

The eye-opening reality of being sent, from everywhere to everywhere

By CAROL TOBIN
VMM/EMM Global Ministries Associate

As the boat cut through the grey water of Lake Toba, the stiff breeze slapped our faces awake. It was 7:00 am and the volcanic sides of the Northern Sumatran crater were still shrouded in morning mists. It occurred to me that my two Thai friends might need that chilling wind in their faces to remind them that they weren't dreaming. How could it be that they were here, soaking in this spectacular sight? Who could imagine that they, two farm women, would spend a week in Sumatra, rubbing shoulders with enthusiastic believers from 15 different countries? With confidence, clarity, and conviction, Joy and Mother Khong had shared the vision they carry for what God wants to do through them as church in Northeast Thailand. The men listened to them! What an honor!

This was our first opportunity to be part of the "International Missions Association," an affiliation of friends who carry threads of missional connection with

Joy and Mother Khong giving thanks for the meal they are about to receive in this crowded Sumatran restaurant.



The gathered group in Indonesia, representing 15 nations. Can you find me and the Thai women (note: Joy is showing her Thai manners by sitting on the floor!) Photos by Javier Soler

each other and with recently retired EMM president, Richard Showalter. Mother Khong disarmed everyone with her ready hugs. She abandoned the reserved Thai "wai," insisting on her preference for the affectionate American practice. I was delighted to see these ladies acquiesce so deftly to cultural challenges in our Indonesian host family. Without any sign of complaint, they ate the breakfast that was provided—milk and toast—while our hosts ate rice and fried fish in the kitchen.

Halfway through the week, they managed to politely communicate that they would be more than happy to eat the "regular fare." Happy indeed—they detest milk!

It was an eye-opening week for me. I learned that the Sumatran Mennonite churches are known for being loving communities who care about reaching out. The logistics of this international meeting had been handled almost entirely by young adults who are being trained in outreach and service

within the churches. One after another, these young adults shared with us their sense of call to serve cross-culturally. For ten years, Lianta, to her parent's chagrin, has treasured a call to be God's witness in Tibet. They say, "Why don't you let us find you a husband?" Mae, who recently returned from serving among Indonesian workers in Hong Kong, has a heart for Muslims in northern China. Ria served in Aceh and is now turning her eyes to North India. We met a young man who greeted us in halting Lao; he has been studying language in Vientiane, and is trusting God to keep the door open for him there. Another couple questioned me about Cambodia. "How can we serve?" they asked.

(continued on page 3)

Emerging leaders	2
Peace story: a reconciled church	3
Blossers' Italian homecoming	4
Freed...to live in grace	4
Italy ordinations strengthen church	5
Mennonite Women gather at retreat	5

Emerging leaders

Not so long ago, or so it seems to me, I was given my first opportunities to exercise leadership in the church. It began with encouragement from others, my hesitant agreement to try something new, and then space to exercise the slightest hint of a talent or gift. My first attempts to preach were pathetic, I'm sure. I couldn't even bring myself to call it "preaching," preferring rather the lesser phrase, "sharing a few thoughts." Even so, I could hardly think of any thoughts that were worth sharing. But I tried. And that was over 45 years ago!

It is delightful to witness another generation of leaders emerging. God is calling out men and women for particular purposes of leadership within His Body. Many are hearing the call. Congregations, districts, and Virginia Mennonite Conference are confirming the call and people step forward into responsibilities in new ways. I am seeing this movement of God's Spirit in the increased numbers of persons available for service overseas, in the number of new church plants in our conference here at home, and in the number of persons who are stepping forward in congregations and districts.

The emergence of leadership depends on at least three things; a personal sense



Loren Horst
VMM President

of call, confirmation of that call by Christ's body, and opportunity to exercise that call. One alone will not do. Dynamic possibilities emerge when all are present, in a person's life, but also in the church! Each issue of *Connections* and each congregational newsletter tell more of the story!

Examples abound! Chris and Heather Scott are starting *the exchange* in Winchester. Steve and Laura Campbell (and Ruth) are preparing for longer-term service in Montenegro. Here in our office, we enjoy and benefit from the gifts of Sarah Bixler and Lars Akerson. Many congregations enjoy allowing the space for persons to try their wings, even while they are deepening their roots. We are not finished products before we begin, but after we end!

Several years ago, I met a particular young man for the first time. He had the same name as his grandfather, a gifted evangelist I had known. "May you become as good a preacher as he was," I told him. Two weeks ago I heard that he is discerning that call. If he does indeed follow in his grandfather's footsteps, call, confirmation, and opportunity will all figure a part. It has been that way for the rest of us and it is exciting to see it repeated!

Two VMC young adults in Service Adventure

Two members of Virginia Mennonite Conference are serving a one-year term of service with Service Adventure.

Isaac Fox, of Blacksburg, Va., began a one-year service term in August 2011. Fox is living in community with other young adults in a unit house in Anchorage, Alaska.

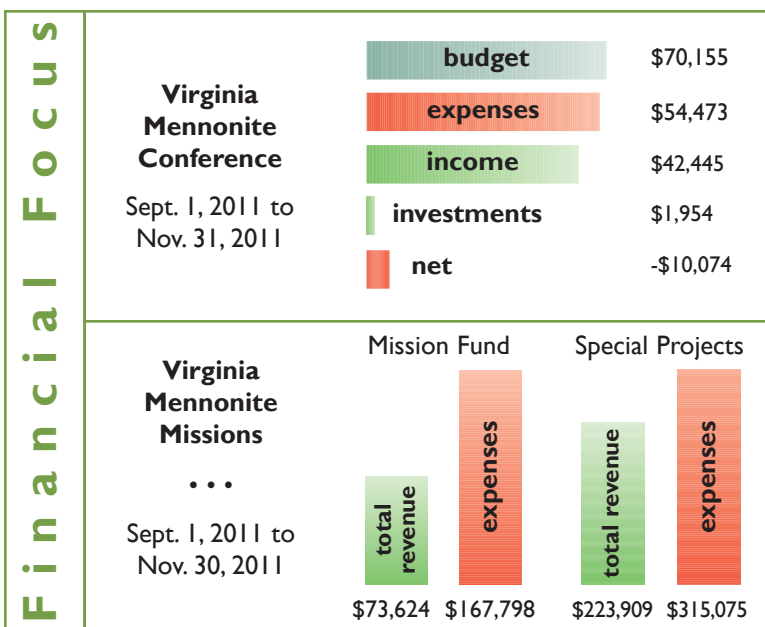
A 2011 graduate of Blacksburg High School, Fox is the son of Leslie McArthur-Fox and Charles Fox and a member of Christiansburg (Va.) Mennonite Fellowship.

Melissa Jantzi, of Harrisonburg, Va., began a one-year service term in August 2011. Jantzi is living in community with other young adults in a unit house in Albany, Ore.

A 2011 graduate of Eastern Mennonite High School, Harrisonburg, Jantzi is the daughter of Margo and Beryl Jantzi and a member of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.

In this program of Mennonite Mission Network, young adults, ages 17-20, live in a household community, with a leader, for 10 months in cities and towns across the United States.

Courtesy of Mennonite Mission Network.



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A Bender family, Mississippi bombing and a reconciled church (Part 1)

Adapted from DON, MILDRED
AND TITUS BENDER

At retirement, Esther and Nevin Bender, Sr. were too full of vision to simply sit back and “be retired.” Instead they answered the call to share the gospel and help the growing church among a Choctaw tribal community in rural Mississippi. It was the 1960s in a racially divided South and the Choctaw-ancestors of tribes who refused to take the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma—were trying to live as invisibly as possible while clinging to their indigenous culture. Most were illiterate sharecroppers at the mercy of the white “boss men.”

The Benders, living in solidarity in a sharecropper’s shack, sought genuine relationships and understanding with those around them. They talked often with neighbors and tribal leaders, advocated with the former Bureau of Indian Affairs, and welcomed many strangers to their tiny home. Though Nevin, Sr. only learned bits of Choctaw, his compassionate, accepting spirit reached where words could not.

Bartering extensive carpentry in exchange for an acre of land and with the help of other Mennonite volunteers, a building was ready for worship in Nanih Waiya within two years. Some of the Bender children even moved down after their college graduation to support the emerging biracial faith community. As the church grew in baptized numbers and maturity, clear life transformation occurred, including Choctaw women increasingly refusing to be easy targets for the passions of white men. This change deeply threatened the “boss men” as they began losing control of “their” Choctaw women.

Tragically, some opposed the equal treatment of Choctaw people. They did not object to churches telling Choctaw to repent and change, but they were unwilling to treat them as equal brothers and sisters and were particularly unhappy when the church confronted their own oppressive treatment. But the Benders, convinced of the sinful dishonesty of teaching Choctaw people the gospel of Christ’s reconciliation but refusing to share in their daily lives, continued to invite a mix of neighbors to their homes

for meals, advocated for workers paid too meagerly to feed their families, expressed anger when a few men treated the vulnerable Choctaw women as property and stood up when a nearby church camp refused to allow Choctaw youth to use their facilities.

Some white folks in the community and even within the church saw this deep involvement as improper. Some Mennonites wanted to confront racism directly while others were wary that it would be “meddling in politics.” Yet despite the cultural, theological and leadership differences within the church itself, Nevin, Sr. and Esther did not waffle in identifying as a full brother and sister to both their Choctaw and white friends. In a time of racial alienation, they refused to associate with only one acceptable segment of the community.

But things were about to get even more turbulent in the little Nanih Waiya church community when President Kennedy’s assassination brought great changes to the US, the South and especially to Mississippi.

Follow the rest of the story next month.

Indonesian conference shows reality of being sent from everywhere to everywhere (continued from cover)

I can hardly wrap my head around the irony that God calls these passionate young people, themselves from one of the largest concentrations of the world’s least reached, to go...somewhere else! Is this madness? And is there a method to this madness?

The madness, I realize, is what is called “missional impulse.” Far more than youthful imagination, it is something that originates in the very heart of God who sees the brokenness of the world he made, who hears the anguished cries of complaint, who responds by coming as love personified, and who draws us into the story by sending us out with a brave invitation meant for everyone the world over: to look to Jesus for salvation.

As to the method? It is beyond what my small human mind can appreciate. There’s nothing pragmatic or popular about this sense of being sent. It will express itself here, there and everywhere; apparently, healthy followers of Jesus all suffer the same disturbing malady! I found

Bus trips provided time for conversation and singing. (Left to right, Mother Khong, Carol, and Mae. Photo: Javier Soler)



myself asking, “What can I learn from this picture? How can I welcome and cooperate with this wonderful confusion?”

As we headed home across the lake that morning, to the wonder of the other sleepy-eyed passengers, my Thai friends were unabashedly singing out their praise in perfect synchrony with the exceptional beauty surrounding us:

*Do come! Do come! Take hold of Jesus!
This One of unsurpassed value
He gave His very life for us
Committing His spirit to the Father
Whenever we feel alone or abandoned
He is there to help
He’s not slow to respond.**

(* translated from Thai)

An Italian homecoming for Floyd and Janet Blosser at Conference

By JANET BLOSSER

VMM Italy Field Director

Excitement mounted as we flew into the Palermo, Italy airport, on a flight that we had taken many, many times before. But this time we, Floyd & Janet, were returning after 10 years to attend the annual Italian Mennonite Conference, which is presently composed of two districts: Sicily, and the newly-expanded South-Central District (Bari), on the heel of the boot. Willard & Eva Eberly, long-time VMM workers in Bari, met us at the airport.

For us, the conference was a kind of homecoming, returning to the place where we had invested fifteen years of our lives in helping people come to faith, and where we had raised our family. It was a joy not only to see all of our many friends, but to experience the church ten years

down the road. During the sessions we heard testimonies of new believers telling their experiences of a life transformed in Jesus; one group sang several worship songs written by a local member. The worship team from Centro Agape energized us with their lively music. Franco Bosio from Youth for Christ in Italy gave three excellent inspirational talks on the family, reminding us that through faith we become God's children, regardless of our experiences in our biological families.

An important highlight for us in the Sunday morning service was the ordination of two men as elders in the Centro Agape congregation. It was a reminder that God continues to call people forward into leadership. What an affirmation that the church was alive and moving forward!

During the Sunday evening service, Willard Eberly and I went to the podium to

announce the transference of VMM Italy Field Director from him to me. Willard and Eva will be retiring next year from VMM. We pray God's continuing guidance as they discern their future.

After a wonderful weekend we made the 11-hour trip by car to Bari, Italy, on the heel of the boot where the Eberlys live. There the work of VMM continues to expand. Chris & Melody Riddle and family live and work in Carbonara, a suburb of Bari. Shawn and Laura Green have recently been appointed by VMM for Bari, Italy. Giovanni and Fiorella Greco of Termoli, have joined the district team with the hope of opening a church in their hometown this year. Floyd and I had occasion to preach and share in the various services in the district there. We returned home blessed and encouraged by our visit.

Freed from condemnation to live in grace

Edited/translated by EVA EBERLY

VMM Mediterranean Regional Assistant

As a child, I grew up in a church where perfection and obedience to regulations were expected. I faithfully attended with my mother, but without any joy. I lived in terror of not measuring up, of being rejected and condemned by God, recognizing how desperately I needed Him in my life. At the same time I didn't want to submit to rules. There was no space given for my doubts, fears, and questions.

As a teenager, we discovered Centro Koinonia. One night when my mother returned from a Bible study on Galatians 3:8-14 led by Willard Eberly, she had a new light in her eyes! At first I couldn't believe what she shared about the certainty of salvation by faith. In fact, it took three years for me to understand and accept this life-giving truth, "No one is justified before God by the law, because 'the just shall live by faith'!"

One day at Centro Koinonia, as I opened my heart with Nicola (friend and church leader) he said, "I know you've accepted Jesus into your life, but you must confess it out loud." Yes, it was true, but I was still spiritually blind, deaf, and mute. Several more years passed. . .

Then last summer when deeply sensing my great need and lostness, I took my Bible and escaped to a solitary place where I repeatedly cried aloud to God, "I want You in my life more than anything else!" From that moment, things began changing! Although I requested baptism, I was fearful because I understood the implications. I rationalized: I'm different; I can move forward without that step. What

purpose does baptism serve anyway? Finally the Lord showed me that I had a precise role in my world and in that of the persons around me and that baptism prepared me to responsibly embrace that role. Thankfully, God has never abandoned me in

Valentina (r) with a friend.



Chris Riddle baptizes Valentina, assisted by Eva and Angela. Photos courtesy of author.

my most difficult, decisive moments!
Now I'm available to fulfill His purposes!

Valentina, 18, shared this faith story at her baptism on October 16, 2011, at Centro Koinonia, Bari, Italy. For some months she is living with a German Mennonite Brethren family to learn German and participate in the church there.

Ordination of pastors strengthens leadership in Italian church

By **EVA EBERLY**
VMM Mediterranean Regional Assistant

In a spirit of harmony and peace, the Italian Mennonite Church recently moved forward to choose and commission new leaders to bless and equip the church for the work of the ministry. In contrast, the Italian government has sustained a lengthy period of intense conflict that paralyzed positive decision-making and destroyed hope of unity and partnership, demonstrating once again a cultural tendency.

For this reason the ordination of two ministers at the annual conference (Nov. 2011) of the Italian Mennonite Church

held special significance—a highlight for those who have labored in the Italian context to establish viable congregations with national leadership. In an atmosphere of solemn ceremony, yet joyful celebration, Sergio Crocivera and Silvano Borgomastro were ordained to serve on the pastoral team with Franco Arena at Centro Agape—the “mother



Silvano and Perside Borgomastro (left), Grazia e Sergio Crocivera (rt), consecrated to serve Jesus and His Church. Photos courtesy of author.

church” in Palermo, Sicily. Along with their wives, they both have a long history as faithful, committed “lay” leaders, actively using their gifts in many aspects of church life and highly esteemed for their spiritual qualities and example.

Mennonite Women gather at retreat to find “Living Water”

By **MELODY MUSSER and KATHY ZEHR RHODES**
Retreat Planning Committee

Women gathered from all over Virginia Conference for the Mennonite Women of Virginia Fall Retreat in Waynesboro, Va. on October 28-30. The weekend provided an opportunity for women to connect with their sisters in Christ from the Shenandoah Valley, Tidewater, and Southeast regions. A wide range of ages joined in fellowship including a number of mothers and daughters coming together to get away from their everyday lives.

April Gunderson, Associate Pastor of Care and Counsel at Harrisonburg Mennonite Church (HMC), spoke to women on the theme “More Than Water.”

Incorporating visual arts and journaling in her sessions, April engaged women in thinking about and discussing a movement from feeling empty to feeling Living Water overflowing in their lives.

Music and song filled the meeting room as 160 women joined together in singing hymns and praise songs led by a worship team from HMC.



(above) Mary Bendfeldt and her mother, Carolyn Nowlin participate in a handwashing service. Courtesy of authors

Women awoke to several inches of snow outside and a power outage on Saturday morning. Eating breakfast by candlelight was an unexpected treat, yet the planning committee was grateful when electricity returned shortly before the morning session began, allowing the use of the sound system once again.

On Saturday afternoon, women had opportunities to participate in seminars, vineyard visits, different kinds of exercise, and shoulder and hand massages to refresh the body and spirit.

In the evenings, women joined together with snacks, games and conversation. As a theme for a Saturday evening banquet, women were invited to wear something meaningful from their past. Following the banquet, women expressed a diverse sampling of talents ranging from comedy and original poetry to an herbology lesson during a coffeehouse.

The weekend culminated in a meaningful Sunday worship service followed by anointing, communion and footwashing. Women shared how God was working in their lives through their experiences at the retreat and the ways in which they were leaving refreshed and refilled with Living Water.

Two generations enjoy the retreat together. Courtesy of authors



Building faith in the elementary years

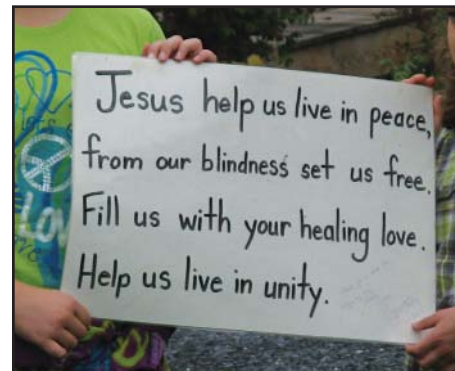
By **MARIA BENDER ARCHER**
Principal, Eastern Mennonite Elementary School

Prior to EMES' opening in 2005, teachers began the process of choosing a faith curriculum and deciding how faith formation would be integrated into the everyday life of the school. The goals were for the faith curriculum to be age-appropriate, to be invitational, and to reflect the Mennonite/Anabaptist philosophy. With the guidance of Lynette Mast, the curriculum started that fall with a weekly peace building class. Students learned about the Elements of Peace, about conflict resolution, and to look at the life of Jesus as a model for interacting with members of the community and with God's creation. They took Jesus' words about being a servant seriously when they began various service learning projects, ones that are on-going today. They began to practice loving their enemies as they learned about conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Today, this curriculum has been interwoven into the lives of every elementary student, kindergarten through fifth grade. Faith building at EMES includes Bible

study and reading stories that help them to better understand God and the life of Jesus. It includes discussions about what these stories say to us about how we relate to others and how we behave in the world. It includes our weekly "Gatherings" where students worship together and hear from local pastors and community members about how they live out their faith. It includes participation in a service learning project with the Roberta Webb Child Care Center, where students visit and mentor the preschoolers in literacy projects and activities during the year. And faith building at EMES still includes the weekly Peace Building class where students find ways to live out the lessons they learn from the Bible and from other people of faith.

This program has permeated all aspects of EMES school life. It is not unusual to see two students talking about a conflict on the deck of their classroom as they listen to each other and try to find a solution. Every day you will find a group of students coordinating the collection of lunch compost and recycling as they practice taking care of creation. If you visit the fifth grade, you might hear them planning



Students hold up the refrain to "Jesus Help us Live in Peace," the theme song of EMES Gatherings.
Courtesy of author

their contribution to the EMES peace path, a place where students can go to pray, reflect, and have time to enjoy the world around them. Every day you find older and younger students practicing living in community as they "buddy up" to read together or to work together on a project.

As our students continue their faith journeys, our hope is that they experience a sense of community, that they practice reconciliation with their classmates, and that Jesus remains at the center of their faith.

Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center to host area Tour Retreat

By **MARCIA A. ROBERTSON**
WCRC Director of Development

Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center will host its first WCRC Tour Retreat:



Experience Hampton Roads from April 23-26, 2012. Ed and Edie Bontrager of TravelVenture

Tours will lead this retreat which explores not only the arrival of the Mennonites in Tidewater Virginia but also the beginnings of the English presence in the New World.

The retreat will take participants on a motor coach tour of the area which is home to five Mennonite congregations. Susan Ackerman, author and historian, will share about the history, culture and



life of the Mennonites who settled in Newport News beginning in 1897. Stops will include the Warwick River Mennonite Church and Calvary Community Church.

Participants will also visit the Virginia Air & Space Center where they can enjoy an IMAX film or tour the Adventures in Flight gallery. The center also houses the

Apollo 12 Command Module. Other activities during the four-day retreat include cruising along the scenic waterways of Hampton Roads and visiting Jamestown settlement.

Lodging and most meals will be at WCRC. Guests will stay in Oakwood Lodge which offers motel-style accommodations and private baths. Despite full daily schedules, participants will absorb WCRC's peaceful environment each evening with a bonfire and hymn sing on the final night.

"This retreat promises to be a great time of learning," said Jenn Hill, WCRC Program Director. "It also offers a chance to relax and make new friends."

For more information, visit www.wcrc.info or contact Jenn Hill at (757) 566-2256 or at programs@wcrc.info.

Connections JANUARY 2012 Prayer Calendar

Sunday

1 "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." Isaiah 43:19

Monday

2 Last month, EMM/VMM workers Mark & Sarah Schoenhals attended a conference in Bangkok on being an Anabaptist Christian in a Thai context. Thank God with them for the presence of some young people in local churches.

Tuesday

3 This week, the Sangre Grande Mennonite Church gathers nightly for prayer. Richard Keeler asks us to pray that many will respond and earnestly seek to know and follow God's will more fully in 2012.

Wednesday

4 Pray for Kris Kraus serving as a nurse in Kenya with AIM and VMM. May she have the stamina needed for her daily tasks and enough energy to relate to her neighbors in helpful ways.

Thursday

5 Peyton Erb, VMM *trainSender* in Guatemala, asks us to pray for CASAS as they begin hosting groups from the US beginning tomorrow. May all involved follow God's direction in their interactions.

Friday

6 The new school term has begun at Maranatha School for the Deaf, Jamaica. Pray for the head teacher, Precious Kennedy, and the other teachers and staff as they provide nurture for the students in many ways.

Saturday

7 Lift in prayer Eugene and Christina Kraybill in their work place ministries as chaplains at Dulles International Airport where they meet people from around the world and share God's presence and salvation.

8 This month Centro Koinonia, Italy, focuses on teachings for the improvement of family relationships. Pray that the sermons and discussions will have a practical impact on many families.

9 In Italy, Adam, Micah and Isaiah Riddle enjoyed celebrating Christmas with their family and church friends. Ask God to bless them as they return to their classrooms and continue in school through this next semester.

10 In the Lezhe Academic Center, VMM *trainSender* Caleb Benner is striving to find creative ways to engage his students in learning—sometimes it's challenging! Ask God to give him great patience and insight.

11 Malerie Plank, serving as a nurse in Honduras, is the hands and feet of Christ in her daily work. Ask God to bless her with stamina and joy as she fulfills her roles in both the hospital and the local church.

12 Tomorrow at Conference Council, Bishop Leslie W. Francisco will share about Calvary District's South Africa church plant. Pray for Pastor Flinn Ranchod, who leads this initiative, and Francisco as he gathers support.

13 Invite God's guidance during the Conference Council meeting this weekend. May our conference leaders and district representatives be attentive to how God's Spirit is moving among us.

14 Pray for VMM *trainSender* Eve Knepp as she relates to the women and children in the community around the Maranatha School campus. Eve is a good friend to many, and is a willing learner in this setting.

15 Thank God for Valentina, a recently baptized youth from Centro Koinonia, Italy who has a vibrant testimony of the change Jesus made in her life. May she grow stronger in faith every day.

16 VMC pastors and church leaders attend EMS's *School for Leadership Training* this week. Walter Bruggemann will discuss "God and Mammon: Reframing Stewardship amidst Abundance, Scarcity and Conflict."

17 Steve & Betsy Dintaman, MMN/VMM workers in Lithuania are beginning a new semester with lots of details to cover, people to learn to know and goals to set for the next months. Ask God to enable them in every way.

18 This week, representatives of all the Anabaptist mission agencies are meeting in Chicago. The energy for missions is high, and good discussions and decisions are part of the importance of this meeting. Ask God's direction on this.

19 Pray for the leadership of south and central Italy as they meet to discuss strategy for establishing churches as follow-up to a recent conference on church planting in Italy.

20 At the end of the week at Lezhe Academic Center in Albania—ask God to enable VMM *trainSenders* Kaitlyn, Jessica and Kristina to be dynamic teachers as they guide their students in learning both academically and spiritually.

21 Ask God's blessing on Christian Conquest Word of God Church and No Longer Forsaken Int'l Church and pastors Bishop Paul Gaskins and Abraham Thomas, as they continue ministering to their greater D.C. areas.

22 Pray for the persons studying the Bible for the first time in weekly home Bible studies in Bari, Italy, that they will come to personal faith in Jesus.

23 Today Marsha Kanagy returns to Kaiserslautern, Germany, after a home leave for rejuvenation and supporting. Praise God that Marsha is excited about returning to her work in this part of Europe.

24 Confirming a call to return to Bari, ex-*trainSenders*, Dino and Mara Colonna, miraculously found employment. Pray for all the details of moving from Torino, adjusting and finding their place at Centro Koinonia.

25 A prayer gathering is held early every Wednesday morning at the community center just down the hill from the Maranatha School in Jamaica. Rodney Knepp attends regularly and expresses the blessings that he and others receive there.

26 In Albania, Allen Umble relates to people of varying ages, and his calm, accepting nature opens hearts to receive his counsel and his encouragement as they grow in faith. Pray for him.

27 During this weekend's Youth Workers Retreat, Bob Yoder will speak about mentoring faith in young people. Pray that youth leaders will be equipped for this ministry within VMC congregations.

28 EMM/VMM Global Ministries Associate, Carol Tobin, is visiting Jacob, Hosanna, Elias and Maia in South Asia this weekend. Thank God that she provides both grandparent care and spiritual encouragement to her daughter and family.

29 Stand in prayer for Washington Community Fellowship and Del Glick, as he completes the first three years as pastor at WCF. Pray for the pastoral review process and clarity for the future for this congregation and pastor.

30 VMM *trainSender* David Jost arrived in Lezhe, Albania, this month and has begun teaching. May he experience God's gift of creativity as he prepares lessons and engages students in the learning process.

31 Pray for VMC leaders, pastors and congregational delegates as they prepare for the Feb. 4 delegate session. Ask God to strengthen our sense of unity and connectedness throughout the VMC body of believers.

This month's prayer calendar is sponsored by

Rawley & Esther Shank

who believe that it is good to start the New Year strongly focusing on the mission of the Church, especially as we face tumultuous times in our world.

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in..."

Matthew 25:35 (NIV)



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Announcements



César, Paula, María, and Sandra García

On Sunday, January 15, at 7:00 p.m., at Park View Mennonite Church in

Harrisonburg, Va., a program will introduce the new Mennonite World Conference General Secretary, César García. Join us for this unique opportunity to hear from and interact with César, a native of Colombia.

Plan to attend the **Annual Dinner & Meeting** of the CrossRoads Heritage Center on Friday, February 3, 6:30 p.m., at Shady Oak, Weavers Mennonite Church. In addition to a tasty meal prepared by the Rhodes Sisters, you'll enjoy a preview of the play, *Jordan's Stormy Banks*, set to run in the EMU Main Stage Theater in early June 2012.

Attention men: Register now for the Men's Retreat, Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center, March 23-25. Meaningful worship, inspired teaching, great fellowship, and recreation for men of all ages are included. Kevin Clark, Professor and Seminary Pastor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary is the speaker. For more information, call 866-566-9272. To register online, go to www.wcrc.info.

WCRC Tour Retreat—Experience Hampton Roads, April 23-26, 2012. Using Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center for an idyllic anchor and lodging, board a motor coach to visit Denbigh Mennonite community, Virginia Air and Space Center, IMAX, Miss Hampton II Harbor Cruise, Peninsula Town Center, Calvary

Community Church, and Jamestown Settlement. For brochure, contact Ed & Edie Bontrager, tour coordinators, at (540) 438-8304, eebontrager@comcast.net or the WCRC program director, Jenn Hill, at programs@wcrc.info or (866) 566-4875.

Join us for **"Peru—Land of the Inca,"** May 8-15, 2012. Visit Machu Picchu, voted in 2007 as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, and Lima, Cusco, Uruamba Valley, Sacsayhuaman, and Quenqu. Visit with Eastern Mennonite Mission workers and churches, and more. Contact Ed and Edie Bontrager, tour leaders, at eebontrager@comcast.net or at (540) 438-8304.



January 2012 Mennonite Central Committee Material Resource Project: Sewing Kit

For a variety of reasons, some rural Haitians do not have the means to take care of their children. Need may drive parents to entrust their children to another person in Port au Prince who is not even family or friend, hoping the child can have a better life. These vulnerable children, known as restavec children, often become victims of injustice and abuse in the homes where they are sent to live.

The mission of House of Hope, an MCC Global Family partner in Haiti, is to ensure that restavec children get primary and technical training, as well as seeing that they are well treated by the families they live with. Sewing is one of the skills

that children learn here. Sewing kits provide the tools they need to learn to sew, which may enable them to support themselves as adults.

These tools will be used often and must be of good quality.

Contents of Sewing Kit (NEW items only):

- 1 metric tape measure
- 2 spools dual use white thread (cotton/polyester, minimum 273m / 300 yards each)
- 2 spools dual use black thread (cotton/polyester, minimum 273m / 300 yards each)
- 1 thimble (medium size)
- 1 dressmaker's scissors (good quality)
- 1 pkg. needles (approx. 25)
- 1 pkg. straight pins (approx. 100)
- 1 pkg. hooks and eyes (approx. 12)
- 1 pkg. sew on snaps (approx. 20-25)
- 10 assorted safety pins

Sewing kits are distributed in a useful double drawstring cloth bag (11in x 16in). You may sew the bag yourself, request bags from an MCC collection center, or donate contents that we will place in a bag. Deliver completed sewing kits to a drop-off location near you. For more information, call the Ephrata Material Resource Center at (717) 733-2847 or go to mcc.org/kits/sewing.