly, letting her clients know that they are valuable and teachable," Ms. King adds.

There is no mistaking the excitement our clients feel. The clients and Joyce also visit places such as the Community Center and interact with their staff, Crystal. They also visit the library, where the clients pick books to read together. Visits to the different local parks, post offices, pet shops, movie theater and local fast food spots are all welcome treats.

"Being a transitional staff is one of the most rewarding jobs I have held," explained Joyce. "Taking clients to volunteer sites and watching their sense of accomplishment leaves me with a sense of pride and personal satisfaction. I make a difference in the lives of people I care deeply about."

• Rosa C. Bare

Public Relations and Fundraising Coordinator

Ways to stay in touch

Reading *Connections* keeps you in touch with what is happening in Virginia Mennonite Conference. However, there are two other publications which can help you keep in touch with the Mennonite Church USA and with Anabaptists around the world.

The Mennonite, edited by Everett Thomas in Goshen, IN., is the official periodical for the denomination. It is published every other week and features topical issues such as: work and play, how to minister to young adults, and speak to government? In addition to in-depth articles and occasional poetry, each issue includes: Grace and Truth (a pastoral letter), Readers Say (your comments), News digest, Leadership, For the record (birth and death notices), Mediaculture (book and film reviews) and an Editorial. See www.themennonite.org or call 800-790-2498 to learn more or subscribe.

The Mennonite Weekly Review is published every week in a newspaper format with brief articles about current events in Anabaptist churches around the world. Edited by Paul Schrag in Newton, Kan., each issue contains insightful articles taken from the Christian Science Monitor and the Religion News Service along with editorials, reader's comments, a Sunday School lesson, regular columnists, lots of news, congregational reports and a serial novel, currently I'll See You Again by Myron Augsburger. Any congregation can submit regular bi-monthly reports free of charge. The church reporter will even get a free subscription. See www.mennoniteweekly.org for details or call 800-424-0178 to subscribe.

2006 Penny Power



We are hoping to raise \$22,000 for this year's Penny Power projects. In 2005, congregations contributed \$22,834.09! We hope to continue the effort and momentum from last year.

- Collect jugs for your church from the Conference Center, 901 Parkwood Dr., Harrisonburg.
- Highlight Penny Power during your Sunday morning worship service. Involve the children in your church. You can borrow "Rhythm of Change" from the Conference.
- Contact Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions at 540-434-9727, 800-707-5535, or info@vmbm.org.



Connections Prayer Calendar April 2006

Sunday

30 Today is commencement at Eastern Mennonite University. Ask God to guide the graduates in their career decisions and personal choices.

Monday

The April prayer calendar is sponsored by **Elizabeth Hostetter**

Her enthusiastic support of missions throughout the world impacts lives for God.

If you would like to sponsor the prayer calendar, please contact *Gloria Lehman* at gloria.lehman@vmbm.org or (540) 434-9727

Tuesday

2 Monica Unzicker, VMBM worker in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, interacts with both the students at the Maranatha School and young people in the community. Pray that others will see the love of Christ in her.

3 Pastor James Rhee is starting a Korean church with the support of the Stephen's City Mennonite Church and others. Pray that this new initiative will take hold and thrive as God enables.

4 Pray for the VMC staff: Owen Burkholder, Kimberlee Greenawalt, Laura Moyers, Jon Trotter, Sherah-Leigh Gerber and Steve Carpenter, as they fulfill their responsibilities in support of the conference's ministries.

5 Roy and Joanne Hunsberger are connecting with the congregations of the Mennonite Church of Trinidad and Tobago through meeting with cell groups and attending worship services. Ask God to give them insight.

6 This season is poignant in the Nazareth (Israel) Village where Samuel Hernandez works as a tour guide for Spanish-speaking visitors. Ask God to make Himself very real to all the staff and to the tourists as they walk these grounds.

7 Margaret Keeler, Trinidad, has a real "counseling by phone" ministry with women who face a variety of stressful situations. Her calm assurance, strong encouragement and prayers help to bring healing and hope to them.

Wednesday

9 Pray for Christians within our culture who are bombarded with conflicting values and who must deal with doubt and cynicism. May the Lord show His mercy and love to those who struggle with faith.

10 Today Harrisonburg area youth pastors meet together for lunch. Pray especially for their ministry among the young persons of their congregations.

11 Richard Keeler, Trinidad, demonstrates the kind of leadership that is needed in the Gospel Lighthouse MC since their former leader retired due to health issues. Thank God for his example, and pray for church leaders.

12 Pray for parents in our churches who struggle to raise Godly children in a world full of challenges. Ask God to grant them insight to know the best way of relating and teaching their children the way of Christ.

13 Maundy Thursday. "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake [it], and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19

14 It was on the cross, at one awful moment, Jesus Christ bore our sins, instantaneously clearing our debt. We are set free from sin's penalty and sin's power once and for all. Praise God!

Thursday

16 The One who directed that stone in between Goliath's eyes and split the Red Sea down the middle and brought His Son out of the tomb takes delight in altering the obvious and bypassing the inevitable. Hallelujah!

17 Melissa Wenger plans interactive Sunday school lessons for children at the Poarch Community Church in Atmore, Ala. Ask for God's clear guidance as she teaches these young ones.

18 Aaron and Laura Kauffman, ~~from Send~~ participants in partnership with MMN, ask us to thank God for a safe and informative trip to Ecuador that they had in January. They are living and working in La Mesa, Colombia.

19 Robert and Lois Wenger, teacher assistants, spark creativity by providing new experiences for the students at the Maranatha School in Jamaica. Thank God for these gifts that they share.

20 Pray for the church-wide Youth Ministry Council meeting in San Jose, May 11-14. Pray for new ideas and encouragement for nurturing youth in God's image.

21 Skip and Carol Tobin, EMM and VMBM workers in Southeast Asia ask: Who will show the way, be the light, live the faith, and be Jesus to those who are searching? How does God want you to be involved?

22 Pray for the Conference Peace Committee as they meet today to discuss how to further promote issues of peace within congregations.

Friday

"When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ." Luke 4: 40-41

23 Pray for the Nurture Commission who will meet tonight. Pray for practical ideas to know how to support healthy development for our individuals and families.

24 Nancy Marshall, ~~from Send~~ participant in Belize, faces various dilemmas in her daily teaching schedule. Ask God to give her insight for problem-solving, and a continued Christ-like spirit as she relates to students and staff.

25 Pray that our youth will make wise and safe decisions as they are at crossroads of life and determining the next step. Ask God to unveil His plans to youth in a real way and enstill in them a desire to follow His call.

26 As thoughts turn toward summer plans, pray for the summer camp program directors of Highland Retreat and Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center as they plan activities and ministries to impact young lives.

27 Pleasant View, Inc., which ministers to adults with developmental disabilities, dedicates their new day care facility tomorrow. Pray for Director Nancy Hopkins-Garriss as she directs this important work.

28 Pray for the graduating class of Eastern Mennonite Seminary as they graduate tomorrow. Pray for God's guidance in their future ministry decisions.

29 Pray for Phil & Marcia Lehman and family as they relate to their next door neighbors who have begun reading the Bible. Ask that God will speak to them through His Word.

Saturday

1 Conference Coordinator Steve Carpenter is traveling today to Knoxville, TN. He will bring the morning message at Concord Mennonite Church. Pray for his safety on the road and for the Holy Spirit's anointing.

8 Dan Hoopert continues teaching at Kiev Theological Seminary in Ukraine. Pray for his interactions with the variety of people that he meets.

15 Ganesh Kalloo, pastor from Trinidad, is wrapping up the second semester of seminary studies at EMS, Harrisonburg. He and Risha are dedicated to becoming more effective leaders in MCTT.

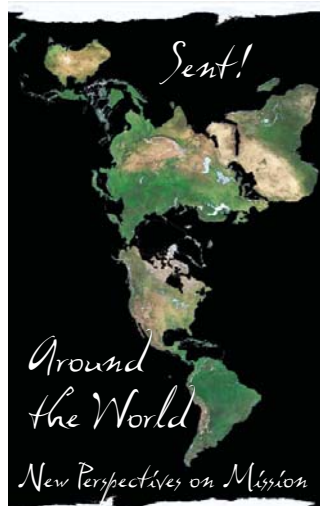
22 Pray for the Conference Peace Committee as they meet today to discuss how to further promote issues of peace within congregations.

Announcements

Hymn Sing For Peace April 1 2006 Washington DC

The **Hymn Sing For Peace** is scheduled for April 1 at 2pm in Lafayette Park, just across from the White House. Held annually, the hymn sing attracts singers from throughout the local area as well as many from other states including Pennsylvania and Ohio. Singers gather to share songs of peace with one another and as a witness to those who pass by. Through this annual event, others are made aware of Christ's message of peace for the entire world. The sponsor for this year's event is the Anabaptist Peace Center of Washington, DC. For more information about the hymn sing and the Anabaptist Peace Center - Washington, DC, visit www.apcwdc.mennonite.net

"Sent! Around the World: New Perspectives on Mission" will be the theme of **The Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly, July 6-9, 2006**, at Eastern Mennonite



University, Harrisonburg, Va. The theme is Speakers are: **Ramesh Jaimani**, Pastor of Charlieville Mennonite Church, Trinidad; **Willard Eberly**, VMBM Mediterranean Regional Director, Bari, Italy; **Nancy Heisey**, President, Mennonite World Conference; **Art McPhee**, Associate

Professor of Mission, AMBS.

On Sat. April 1, **Lunasa**, an Irish music quintet, will present a program at the EMHS Auditorium. One reviewer said of the group, "An amazing new instrumental quintet: state-of-the-art Irish music as aggressively infectious as you'll ever hear." The concert is a fundraising event for the Touring Choir which will be touring in Europe in June. For tickets and more information call 540-432-4931.

Funds are needed for the Mennonite Relief Center in Hinton, Va. It was a very successful canning season: 48,000 lbs of turkey were canned! The Relief Center needs to recover the cost of purchasing the turkey, and asks for your help. You may send donations to the Mennonite Relief Center, PO Box 519, Dayton, VA 22821, earmarked for the meat canning project. If you have any questions pertaining to this project you can contact Leon Rhodes at (540) 867-9751.

Pastoral Transition



Peter S. Nguyen will be ordained by Virginia Mennonite Conference on April 9, 2006. He is the pastor of Vietnamese Christian Fellowship in Falls Church, Va.

called and sent!

Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions

Will you serve in one of these places?

Engage in outreach in Donegal, Ireland, with European Christian Missions partnering with VMBM. Teams in summer 2006 give opportunities for working with youth in various settings. Serve for a few weeks, a few months, or several years.

Teach English in China with VMBM's partner, China Educational Exchange. One- to two-year terms are available. This opening to enhance the lives of Chinese students of all ages yields opportunities for informal sharing of Christ and God's Word.

Teach English at a youth center in Nazareth, Israel, at the 8th English Summer Camp, July 3-16, 2006. Lodging will be with local families.

Contact Ken Horst at (800) 707-5535 or email ken.horst@vmbm.org

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