



PATHWAYS

WALKING WITH THE MINISTRIES OF VIRGINIA MENNONITE CONFERENCE



SUMMER 2024

Vol. 10, No. 2

English

New VMC Ministry Team Appointed



Featuring
Conference
Endorsed
Ministries



the Last
Word from
the iCLT

LIVING STONES
2024
Summer Delegate Assembly



the **Last Word** from the iCLT

Bishop Leslie Francisco III **Minister of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

As I write this report, I find myself filled with mixed emotions, as it marks the conclusion of my tenure as the Minister of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the conference. Over the past two years, I have enjoyed the interactions and collaborations with my colleagues on the iCLT staff. This journey has been both enriching and enlightening, deepening my appreciation for the vital work of the conference and the community we serve.

Throughout our efforts to navigate and address challenging issues, I was continually reminded by the Spirit that the Church belongs to God and will endure, despite any obstacles or challenges we may face. It has been inspiring to witness how VMC has evolved, creating space for a dynamic and ever-changing culture while maintaining the core beliefs that define our faith and foundation.

I want to express my deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve the conference during this season. As I step aside, I will keep the next iteration of leadership in my prayers, asking for wisdom, discernment, and direction as they seek to lead with the aid of the Holy Spirit. May we always remember our purpose as a Conference: "to equip pastors, lay leaders, and congregants for worship and service, and

to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far."

Looking forward, I remain optimistic about the future of our conference, trusting that it will continue to grow and thrive in its mission.

Duane Beck **Consultant to Pastoral Leaders and Coach for Local Ministry**

I am deeply grateful for the interim leadership team I have worked with. They are wise, gifted, and firmly rooted in their relationship with Christ and



dedicated to serving the local church and VMC. I will miss the close relationships with those I have served, especially the iCLT and the District Ministers.

Caleb Schrock-Hurst **Church Relations & Racial Justice Minister**

I want to thank you all and the conference for the chance to serve our congregations over the last three years. From Sunday-morning church visits, to evening events, to delegate sessions, it has been a pleasure to do what I can for the cause of Christ's church in the world; it has been an honor to work alongside so many fellow servants of the way of Jesus.

I remain hopeful for the future of conference and hope God continues to empower Conference Council and all VMC leadership with courage, wisdom, and compassion in the coming months and years.

Craig Maven **Minister of Administration and Church Relations**

It was truly an honor to be asked to serve on iCLT. I worked with an amazing and cohesive group of people. I end my two-year commitment with gratitude for the other members of iCLT, the work of Conference Council, and the engagement and input from pastors, delegates, and other people within VMC. I believe that Virginia Mennonite Conference has a bright future!

VMC= Virginia Mennonite Conference

Why we exist!

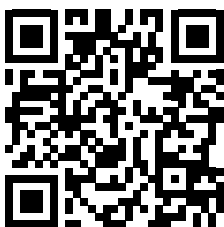
Vision

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.

Mission

Virginia Mennonite Conference equips pastors, lay leaders, and congregants for worship and service, and to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far.

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Virginia Mennonite Conference
601 Parkwood Dr
Harrisonburg, Va 22802
540-43-9727
info@virginiaconference.org

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New Conference Ministry Team Appointed

With the conclusion of the interim Conference Leadership Team (iCLT), Virginia Mennonite Conference is pleased to announce a 4-person transitional ministry team. Returning from the iCLT are Maren Tyedmers Hange and June Miller who will resume similar roles. Maren's time will be increasing from 0.25 FTE to 0.5 FTE. She continues to be co-pastor at Charlottesville Mennonite Church but has resigned as Co-District Minister of Harrisonburg District. The new members include Juan Carlos Malvaez and Phil Kniss.

Maren Tyedmers Hange: Conference Minister of Conference Formation and Soulcare (0.5 FTE)

Major responsibilities include tending to the spiritual vitality of the conference, supporting the Racial Justice Task Force, Youth Council and other ministries, and serving as the team's leader. New role begins October 1. Current 0.25 FTE role continues through September.



June Miller: Conference Director of Administration and Communication (0.75 FTE)

Major responsibilities include managing the business side of the conference, overseeing office staff, and directing strategic communications. Role continues from iCLT term.



Juan Carlos Malvaez: Conference Minister of Congregational Vision and Mission (0.5 FTE)

Major responsibilities include assisting congregations with training resources, working with districts to coordinate regional events, consult with congregational leadership teams on vision and mission. Begins Monday, September 16.



Phil Kniss: Conference Minister of Leadership Development and Support (0.25 FTE)

Major responsibilities include supporting District Ministers, cultivating pastoral relationships across conferences, geographical areas, or interests. Begins Tuesday, October 1.



Staff representation to Mennonite Church USA and to the districts will be divided among the team. Though start times vary, the new Ministry team will be in full force on October 1, 2024 continuing through August 31, 2025. The additional transition year allows for proper time to confirm a permanent team.

Join us October 6, 2024 for the commissioning of the new team at 546 Franklin St, home of Ridgeway Mennonite Church and Manantial de Vida at 7pm.

Transitions

FEBRUARY 2024-AUGUST 2024

Harrigain Bowman: Expired

Kevin Clark: Retired

Joshua Cox: Expired

Peter Eberly: Withdrawn

Andrew Buckwalter Fairfield: Suspended

Joshua Fyffe: Expired

Shawn Green: Expired

Willis Hunsburger: Withdrawn

Patrick McFarren: Transfer to Central District

Michael Metzler: Withdrawn

Harold Miller: Withdrawn

Christopher Riddle: Withdrawn

LaShonda Russell: Expired

Matthew Schwartz: Withdrawn

Jason Rhodes Showalter: Expired

Mark Thiessen Nations: Withdrawn

Dorothy Jean Weaver: Retired

Sandra Wenger: Expired

DEATHS:

Gay Marcille (Marci) Frederick: August 25, 2024

Carl Mericle: September 4, 2024

Correction:

Orval Shank: March 22, 2023 d.o.d.



Beauty from Brokenness by Gail Hickok

Commissioned by Virginia Mennonite Conference
for the 2024 Summer Delegate Assembly
"Living Stones"



Artist Statement: Some might look at it and see a wall in need of repair, a place where the crumbling mortar has made way for weeds to take hold. I see a wall evolving, losing its rigidity, and giving way to growth. Perhaps a dandelion might represent annoyance to the adults who try to keep up the appearance, but maybe it's time to remember the joy of a child running with abandon, hands full and sticky with their hand-picked dandelion-filled bouquet— a gift of love. Maybe it's time to allow God to grow in the cracks of our brokenness, and take a step of faith into His guidance, knowing that He will make something beautiful, from our wounds and division.

This piece has been made completely from recycled paper. Some of these papers have included past notes from VMC delegate meetings. Each piece of paper has served its first purpose, but now rather than meeting the destruction of a burn pile, they have been ground down to recreate a message of hope for what the future holds.

Gail Hickok is a member of Mountain View Mennonite Church in Hickory, NC. Gail's artwork is on display at VMC offices.

From the Moderator



BY JIM HERSHBERGER

Dear members of Virginia Mennonite Conference

As I write this, I am reflecting on our recent summer assembly and Conference Council meeting we had Thursday evening, August 22 as well as my beginning role as moderator.

Conference Council (CC) invited the Faith and Life Commission (FLC) to join the conversation with the Interim Conference Leadership Team, (iCLT), which ended their term August 31. The iCLT members, Caleb Shrock-Hurst, Craig Maven, Duane Beck, June Miller, Bishop Leslie Francisco, III and Maren Tyedmers Hange, shared with us their reflections on what was accomplished, what still needs to be done and what remains. I share briefly some of the many highlights of our time together.

Some of the accomplishments were the district worship services, a sense of more trust and lowered anxiety in churches, an increased commitment to supporting congregations as they focus on evangelism and ministry in the communities around them.

Some of the remaining challenges are ongoing difficulties of finding pastors, need for conference staff to preach in local congregations, equipping churches to use gifts in our conference, outreach to the community, and helping churches form leadership teams. We are grateful to the iCLT members for their careful and faithful work among us. They shared their love of Jesus and the church with us and we are healthier for it.

In other work we approved Howard Miller as chair of the VMC Gifts Discernment committee and Janet Blosser as a provisional member-at-large of the FLC. Janet's appointment will be finalized in the 2025 Winter Assembly. The personnel commit-

tee shared their work of preparing job descriptions for the next VMC Minister team. They propose dividing the Executive Minister responsibility into 4 parts: Administration, Equipping District Ministers, Equipping congregations, and Equipping conference life and ministries (such as Youth programs, Racial Justice Task Force, Congregational Life Commission and planning VMC Christian worship and growth). An announcement went out earlier this week, which can also be found on our website virginiaconference.org. We are grateful for the generosity of congregations and individuals that came very close to a balanced budget!

Other work going forward is understanding and putting into practice the 5 resolutions approved by delegates in the summer assembly. In a nutshell the delegates continue to endorse the Confession of Faith as our teaching practice, and want to be part of MC USA. Allowing local churches to opt out of derived membership in MC USA was extended to the end of 2027, and continue to urge MC USA to recognize this in their constitution. These 5 resolutions emerged from the turbulence created by the Repentance and Transformation resolution that MC USA delegates approved in 2022. One agenda item in the next joint Faith and Life Commission and Conference Council meeting is to put together a statement that sums up our understanding of the resolutions.

We look to the future focusing on our mission statement Virginia Mennonite Conference equips pastors, lay leaders, and congregants for worship and service, and to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to neighbors near and far.

*Jim Hershberger, Moderator
Virginia Mennonite Conference*

On August 22, 2024, Conference Council officially accepted the resignation of Andrew Buckwalter Fairfield as Moderator. As Moderator-Elect, Jim Hershberger has agreed to complete Andrew's term, ending August 31, 2025.



VMC Delegates support membership in Mennonite Church USA

BY JUNE MILLER

July 20, 2024 | Harrisonburg, VA. With 75% delegate support, Virginia Mennonite Conference reaffirmed their relationship Mennonite Church USA.

On Saturday, July 20, 2024, the third and final day for the 2024 Summer Delegate Assembly, delegates cast ballots on five motions brought by the Denomination Affiliation Work Group (DAWG), a task force commissioned by Conference Council and



Rachel Ringenberg Miller, MC USA Denominational Minister, shares with Virginia Mennonite delegates on Friday, July 19, 2024.

mandated to “examine VMC’s relationship with MC USA in order to map a future relationship that provides delegates with options to consider.”

The mandate to DAWG was affirmed and further refined by delegates at the 2023 Summer Delegate Assembly with delegates asking the work group to “bring their recommendation of decisive action forward for delegate approval by no later than VMC Summer Assembly 2024.”

Jon Carlson, MC USA moderator, and Rachel Ringenberg Miller, MC USA Denominational Minister, were present for the duration of the assembly. Carlson witnessed

the event as “hard and holy work of lament, discernment, and spiritual formation.” Likewise, Ringenberg Miller articulates it as a “sacred space of worship and discernment.”

Doing due diligence, DAWG engaged with six current and former MC USA conferences that are or have examined their relationship with MC USA to understand their process and to seek recommendations. The number one takeaway was that an up and down vote on affiliation was not helpful.

Instead of voting to leave MC USA, the question was inverted to affirm the current relationship. A constitutional change, like leaving the denomination, requires a 75% approval by VMC delegates while affirming the relationship with MC USA requires a simple majority. Craig Maven, the chair of the work group and a member of the interim Conference Leadership Team, notes that “it is framed as a positive affirmation, maintaining the status quo, in order to avoid the scenario where the majority of delegates express a direction that is thwarted by the minority as this motion does not require a 75% threshold.”

On Saturday, Jon Carlson, Moderator for MC USA, was invited to join Maven on stage for a Question-and-Answer time. Carlson referenced the recommendation to avoid decisive up or down votes and asked, “what changed?” “As we examined other options, everything ended in a vote,” responds Maven. “Framing it in the positive, in the event of a failed vote, allows VMC the time to develop protocols for leaving MC USA, and allows churches that wish to remain part of MC USA to discern their paths collectively or individually.”

All DAWG motions passed, including affirming the 1995 Confession of Faith as the teaching position of Virginia Conference; extending VMC Bylaws suspension, enabling a congregation to disassociate with MC USA and remain in VMC, through the end 2027; and to begin conversation with MC USA executive board to consider MC USA bylaw changes on derived membership.

Ringenberg Miller has frequented VMC assemblies since she began her role with MC USA. “I deeply appreciated the conversations I had with various pastors and the leaders of VMC. I look forward to continu-



Craig Maven (right) invited Jon Carlson to share the stage for a Question and Answer time surrounding VMC’s action to reaffirm membership in Mennonite Church USA.

ing these conversations as VMC leadership, pastors, and congregations navigate next steps following this assembly.”

“As I shared during my Q&A with Craig Maven,” Carlson reiterates, “VMC plays a significant role in the life of Mennonite Church USA. I look forward to building on and deepening that partnership as congregations throughout Mennonite Church USA seek to follow Jesus together.”

LIVING STONES 2024

The 2024 Living Stones, Summer Delegate Assembly took place at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church July 18-20 with Thursday and Friday evening services at Lindale Mennonite Church.



Leonard Dow of Everence challenges VMC to hold onto God and hold onto each other.

Getting into routine

Thursdays of the summer assembly are falling into a pattern of workshops during the day and followed by an appreciation dinner for pastor and credentialed leaders. The first post-pandemic assembly was held in 2022. Workshops consisted of a tour of the VMC archives at EMU's library; a walking tour on Race and History in Harrisonburg, and Intercultural Development Inventory. In 2023, five workshops were offered. This summer we were honored to offer 12 different workshops, open to all constituents.

Thursday Evening Worship

Leonard Dow, Vice President of Community and Church Development for Everence, was a contagious presence of Christ, challenging Virginia Mennonite Conference to hold on to God and hold on

to one another stating, "when it only requires just you and God or me and Jesus and those that think like me, act like me, pray like me, vote like me If that's all that's allowed in my eco system or my spiritual influences we are in danger of rejecting those who are outside of that as not being image bearers of God." Continuing, he encouraged us to embrace what the early church had to leave behind: let go of scarcity mindset, let go of hurry, and let go of tribalism. Full message is available at Lindale.org.



Carmen Schrock-Hurst, Associate Pastor at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, shares during the Pastors and Credentialed Leaders Appreciation Dinner.

Friday Evening Worship

On Friday evening, we had the chance to hear from our three congregations and two VM Missions workers. Our newest congregation, Iglesia Shalom Nuevo Comienzo, represented by co-pastor Veronica Sanchez, shared about lives transformed into living stones. She shared about a woman, caught up in drugs, who lost custody of her children, but in coming to Christ the woman was able to recover, regain custody of her children and be reincorporated into society.



Caleb Schrock-Hurst, iCLT, prays over Kevin Gasser, District Minister, and Seth Hanke, Pastor, in the releasing of Greenmont Mennonite Church.

Mike Shank and Aldine Musser shared how new life was infused into Valley View Mennonite Church when two young couples with small children started coming to the aged congregation. As an outreach, they wanted to join a church softball league, however, to play on the team, you had to attend the church twice a month. The first Sunday the team showed up, with boyfriends and girlfriends in tow, the congregation doubled in size. Now the team doesn't just show up for obligatory attendance. They have woven themselves into the fabric of congregational life.

Daniels Run Peace Church was asked to help two Afghan refugees in the DC area. Steve Fogleman shared of their journey which began in December of 2021 when the two families arrived. In three days, the congregation gathered household furnishings for the first family who already had an apartment. The second family lives with a family from



the congregation. In 2.5 years, Daniels Run Peace Church, a church of 30-40 families, has helped 29 Afghan families. Their work continues, reaching beyond Afghan refugees.

The service concluded with Stephen Horst and Bethany Tobin, VMMissions workers in Thailand and members of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church, sharing their journey along side of a family through trauma, mental health and death of a family member into faith in Christ. There are lots of layers and aspects to healing: physical, mental, emotional. It's a journey with Jesus toward that healing.

Congregational Transitions

On Friday morning we said goodbye to several churches. Congregations that have realigned with Lancaster Mennonite Conference include: Early Church, Eastside Church, Mosaic of Grace, Grace Mennonite Fellowship, Iglesia Enciende una Luz, and Trisels Mennonite Church. Powhatan Mennonite Church, West Liberty Mennonite Church, and Greenmonte Mennonite Fellowship are looking at Rosedale Network of Churches, formerly Conservative Mennonite Conference. Knoxville Mennonite Church transferred to Central District of Mennonite Church USA. In addition, two congregational closures, Asheville Mennonite Church and Signs of Life Fellowship, were acknowledged and lamented, reflecting on their ministry, purpose, and legacy. Leroy Kauffman and Kevin Gasser shared for the congregations, respectively.



The beginning of the stone pile, marking this time in our history - stones of remembrance.

To end the congregational transitions, VMC welcomed Iglesia Shalom Nuevo Comienzo, co pastored by Armando and Veronica Sanchez as a Congregation in Formation. The congregation, who meets in Waynesboro Mennonite Church, recently celebrated their 5-year anniversary.

To mark this time in our history, delegates were asked to stack stones at the front - stones of remembrance.



Ervin Stutzman, Chair of the Faith and Life Commission, delivers perfect comic timing to make Craig Maven, iCLT, blush. That is talent!



Ruel Burkholder leads Friday evening music at Lindale Mennonite Church.



Maren Tyedmers Hange, iCLT, designed and led, the worship sessions for assembly



Anabaptist Community Bible nearing completion



After nearly two years of collaborative work—including contributions of many congregational Bible study groups from Virginia Mennonite Conference and several professors associated with Eastern Mennonite University and Seminary—the Anabaptist Community Bible is nearing completion.

According to general editor, John D. Roth, the final layout was sent to the printers on July 10 and the study Bible is on schedule for an official re-

lease on January 21, 2025—exactly 500 years after the first adult baptisms in Zurich that gave rise to the Anabaptist movement.

Roth will be speaking about the commemoration at an Eastern Mennonite University chapel on Wednesday, January 29, with a public event possibly scheduled for the evening as well.

The Anabaptist Community Bible is the first study Bible oriented to an Anabaptist approach to scripture, with a strong emphasis on reading the Bible in community, reading it through the lens of Jesus, and reading it with the expectation that it is intended to shape our daily lives. More than 60 Anabaptist scholars provided introductions to each book of the Bible and shared additional insights through the “Biblical Context” notes that appear in the margins. A group of Anabaptist historians gleaned thousands of “Early Anabaptist Witness” notes from the biblical commentary of sixteenth-century Anabaptists, which also appear in the margins. Rounding out the 7,200 marginal notes are questions, insights, and applications shared by nearly 600 Bible

study groups from Anabaptist faith communities across North America.

In addition, five artists have contributed 40 images depicting biblical stories or motifs, each done in a distinctive linocut-style. And seven scholars wrote essays on topics related to Anabaptist hermeneutics.

The Anabaptist Community Bible is part of a larger project initiated by MennoMedia to help Mennonites and other Anabaptists commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement. Under the motto of “Looking Backward, Living Forward,” the Anabaptism at 500 project will release numerous other publications in addition to the Bible, including a new Anabaptist history text, three children’s books, several devotionals, and a photo-story book.

The Anabaptism at 500 Tool Kit, a collection of ideas and texts designed to help congregations, schools, and historical societies celebrate the 2025 anniversary year, is scheduled to appear in fall 2024.

Presale discounted orders of the Anabaptist Community Bible—in hardcover, soft touch, or genuine leather editions—started on May 15 and will continue on-line through October 15.

RELEASE DATE

January 21, 2025
Preorder Now!

[mennomedia.org/
Anabaptist-Community-Bible](http://mennomedia.org/Anabaptist-Community-Bible)

Pictures: Top Left, Daniels Run Peace Church; Top right, First Mennonite Church Richmond; Bottom Left, Harrisonburg Mennonite Church; Bottom Right, Park View Mennonite Church



Reflections on the Bible study group process from several VMC congregations

The experience was very interesting and we loved getting different perspectives from different people. We felt that we were really able to delve deeply into the material and we hope others will be able to as well. - Daniels Run Peace Church

While some of the verses were pretty challenging, the group enjoyed the experience. The prompt questions helped us think about these verses in a different way and that was helpful. Taking the input of others and making them into combined statements—in case the margin notes—is actually a pretty hard task. I hope ours came out well. - First Mennonite Richmond

Bible study in a faith community brings shared awareness. Out of awareness comes understanding and connections to lived experiences that help to inform deeper reflection and inspire new behaviors. - Harrisonburg Mennonite Church

At Zion Mennonite Church in Broadway, VA, our youth group used this project as an opportunity for Bible study together. High school youth participated quite well and had many challenging questions including about human free will, God seemingly causing suffering (of the Egyptians), pacifism and Christian nationalism, Judas's role at the end of Jesus' life, among many others. It was good practice for the youth to see adults also struggling with difficult questions as this is a very real part of Bible study and Christian living. We are excited to see the final product of this project! - Zion Mennonite Church (Broadway)

We had a great time reading and creating our notes, and an even better time sharing them with each other. It was intense but delightful to wrangle with our questions and share our personal moments of connection with the passages. And we came out of each meeting with new insights gained from each participant, and new understanding of each other, too. We all loved being a part of it. - Huntington Mennonite Church

Each person had something unique to contribute, and we learned a lot from each other. . . . This occasion led us to study scripture passages we wouldn't have chosen for ourselves, and forced us to dig into their meaning in helpful ways. The five questions were particularly useful, and led us to explore their meaning. The study helped us to explore the meaning of these passages for our everyday lives, and to pray for each other in heartfelt ways. Thank you for this opportunity. - Parkview Mennonite Church

We would love to see this kind of Bible Study happen more often; a study that isn't dependent on a leader taking us in a direction and making it all happen but a matter of us all wrestling with it together and finding our way. This method doesn't require a teacher with substantial preparation and we found it working for different genres of the text and different learning styles. Part of the value is the way it welcomes different insights and different approaches. It frees people to talk about how they see things. Our time together was so alive and learning oriented in part because of the diversity in the

room. We value the process and wonder how it might work for more people in the congregation in ways that could be contagious, so we all learn to speak with more candor, openness and wondering about the scriptures. - Springdale Mennonite Church #2

This has been a phenomenally rich group. There's been plenty to chew on, with an intriguing process of working through it. Each participant brought unique perspectives—one pastoral, another psychological, another original thinking, another a more scholarly approach. And somehow, our group seemed to get hard passage after hard passage. They must have looked at us and said, let's give them some really tough ones. This process instructs us on why Anabaptists, and Christians more generally, are known as people of the Book. It is our scriptural core that makes us tick. This has been a joyful experience, and a wonderful learning experience! - Springdale Mennonite Church #3

Waynesboro Mennonite Church has a group called "Get Real" that has been meeting for over a year. We meet each Tuesday evening, eat together and then have a bible discovery time. We first focused on a parable of Jesus each week and then began to play with Jesus' teachings from the sermon on the Mount. We have used similar questions to the Community Bible Project questions. This project seemed like a natural fit for this group as the process was very similar. We found the time together was very enjoyable. Because our group has been steeped in the teachings of Jesus for over a year, we found many of our observations and interpretations for this project were influenced by this experience. We found our study of the Jeremiah 49-50 passage to be challenging as it contrasted so strongly with the teaching and hope-filled message of Jesus. We hope this project will help other communities enjoy the scriptures as they "play" with various passages and experience the presence of the Spirit as they meet together. - Waynesboro Mennonite Church

We were grateful to have a part in the formation of this study Bible. - Williamsburg Mennonite Church

CELEBRATION

Harrisonburg
January 29

Save the Date!



Pictures: Top Right, Zion Mennonite Church; Bottom Left, Park View Mennonite Church; Bottom Right, Waynesboro Mennonite Church

Conference Endorsed Ministries

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mwvsecretary@gmail.com
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BRETHREN & MENNONITE
HERITAGE
CENTER

Welcome Brethren & Mennonite Heritage Center as a new Conference Endorsed Ministry!

We'll learn more about them in the next issue of Pathways. Churches, do you support BMHC? You can now include your donation with your check to VMC. You can find the forwarding form on our website virginiaconference.org/resources.

FLRC's Ministry to Our Community

Family Life Resource Center is a local 501(c)3 nonprofit counseling agency meeting the behavioral health needs of individuals, couples and families in our community since 1987. The original vision and then formation was to create a counseling center that was rooted in faith while being a vital resource for local area churches, and all members of our community, in the pursuit of hope, health, and healing.

Family Life Resource Center continues to partner with pastors and congregations to provide support and mental health care to church members and our communities. Congregational Leaders are one of the first persons to see the mental health needs within their congregations. Our hope is that these leaders could be encouraged to know they are referring congregant members to a Faith-based practice that prioritizes values of spirituality and can meet the client where they are at in their personal journey. FLRC is welcoming to all people, aspiring to be a source of God's love, and bringing into reality God's commandment to love others. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

Outside of our agency statement and Christ-centered mission, our goal is to help people realize the importance of mental health. Mental health challenges, mental illnesses and basic life challenges emerge no matter one's age, faith, family background or educational level.



273 Newman Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22801

540-434-8450, www.flrc.org

Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale Fasting And Feasting To Raise A Half Million \$\$\$ For The Hungry This Year

BY HARVEY YODER

I have long been in awe of all the dedicated volunteers who make the Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale a success each year. The money raised for Mennonite Central Committee at this annual event may seem negligible in light of the unprecedented needs of millions of our hungry and homeless neighbors around the world, but every half million dollars helps, and I believe the Sale might actually be able to raise that amount this year (last year's total was well over \$400,000).

I occasionally hear people question whether indulging in so much food and purchasing so many unneeded items at the Sale is the best way to raise money for the hungry and destitute, but I can't believe Jesus would object to an occasional feast or festive occasion for a good cause as long as everyone's invited. After all, he frequently enjoyed a good meal, and with some unsavory characters at that, so much so that some even brought accusations like, "Look at him! He eats too much and drinks too much wine, and he is a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Luke 7:34, CEV)

So let's just assume an occasional feast or festivity is a good thing. But what Jesus clearly does object to is "faring sumptuously every day," like the rich man Jesus warns us about in Luke 16:19. As an observant Jew, Jesus observed both feast days and fast days, and in fact fasted for 40 whole days in preparation for his public ministry.

All major religions I know of commend fasting as a spiritual practice, accompanied by prayer, repentance, reflection on our dependence on God, and being in solidarity with millions who

suffer from want. In both Catholic and (most) Protestant traditions there are regular times designated for doing without--or doing with less--as in the observance of 40 days of Lent, as an act of self-denial versus self-indulgence. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasting_in_religion

So here's a modest proposal for a fast in preparation for the Relief Sale's efforts this year:

1. Encourage your congregation to designate a day between now and the Relief Sale for some kind of fast for world hunger. This could mean abstaining from food from sunset on a Saturday to a Sunday noon, for example.
2. Encourage your congregation to have a have a simple meal to help identify with those not blessed with the food abundance we are (rice and beans or some similar fare) and to host it as a fundraiser for the Relief Sale on some Sunday noon, especially for those not able to attend the Sale in person.
3. Have your church encourage those who can attend to not only assist in raising money by buying food and other items but to match or exceed that amount with a cash, check or credit card gift at the Everence giving table.
4. Encourage people to give online <https://vareliefsale.com/donate/> or send a check to VMRS, 601 Parkwood Drive, Harrisonburg, VA 22802, with SOS on the memo line.

If enough followers of Jesus in our community were to do that, we could easily raise a record amount of funds to bless those in need.

Mennonite Women of Virginia



Worship in song at Mennonite Women of Virginia's Fall Retreat 2023 at Short Pump, Marriott, VA

Women's Prayer Breakfast – Mt. Clinton Mennonite Church hosted our women's prayer breakfast July 15th, 2023. Veronica Sanchez shared several inspiring testimonies of the transforming power of the gospel in people's lives. Veronica and her husband, Armando, pastor of Shalom Nuevo-Comienzo, had recently returned from a trip to visit family in Mexico. For 27 years they had faithfully shared about Jesus to Armando's brother, George. Rejection – there was no visible sign of openness year after year. The summer of 2023, they went to visit George, who was in poor health, to share about Jesus again. This time his heart was ready. He received Jesus as his Savior and Lord! Those present at the women's breakfast were encouraged to persist in sharing the Good News.

Women's Retreat – Nov 10-12, 2023, women enjoyed a getaway at the Richmond Marriott Hotel. Carmen Schrock-Hurst, our speaker, spoke on the theme, Growing in Grace: Psalms of Lament, Trust, Wisdom and Gratitude. In sessions 1-2 we explored four steps to lament, inspired by the Psalms of Lament (adapted from Mark Vroegop's Dark Clouds Deep Mercy): turn to God, name your hurts bluntly but humbly, ask for God's help

and trust. The last two sessions focused on gratitude, praise and God's grace. Renewal, sweet fellowship, prayer, generosity, and love marked our time together.

Annual Missions Day – Lynside Mennonite Church hosted our Annual Missions Day on Saturday, April 13th, 2024 providing a delightful breakfast! Worship permeated every aspect of our time together, a sense that God was being glorified in conversations, the music, Risa's stories, and the generous joy-filled time of giving. Risa Yutzy, our guest speaker, shared of the surprising mission field she and her husband, Ben, discovered on their farm during Covid. They are a family on mission making disciples based on principles found in Mark 4:27. We explored helpful heart posture shifts – in "going" we move from "went to sent", in "sowing" we move from "should to could", in "growing" we move from "best to rest" and in "gathering" we move from "rather not to rather". Donations towards missions needs reached \$5,325 and \$1,719 was gifted to MWV to cover the love gifts given to special projects.

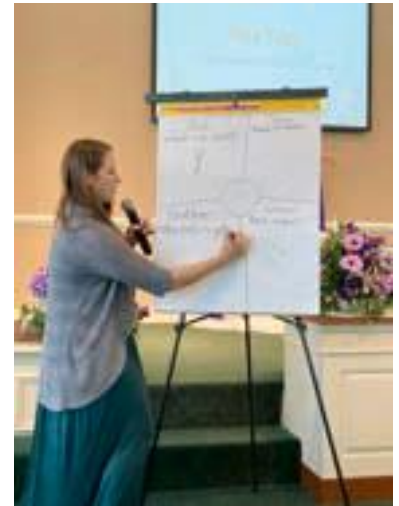
"You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness." Ephesians 4:4-6 MSG

Mennonite Women of VA hosted a picnic on June 15, 2024 from 10-noon at the Harrisonburg Mennonite Church pavilion. During this picnic there was welcome, worship, and an encouraging message from God's Word titled, "Leaving Moab: Stories of Pilgrimage with a Redemptive God". We shared testimonies of God's hand among us, food, fellowship, intercession and anything else the Lord put on our hearts as we came together for His glory.

The purpose of this picnic was to:

1. Seek to live into the unity we are called to in the Ephesians passage above – valuing and appreciating each part of the body of Christ and its role in the Great Commission.
2. Encourage each other in the faith, sharing how we each see God moving in around us.
3. Hold each other in prayer and be attentive to ways we can collaborate with sisters from a culture distinct from the one in which we grew up.

Praise the Lord for His goodness that continues to be evident in each of these gatherings!



Annual Missions Day 2023, Risa Yutzy sharing about their friendship evangelism work.



Pleasant View, Inc.

“What should be the theme of our worship this year?” I wondered aloud to different members of Pleasant View’s worship team.

At Pleasant View, we believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are given freely to the church to further the work of God in the world. Importantly, they are not dependent on intellectual ability. Our worship team, which has ministered for over forty years, is one of the ways

Pleasant View is able to share the gifts that our community has received with the broader church.

David, who attends Zion Mennonite Church, pondered my question about a worship theme for a moment, and then responded, “I like to pray.” As pastor at Pleasant View, I know that David and our whole community have a profound prayer life. It seemed good to structure our worship service around prayer. This is a snapshot of the worship service that we want to share with the broader church.

—

Kum Ba Yah: We begin the service with the plea of the beloved spiritual: “Come by here, Lord!” At its heart, Kum Ba Yah is a humble acknowledgement that we are people in need of God. The church confesses this, but sometimes we don’t like the implications, especially on an individual level. We are vulnerable. We aren’t strong. We aren’t independent. We need God. Pleasant View understands this. “Kum ba yah, my Lord. Kum ba yah.”

Part of our humble vulnerability is the recognition that every part of our experience may be brought into the loving embrace of God. And so, we check in with each other. Are you hurting today? “Someone’s crying, Lord. Kum ba yah.” Is today a day that is filled with joy? “Someone’s laughing, Lord! Kum ba yah.” When we invite God’s presence, both tears and smiles are holy.

Somebody Prayed for Me (Voices Together 698): Not only are we dependent on God; we are dependent on each other. We sing vigorously as we name members of the “great cloud of witnesses” who have cared for us. Our broader society doesn’t do so well at remembering the importance of community. We prioritize independence. But as the worship team sings, “Somebody prayed for me,” we help the church to value interdependence. “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective,” we read in the Epistle of James. The community of faith cares and prays for us, and in some mysterious way, their prayers keep us in God’s grace.

Open My Eyes (Voices Together 732): Linda, who is married to David, is also part of the worship team. This is her favorite song, and it is a wonderful contribution to this worship service. Having confessed our need for God and for each other, we pray for the grace to do our part in the ministry of the Church. “Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see your face. Open my ears. Help me to hear your voice. Open my heart. Help me to love like you.” Sometimes it’s hard to recognize the image of God in the lives of the people around us. But this is part of our prayer: when we recognize Jesus in our neighbor, then we are able to love without reservation.

(A note regarding language: There is a certain irony in the worship team’s use of this song. We have varying physical and intellectual impairments, and we feel pain when those impairments are used as metaphors for moral shortcomings. And yet, the song “Open My Eyes” may be construed to do just that. We hope that each of our congregations will do the hard work of choosing language carefully in ways that don’t harm the body of Christ.)

As You Go Out from Here (Voices Together 841): This is our final prayer for the congregations that we visit: “May the Lord go with you—the face of God shine on you every day!” Churches often think in terms of ministering to persons with intellectual disabilities. It is fitting for us, as members of the priesthood of all believers, to also minister wherever we go. We end by offering this joyful blessing.

—

As I was finishing this snapshot of the service that the Pleasant View worship team leads, I followed up with David: “Why is it that you like to pray?”

“Because I like my friends,” he said. Clearly, David has understood the heart of God to be in relationship and to meet us in prayer.

Pleasant View is always hoping to build and strengthen friendships within the church. If your congregation would like to get to know us better, please contact Pam Miller (Director of Development, pmiller@pleasantviewinc.org) or Derek Yoder (Pastor, derek@pleasantviewinc.org).

Eastern Mennonite School

It starts with a meal: Rise Against Hunger



First Shift of EMS Student and staff volunteers who assembled meal bags.



EMS Students measuring rice and soy with precision



Boxing station: counting up packets with precision



EMS Students at the Packaging Station: Teamwork in Action



RAH transportation truck: Fight against global hunger

At Eastern Mennonite School (EMS), the core value of service isn't just a standalone concept; it's woven into every facet of education throughout our K-12 curriculum. It's not just about teaching subjects; it's about nurturing values that extend beyond the confines of the classroom. Students at EMS, not only learn but also embody empathy, compassion, and responsibility. This integration ensures that service isn't a separate entity but an integral part of the learning experience, nurturing a community where the well-being of others, both locally and globally.

Clubs such as Model UN, We Serve, and SCO (student council organization) drive service in extra-curricular activities at EMS. About a year ago, Model UN club attended an event where they were introduced to Rise Against Hunger (RAH), a non-profit committed to ending hunger globally. The encounter ignited a spark within high school students Lucas Pou and Adam Rhodes, planting a seed for future endeavors in service.

It wasn't until recently in AP World History that students observed a moment of silence for those who lost their lives in Gaza. This solemn occasion stirred a deep sense of discomfort in Lucas and Adam, prompting them to reflect on ways to address global issues. As Adam put it, "It feels uncomfortable to hear about things like this because of the role we play in these problems. By not

making an effort to make the world a better place, we hold some responsibility for its condition."

Driven by a newfound sense of responsibility, Lucas and Adam partnered with RAH to organize a community service event. Their partnership with RAH enabled EMS to contribute meaningfully to the fight against global hunger by planning a hands-on meal packaging event. Their coordination made it possible for small communities like EMS to make a real difference in the lives of people who need it. Lucas and Adam spearheaded this community service endeavor, rallying support and raising \$4,100 through generous contributions to fund the event's supplies. "We hope that this can become a yearly tradition that will help us do our part in making the world a better place as human beings who are part of a larger human family." -Lucas

May 1st arrived with great excitement. The Eastern Mennonite School student volunteers gathered in the dining hall, assembling meal bags comprising rice, soy, and beans in an efficient assembly-line setup. With almost 100 individuals across two shifts, a remarkable 10,000 meals were packaged, feeding 47 children for a full year. The meals packed that day are headed to Uganda. Uganda hosts a large number of refugees, many of whom rely on food assistance to meet their daily nutritional needs. The Global Hunger Index, which assesses food insecurity based on indicators that measure undernourishment and undernutrition, estimates that Uganda has a "serious" level of hunger. The partnership between RAH and students Lucas and Adam has made a difference on a global scale.

Thank you

"Just in like 2 hours and 15 minutes we have made such a big impact and I think it really goes to show how much of a difference our community can be together. And I'm just really proud of you guys for stepping out of your comfort zone and taking an opportunity that is unique. And we want to thank rise against hunger for ...really helping us out. The faculty and staff in every way was supporting us. Thanks to our world history teacher, Nathan Hershberger, for taking the time to inspire his students to care about what's happening in the world. Thanks to both our principal, Mr. King, and our math teacher, Mrs. Lawson, for their support and encouragement. Thanks to the athletic department for being willing to sacrifice practice time for the event. Thanks to the advance-

EMS continued on next page

Highland Retreat



The Soil and The Seed Project founders Greg Yoder (pictured left) and Seth Crissman (pictured left of center) performing with the Walking Roots Band.

Thank God for Healthy Partnerships!

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:3-6

At Highland, we have learned the value of healthy mutual partnerships. We can better provide meaningful experiences when we learn how to work directly with those who, because of close affiliation, we identify as partners.

For years, Highland's Church Match Program has been a way to partner with area churches to offer financial support to hundreds of families, ensuring that children are experiencing the power of camp in a way that parents can afford. The vision of keeping Christ-centered summer camp experiences affordable has borne fruit! This summer, we have more than a dozen church partners, and more than 100 campers will receive financial assistance through the Church Match Program.

Another long-standing partnership has been with the VMC Youth Council. Highland works with the council to offer a fall junior high retreat and a winter senior high retreat. As a result, kindred congre-

gations of various sizes can pool their resources and offer a quality retreat experience that is engaging for their youth and easy on the sponsors.

This year we have been blessed to develop two more partnerships, with The Soil and The Seed Project and VMissions!

The vision of The Soil and The Seed Project involves developing resources that are helpful for people, especially families, as they follow Jesus, read scripture, and talk about their faith together. We at Highland are impressed with the way the project's music and 'little liturgies' have gone out to connect with over 3,000 households since the project launched in 2021. God is using this project in wonderful ways!

Recently, a grant was awarded to continue and expand the work of The Soil and The Seed Project, including the addition of opportunities to not only send out resources, but also gather people in. Those in-gatherings are where Highland has begun to partner with the project by providing the space for several retreats each year. One new significant in-gathering is The Shepherd's Tree, a yearlong cohort bookended by two retreats at Highland. The opening retreat in April and the year-long cohort are for church leaders who work at supporting parents and forming faith in children and families. Participants enjoyed a weekend of learning, connecting, and resting in the natural beauty here at Highland. The Soil and The Seed team is also planning a fall festival/retreat with a family focus in October; this event could easily become Highland's largest retreat of the year. The hope is for these gatherings at Highland to be annual events as this partnership continues.

VMissions has long offered internships for young adults to explore God's

calling through structured opportunities for service and discipleship through a one- or two-year mission placement. Highland's similar vision for a year-round internship program launched last fall, thanks to a partnership with VMissions's existing tranSend program!

Our first two interns, Clay and Brynn, have split their time over the last few months between serving at Highland (assisting with maintenance and more), serving in the surrounding community (connecting with local food pantries and a youth program called Big Blue), and developing aspects of Highland they are passionate about (a recycling program and hiking trails for Clay, summer camp planning and an archery program for Brynn). Now, in the summer months, they will serve as senior members of Highland's summer staff team before wrapping up their time as interns.

Highland Retreat and VMissions are now looking for interns to serve from September 2024 through August 2025 (or longer). Highland provides lodging, financial support, and the support of our caring staff team. VMissions provides coaching, training, grant support, and a livable wage. Approved interns are responsible for developing a ministry support team and raising a portion of their wages. To learn more visit highlandretreat.org/get-involved/internship or apply online through VMissions.org.



Highland's interns, Clay and Brynn, at work in the Bergton food pantry.

continued from EMS

ment team for their advice on financials. Thanks to all the students willing to speak to churches and go door to door. Thanks to all the donors for their generous donations. Finally, thanks to all those who plan to attend the event on May 1st. The support we have received from our community has shown us how willing people are to help." -Lucas and Adam

The EMS community embodies compassion and generosity, constantly giving their time to help others. They are always ready to step up. Serving as pillars of support and kindness, they are making a difference in the lives they serve. Lucas and Adam, thank you for exemplifying these qualities and for being a pillar in our EMS community.

Thinking of Seminary or Bible School?

We can help you get there.

As a member of a VMC congregation, you are eligible for a grant, Ministerial Training Trust Fund (MTTF).

Apply online at virginiainconference.org/resources.



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Save the Date

Fort Monroe

October 11-13, hosted by the Racial Justice Task Force

Achieving Relational Wholeness

November 2, Virginia Mennonite Men

Embracing God's Story

November 8-13, Mennonite Women of Virginia

Anabaptism@500 Celebration

January 29

2025 VMC Winter Assembly

February 1, Calvary Community Church

2024 VMC Summer Assembly

TBD

More information available at virginiainconference.org