

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

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Making disciples is our primary task



● **Come to
the table**

PAGE 4



● **Learning
to walk
after Jesus**

PAGE 6



**Virginia
Mennonite
Missions**

Called. Sent. Transformed.

Know them by their fruit

BY AARON KAUFFMAN
PRESIDENT



Last spring, I bought a new (to our family) vehicle. The 15-year-old minivan we were using at the time kept having maintenance issues. The starter faltered. The transmission was unresponsive at times. But I was prompted to action when the fuel line sprung a leak right over the exhaust manifold. The mechanic told me it could have burst into flame at any time. That was enough. I wasn't going to risk the safety of my family just to squeeze a few more miles out of this old van. The importance of my family's well-being won out

over my value of simple living. I upgraded to a vehicle that was only *eight* years old.

What motivates you? What underlying beliefs and values inform the decisions you make? These are hard questions for many people to answer. Our convictions and motivations often lie below the surface, beyond our full awareness. Yet they are at work all the time. They show up in our concrete decisions and behavior. We can only uncover our core commitments when we pause to reflect, especially in the company of others.

Commitments guide organizations, too. Sometimes they are stated in a list of "core values." Words like integrity, innovation and excellence often appear on these lists, though they may be more aspirational than actual. If you really want to know what matters most to an organization, you have to look at what it does, not just what it says. You will know them, Jesus says, by their fruit.

Virginia Mennonite Missions recently completed a process of identifying the core commitments that inform what we do. We began by reflecting on what motivates us personally as followers of Jesus. Then, to get at the historic values that have shaped us over 96 years, we took a look back at past accomplishments. An especially helpful document was *Holding Forth the Word of Life*, a booklet published in 1969, recounting the first fifty years of our work. Finally, we put all of this together into a draft of core commitments, revising it multiple times in response to feedback from board, staff, workers, and the delegates of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Through this process of reflecting on our personal, collective and historic values, three key commitments have emerged as especially important for our ministry:

Faithfulness: In response to God's great love, we give God our lives in obedience and praise.

Partnership: We join the church in sending God's people to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Transformation: By the Holy Spirit's power, we live out God's kingdom among neighbors near and far.

We believe that these core commitments describe who we have been at our best. Our intention in naming them explicitly is that they guide our work, both now and in the future. But don't just take our word for it. Look at the evidence on display through the people and ministries we support. The fruit of our labor reveals what we really value. And we invite you to help us stay true to God's call.

Features

4 Come to the table

In Italy, sharing food around the table provides discipleship opportunities.

6 Learning to walk after Jesus

Couple plants seeds of faith and lives Christ's love in Asian slum.

8 tranSend - A missionary's journey in the Philippines

Spotlight

9 USA Ministries

10 Call to prayer

11 Worker profile

Financial Report

Reporting: 9/1/14 to 02/28/15



Mission Fund: undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries

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Editor and Designer: Jon Trotter
Assistant Editor: Sherah-Leigh Gerber

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Italy Shalom church buys new equipment after theft with US fund appeal

Pino Arena, pastor of the Shalom church in Palermo, thanks God for the generosity that He has placed in others' hearts toward the Shalom church. He writes, "Through you, we have come to realize how God takes care of *His church*. With your generous gifts, we were able to buy even more than we had before the theft. The church has been so encouraged to know that we are not alone, but that through you God has made his presence felt among us. May the Lord continue to bless us as we serve Him."

Belize Dental health kits made possible with ACG funds

Nancy Marshall extends her thanks to all who contributed to the Alternative Christmas Gifts projects benefiting her ministry in Orange Walk. "We received money to make dental health kits for 22 families and individuals. Most Belizeans have toothbrushes, but our Deaf families are among the poorest of the poor here. Many are just getting by with enough money to buy food. Toothpaste and a new toothbrush are not high on the list of priorities when they are hungry," she wrote on her blog (jesus-deafchurch.blogspot.com).



Kosovo Pray for nation as thousands emigrate to find work abroad

Every week in 2015, roughly 1,000 people have left Kosovo, seeking asylum in other European countries, leaving with the hope of a better life somewhere else. The unemployment rate here is a staggering 50% or higher (figure not officially well-defined.) VMissions workers Vince and LaVonne Ramella ask for your prayers. "Many young adults receive their bachelor's degrees and often go on to receive their master's, yet have no work available to them. Please continue to pray for the [ethnic] Albanian people here. May God's love be evident to them. May there be a hunger for Him, and may we be His hands and feet."



Nicaragua Yoders' teaching begins at Christian academy

Mitch and Lauren Yoder began teaching at NCA Nejapa (Nicaragua Christian Academy), serving with *Partners in Mission*. Mitch, the English coordinator, teaches 20 hours a week and advises the other members of the English department the other 20 hours. Lauren is a kindergarten assistant and spends each day in a Spanish-speaking classroom. She writes, "What a difference it is to be in this Christian school system, instead of the public system we were used to. We've been adjusting well to all of the changes and are enjoying the Christian atmosphere."

Southeast Asia Anabaptist Retreat draws many Asia workers, staff

"What's so good about the Good News?" was the theme of the March 28-31 Southeast Asia Anabaptist Retreat, bringing



Carol Tobin



Aaron Kauffman

together Anabaptist workers in the region at Berastagi Cottage, Sumatra, Indonesia. Carol Tobin, VMissions Asia Regional Director, provided leadership for the retreat and Aaron Kauffman, President, provided input in some of the sessions. Anabaptist organizations taking part included Eastern

Mennonite Missions, Mennonite Mission Network, and Mennonite Central Committee, as well as local Anabaptist groups. Retreats provide a valuable time of refreshment, renewal and relationship-building for workers.

United States Find VMissions at Conference Assembly and MC USA Convention

Virginia Mennonite Missions will be represented at both Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly, Harrisonburg, Va., June 11-13, and



at Mennonite Church USA Convention in Kansas City, Missouri, June 30-July 5. Stop by our booth to learn how we are making disciples, and complete a disciple "passport" for a chance to win a "Virginia Mennonite Missions is for Lovers of Jesus" t-shirt!

● Come to the table

In the southern Italian context where Chris and Melody Riddle and their three sons served for eight years, sharing food and friendship around a table is where evangelism and discipleship can have the most openings.



BY CHRIS RIDDLE

These words of Christ at the end of Matthew compel us to make disciples of the people that we meet, wherever we meet them. We go forth with the knowledge that Christ is not only there with us, but was there before us and will continue to be there after we depart. What does it mean though for us to make disciples and what does it look like? How do we go about this work of 'making disciples'? How did Christ do this work?

When we look at the Scriptures, we see many times Christ taught his disciples and others when seated at the table for a meal. The stories in John 2:1-11 (Jesus changes water into wine), Matthew 26:17-30 (the Last Supper), Mark 2:15-16 (Jesus dines with tax collectors and sinners) and Luke 19:1-10 (Jesus goes to stay with Zacchaeus the tax collector), along with many others, are set with Jesus at the table. These are stories of people eating together, enjoying each other's company, and at the same time learning in community. These were also times to sit with what some would call enemies, as in the story in Luke 14:1-14 (Jesus heals a man at a Pharisee's house).

The idea of meeting around the table for a meal and talking, listening and telling stories is all a part of the

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20

Mediterranean culture and has been for centuries. It is a tradition that continues even today. During our time in Italy, we were able to experience fellowship and community at the table many, many times. These were opportunities for us to share in the lives of people and to share with them the hope of Christ.

There were two families in particular that we ate with regularly. The first family had come out of the Jehovah's Witnesses and for many years, this group forbid them to interact with their families. This group restricted them from going to Christmas or Easter meals with their families. They could not attend an event held in a Roman Catholic Church building, such as a funeral or wedding of a family member. These regulations tore at their hearts and divided the family.

As our relationship grew with this family, we realized how close knit they were, as many Italian families are. Every Sunday the extended family would gather at the parents' home for lunch; it was tradition. After some time, a couple of family members came to one of our "Family Nights" at church. Soon after that event, their family invited us to one of their family events for a meal. At each of these meals, we talked about food, sports and politics, but there were always questions about what we believed and we were able to share our faith within the family. It was a true blessing to be able to be at the table with them.

Melody and Ines prepare panzarotti, a type of filled pastry, for a New Year's celebration with the family of Luigi and Elena. Photo: Chris Riddle





The second family invited us to lunch once and it grew into a weekly event for over two years. When we started, the husband said to us more than once, "I cannot put faith in a god who permits so much evil to happen! I am an atheist." We remained at the table with him.

Time passed, meals were shared and the message of the Gospel of Christ was told over and over. The love that flows out of the Gospel overflowed into the life of this family. The wife accepted Christ and received baptism. The husband began to read the Bible and in less than one year read it completely. The relationship between husband and wife improved as did the relationship between the father and his two children. All of this took place as we interacted at the table.

During our time in Italy, we were able to experience fellowship and community at the table many, many times.

We are no longer in Italy and do not have the opportunity to be with these families regularly. They, however, continue to grow and share the Gospel with those around them.

Both families are a part of the current Bible study, "Experiencing God", which meets twice a month at the Bari church. They are also reaching out to their extended family with the message of the Gospel and they are doing it at the table of fellowship.

This is our goal within the church; to bring people to relationship with Christ (make disciples) so that they can do the same in the future. It is a joy and an honor when we see this lived out. It is a pleasure to do this work when we come to the table.

Micah, Adam & Isaiah enjoy a New Year's meal with friends at the home of Elena's sister.

Photo: Chris Riddle

Chris Riddle served in Bari, Italy, with his wife Melody and sons Micah, Adam and Isaiah from 2007 through 2014.

● Learning to walk after Jesus



In the slum outskirts of a large Southeast Asian city, Yugo and Grace live and serve among the poorest of Asia's people. In a place of few economic hopes, they manifest the love of Jesus and work to bring hope to their community through transformational discipleship.

BY GRACE*

My son Jeremi is learning to walk. He will be one year old in two weeks, and yesterday, suddenly, he let go of my hand and started running around the green field near our house. It was incredible! He laughed hysterically as he marched forward a few steps, inevitably stumbling and falling over. I tried to catch him and slow his fall, like most times. I'd pull him to his feet and start walking again. Walk, run, fall down, stand up again, repeat, repeat. It was more fun than I can express in words.

Discipleship seems something like Jeremi learning to walk. Discipleship. The life-long journey to follow Jesus and

become more like him. Jesus is our caring parent walking alongside us in this journey, letting us run ahead, stumble, and inevitably fall down. But he offers us his hand and pulls us back to our feet to keep going. Discipleship. Jesus tells us to "go and make disciples of all the nations."

I moved to the slums of this city four years ago. My mind was full of big ideas of hope and transformation, 'correct ways' to evangelize in word and deed, the desire to see Muslims meet Jesus, and the dream of seeing slum communities transformed by the love of Jesus. But in my four years here I have witnessed grueling poverty, a devastating fire, demolition and eviction of over 1,000 homes, and the daily



In their neighborhood beside a large dump, people earn a meager living by sorting and reselling items. Among this grueling poverty, Grace and her husband Yugo dream of a discipleship movement to Jesus. Photo: Carmen Schrock-Hurst



Grace and Yugo run a free preschool and afterschool program—Rumah Harapan (House of Hope)— where children learn from caring teachers about the love of God and stories from the Bible. It also provides a safe place for kids to be for a few hours. “We believe many seeds have been planted,” Grace writes.

Photo: Grace

grind that is the life of my neighbors. What does discipleship mean in such a context? And what does it mean to call others into this journey of discipleship with Jesus?

I choose to live here with my husband and son because we desire to follow Jesus. Our following, our stumbling walking alongside Jesus, happened to bring us to this particular garbage-collector community on the outskirts of this mega-city. Yes, we still have hopes and dreams about our neighbors meeting Jesus and choosing to follow him. But also each day I am learning that my “service” here is in large part about me being transformed.

We run a free preschool and afterschool program for kids. These kids continually humble me, teach me about love and generosity, and keep me laughing. We teach them stories from the Bible and songs about how much God loves them. If nothing else, each day they have a safe place

We take opportunities to tell stories about Jesus, pray with sick friends, and love people with the love God freely gives us.

to come for a few hours; and they have teachers who love them and listen to them. Sometimes I try to imagine what the future of our students will be. Will they stay in school or drop out like their parents? Will they be able to get better jobs, or will they be forced to sit sorting through trash heaps their whole lives? Will the girls have a future or will they marry and get pregnant as teenagers, like their mothers? We live here and love these kids, holding onto the belief that our tiny efforts may make some sort of positive difference in their lives.

It is a privilege to learn from Jesus here, and although no neighbors have become followers of Jesus yet, we believe that many seeds have been planted. We take opportunities to tell stories about Jesus, pray with sick friends, and love people with the love God freely gives us. And through this process I am learning more each day what it means to follow our Lord. It is in the following that we are transformed.

Do I really believe God is the Healer? Only when my poor friends cannot afford medical care and I must pray for them. Do I really believe that God is the hope-giver? I watch children pushing carts of garbage and respond by teaching them ABCs. Do I really believe that Jesus offers something more than what is taught in Islam? Yes. And so we celebrate Christmas with over a hundred of our neighbor kids each year. Seeds of hope. Seeds of good news amid the overwhelmingly bad news all around us.

Oh, how we long to see a discipleship movement born here! To see our Muslim friends embrace Jesus as not only prophet but as Lord and Savior! Pray for signs and healings, for visions and dreams- that our neighbors would meet the risen Jesus.

We also long for more believers to join us in following Jesus to the slums. To join us in being transformed by Jesus’ heart for the poor. We do not have to know how to run by ourselves; we trust that as we stumble along like little children, Jesus is with us each step of the way. And I have to believe that just as I take pride in Jeremi’s steps forward, so too Jesus rejoices in our efforts to follow- no matter how small.

Grace is serving in a large Southeast Asian city. She is married to Yugo and they have a son, Jeremi. They serve in partnership with VM Missions.

**Sensitive location, last names not used*

Twinkle's journey: The education of a Kalinga missionary in the Philippines



BY JONATHAN CRANSTON

When she was five years old, Twinkle Algag Bautista gazed at the sun's rays and wondered "Where is this? Where is my homeland? Where is Kalinga?" In school, she learned the history and folklore of Manila and Southern Luzon, the homeland of the Tagalog tribe, who hold most of the political power and cultural influence in the Philippines.

But she was taught very little about the culture of her own people, the Kalingas of the mountainous Cordillera Region of Northern Luzon. Even at her young age, she began to realize that she and her people did not fit the standard Filipino archetype, and later she would learn about the perpetual subjugation of the Kalingas and other Cordillerans by the national government; the despoilment of their territories by Manila-based logging and mining corporations; and the national prejudice against Cordillerans, whom lowlanders often dismiss as headhunters and savages.

She would understand all of this with time, but at age five what she felt most acutely was exclusion and shame. She felt the brokenness of the Cordilleran situation, and she knew that she wanted to work to help people.

Twinkle's early missionary zeal persisted through her teenage years, as did a sense of inferiority regarding her Cordilleran identity. She was seventeen before, as she says, "I fully embraced my identity as a Kalinga without the shame." She attended university far from home in Manila, where her classmates often derided her Cordilleran heritage, sometimes calling her a monkey. After receiving her Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism, Twinkle returned to Kalinga and took a position at the Cultural Heritage Research Center of St. Louise College.

Still, she dreamed of serving her Cordilleran sisters and brothers through a more holistic ministry. She wanted to work not only for the preservation of Cordilleran culture, but also for the economic, spiritual, political and social renewal of her people. She was constantly asking "Is what I'm doing part of Jesus' plan for the world?" and she realized that she needed to find a Christ-centered framework for social activism.

In May of 2011, at the Christian Development Center in Tagaytay City, Rev. Daniel Pantoja, CEO of PeaceBuilders Community, Inc. (PBCI) was preparing to lead a group of young social activist leaders in a training program cover-

Twinkle has galvanized her entire extended family network.



Twinkle (right) in Kalinga with her mission mentor Rev. Daniel Pantoja (center), during a time of fellowship with her newly-organized mission community.

Photo: Bryan Jay Nahag Paler

ing PBCI's Peace And Reconciliation (PAR) philosophy of mission. He had carefully screened and vetted every one of these youths, and was satisfied of their potential to be influential agents for justice and healing in the Philippines. Then, shortly before the program was to start, a colleague and friend of Rev. Daniel asked, as a special favor, whether she could add one more name to the enrollment list. For the sake of his friend, Rev. Daniel grudgingly assented, and Twinkle was the last-minute addition. She showed up to the training program wearing high heels and the attire of a Filipina professional – a sharp contrast to her classmates, who included several young men with bandanas, long hair, and earrings, advertising their self-identification as social revolutionaries and radicals.

But far from being out of her element, Twinkle dove into the program material with enthusiasm, and soon impressed Rev. Daniel as a particularly perceptive and creative thinker. Twinkle wholeheartedly embraced PBCI's PAR framework

for mission, which is based in an Anabaptist conception of Christ's commission to His followers. The PAR framework elevates social justice, peace, environmental stewardship, and the inherent value of every tribe and nation, along with the reconciliation of human souls to Christ. In PAR, Twinkle found the model of holistic mission for which she had been searching.

She also found mentors in Rev. Daniel and Joji Felicitas Bautista-Pantoja, his wife and mission partner. Twinkle applied and was accepted to a two-year internship with PBCI in Mindanao, where she came to value the Pantojas' counsel and guidance, and finally to think of them as a second set of parents. Today she calls them "Ama" and "Ina," (Mom and Dad) and they call her "Anak" (our child). Under the Pantojas' mentorship in Mindanao, Twinkle acquired training and experience in community organizing, livelihood program development, conflict mediation, response to armed struggle, and many more skills for spiritual, social, political, economic, and ecological mission. She is now using these skills in her home province as the organizer of the new Peace and Reconciliation Kalinga mission community.

In bringing the PAR framework and training home to Kalinga, Twinkle has galvanized her entire extended family network. Her mother, grandmother, aunts, and cousins, along with many of their friends, are united and working towards the PAR vision of transformation in their province—a vision of Christ-centered mission which includes the restoration of the Kalingas' pride in their culture, so that in the future, Kalinga children will not feel the stigma of exclusion from the story of their country.

Jonathan Cranston is serving in Mindanao, Philippines, with VMissions and PeaceBuilders.

Twinkle embraces her mentor, PeaceBuilders' co-founder Joji Felicitas Bautista-Pantoja. Photo: Jonathan Cranston



Cultivate

Finding what was missing

BY SKIP TOBIN

Six years ago, living in Thailand and working as missionaries, Carol and I traveled monthly between multiple teams in several countries, often living out of suitcases. After a year, I observed that something seemed missing in my life. I was coaching and providing accountability for others, but there weren't clear accountability relationships in my life.

I knew I was yearning for a deeper experience of church community. Also, I wanted to regularly reach out to non-Christians. We lived only a few miles from a Thai Buddhist who had married a believing wife while he was a construction worker in Indonesia. He asked to know more about Jesus, but I was always on the road, never home enough to have a regular ongoing discipleship relationship. After returning stateside, I wondered if things would change. Just attending church did not fill the yearnings. I wondered, How could I grow as a disciple?

I was working only part-time, yet I did not find the time to relate to non-Christ-followers. I desired to, but my time was occupied remodeling my kitchen or putting in a garden. Besides, I reasoned, my work at VMissions was mission work. Months went by this way. Then one day I rediscovered Life Transformation Groups (LTGs). I knew it was up to me to listen and do what God was nudging me to do.

Inviting a pastor friend, we began to meet weekly for LTG. At first I found it hard to confess. I was so used to being in charge and concerned more about my appearance than my own change. But slowly, over weeks, my hardened attitude began to change. With accountability, I began to pray and put relationships with non-Christ-followers on my weekly schedule. And then, I discovered that the real work was about my relationship with my wife and that my attitude needed to change. The desire to intentionally practice being a disciple and to help others do the same continues to grow and inspires my life and work.

Cultivate is a new handle that expresses what I do in my role with VMissions and Virginia Mennonite Conference. It travels through four growing stages of natural plant growth, *exploring*, *growing*, *overflowing* and *multiplying*. Like living things, individual disciples or congregations explore their environment, grow in capacity, and begin to overflow with fruitfulness, ultimately multiplying their lives. We are glad to share with you some possibilities designed to help you grow as disciples no matter where you are.



Skip Tobin is Cultivate Coach and USA Ministries Director for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

Call to Prayer: A testimony of transformation

BY SARAH SHOWALTER

Ging was an alcoholic, the town drunk. He drank so much that he couldn't keep a job, rarely remembered to eat, and pretty much just laid by the side of the road all day, every day. Ging also suffered from a ringing in his right ear that had been present since early childhood, until one day Yut and Duketa decided to pray for him.

Yut and Duketa were new believers, members of the Life Enrichment Church in Det Udom Thailand, and they had caught the disciple-making bug. They had experienced radical transformations of their own and the hope of Christ and the church. As persons who were HIV positive, they had faced discrimination and marginalization by others in their community, but were welcomed into the church with open arms. They knew first hand what it meant to be transformed by Christ and were eager to share this Good News with others.

As physical healing can often be a door to believing in Thailand, Yut and Duketa prayed with Ging for Christ to heal him. And heal He did, in more ways than one. First, the ringing in Ging's ear disappeared. *Healing from a physical ailment.* Second, Ging was able to completely stop drinking alcohol from that point on. *Healing from an addiction.* Third, in realizing that the Holy Spirit could not completely fill him because of a

stronghold related to the tattoos covering his arms that held a spiritual connection, Yut and Duketa prayed for a release from the spiritual oppression of the tattoos and Ging felt a wind go through his body as the spirits left. *Healing from spiritual bondage.* Ging was transformed and is nothing less than a new creation. He was baptized at the

"The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him....so we are Christ's ambassadors." Let us begin this task with prayer.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20



Ging (center) at his baptism. Photo: Sarah Showalter

next church gathering and is now vibrant member of the church and an eager disciple.

This is the holistic transformation that God desires for His children. Jesus didn't minister in only a spiritual dimension, but rather proclaimed in Luke 4, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and

that the time of the Lord's favor has come." Ging's story shows proof of transformation and healing happening on every level, and all beginning with prayer. It was prayer that brought the physical healing, prayer that ended an addiction, and prayer that defeated the evil spirits and invited the Holy Spirit to reign in Ging's life.

Note from the author:

We at VMissions believe that prayer is an integral component in reconciling all people to God and inviting people to faithful living in Jesus Christ. We desire to see God move through the prayers of our staff, workers, and supporters, bringing Christ's transformation in many lives and communities.

Therefore, *Transforming* will feature a recurring focus: "Call to Prayer," highlighting testimonies, insights, and ideas for prayer.

I wanted to share with readers a piece of my own testimony regarding prayer. Ging's story is one of the many that grew my understanding of the power of prayer exponentially as I witnessed Christ transforming lives in rural Thailand where I served with VMissions' tranSend program in 2012-2013.



Sarah Showalter is the Administrative Assistant for Virginia Mennonite Missions.



Worker profile: **Joel DeWald**

Home: Harrisonburg, VA
(Zion Hill Mennonite Church)
(Covenant Presbyterian Church)

Service program: Long-term

Teachers wanted

VMMissions has a number of service opportunities for teachers (teaching English language and other subjects), from Pre-K to college-level. There are opportunities to teach Deaf students in ASL and interpreting work. Many of these are one-year assignments under the grant-funded tranSend program.

Go to vmmissions.org/tranSend to learn more and to discover other service opportunities.

Assignment: Joel teaches English at a university in a large East Asian city.* He is also connected with the local fellowship, helping with outreach and prayer.

Biggest challenges: Maintaining relationships with students while continuing to prepare for teaching and managing the faculty work load is a constant struggle.

Biggest joys: Witnessing the connections and opportunities that God has; it's exciting to see God provide other believers to support, encourage and walk alongside those who have a hunger to know Christ.

On the horizon: Joel is in the midst of wedding planning as he anticipates marrying Hannah. He is also in a time of discernment, praying about what work God next has for him to do.

*Sensitive location

(Below) Joel with two of his English language students during a holiday party. (At bottom) Joel and Hannah photographed for their engagement.





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How are we #makingdisciples?
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Virginia Mennonite Missions invites people to faithful living in Jesus Christ by forming and enabling congregations and individuals to continue God's reconciling work in the world.



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