

Transforming

Stories of making disciples in the way of Christ

Summer 2021
VOLUME 7 • ISSUE 2



Shoulder to Shoulder in Mission



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Marriage and Mission**

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 **VMMissions**

From the President

Stronger Together



BY AARON M. KAUFFMAN

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
—Romans 12:4-5

Partnership is one of our deeply held values at Virginia Mennonite Missions. First, we partner with the church in mission. From our founding in 1919, our purpose has always been to undergird the missional impulses of local congregations. This year alone, we have joined hands with 92 churches as they added their people, prayers and funds to the task of making Christ known among the nations. We can do more together than we ever can on our own.

In addition, we work with other sending agencies to mobilize mission workers around the world. Partners include other Anabaptist agencies like the Evangelical Mennonite Alliance of Brazil, Eastern Mennonite Missions, Rosedale International, Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Central Committee, as well as organizations in the broader Christian family like Servants to Asia's Urban Poor, Pioneers, Impact Middle East, and Every Nation Campus. We're all on the same team, regardless of the logo on our jerseys.

At the personal level, we believe we belong to one another in the body of Christ. There is no such thing as a solitary, self-sufficient Christian. It takes all of us, men and women, young and old, single and married, to be faithful to the call. We need each other to live a life worthy of the gospel.

One way to practice our interdependence is to make a realistic inventory of our gifts. There are any number of tools for this. Spiritual gift tests. Personality assessments. Work style profiles. All of these can be useful, as long as we allow them to illuminate the range of abilities and interests we have rather than lock us into some rigid typology.

Such inventories tell us something basic yet profound. We should neither pretend we're good at everything, nor believe the lie that we're no good at all. We all have something to offer, something to contribute to the cause of the kingdom of God.

Our job is not to try to do it all or become a superhero for Christ. Rather, we embrace our unique mix of God-given gifts and limitations, and together, we witness to the all-sufficiency of Christ our Lord, to whose body we belong. As leadership expert John Stahl-Wert says, "There is no such thing as a well-rounded individual. Only well-rounded teams." We truly are stronger together.

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Financial Report

Reporting: 09/01/20 to 05/31/21

Special Projects \$1,238,925	Special Projects \$975,162
Mission Fund \$700,445	Mission Fund \$640,894
Income Total \$1,939,370	Expenses Total \$1,616,056

Mission Fund: undesignated giving by households and churches, **Special Projects:** giving to specific workers or ministries. The above figures do not include investment income.

Transforming

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Cover photo: Kendra and Tyler Yoder, church planters with Garden City Church in Richmond, Va., walk together through the city. Tyler shares his story on page 4. Photo by Carol Tobin.

VMMissions Announces Fall Cohort on Prayer

This fall, Michael and Ruth Hershey will be leading a three-month exploration and discovery of different ways to pray — ways that are energizing, meaningful and fit who God’s children are created to be. The 12-week online cohort is called “Cultivating a Life of Prayer.” As Michael and Ruth put it, the course will be a journey into “learning to love God more, love one another more, and love the world around us more through prayer.” Ruth will teach and Michael will lead practice in these 12 one-hour online sessions, drawing from a rich reservoir of experiences and insights into God’s word.

“God is passionate about his relationship with us and there is nothing more important for us to do than to keep this relationship moving and growing in a dynamic way through prayer,” notes Carol Tobin, Mission Advocate for VMMissions.

The online class will occur each Thursday from September 2 through November 18, 2:00-3:00 p.m. ET. The fee is \$50.00. A preview video can be accessed at <https://youtu.be/8SBZffSmvFg>.

To register, contact Martin Rhodes at martin.rhodes@vmmissions.org

Lydia Musselman hired as Human Resources Assistant



VMMissions is pleased to announce the hiring of Lydia Musselman as Human Resources Assistant. Lydia began half-time in this

role on June 7 and will continue half-time as a tranSend intern in college ministry at Eastside Church in Harrisonburg, Va., for one more year. Lydia brings cross-cultural and administrative experience, along with a wonderful combination of gifts in hospitality and attention to detail.



The group of riders that hit the open road June 18-19 for the annual Motorcycle for Missions fundraiser for VMMissions.

Motorcycle for Missions Riders Raise Over \$11,000

On June 18-19, sixteen motorcyclists and six passengers traveled over 350 miles to raise money for VMMissions and a new ministry partner, Pax Dei for Nuba.

A portion of the proceeds will help Pax Dei For Nuba buy motorcycles to allow pastors and evangelists to more easily reach far-flung communities. Many of the Islamist and Animist tribes are open

to the gospel, and evangelists are regularly being sent to areas where thousands of new believers are coming to Christ. Pastors are then sent into these communities to plant and sustain churches.

Praise God for beautiful weather, a safe ride, and generous riders and sponsors who helped generate these funds for VMMissions and Pax Dei for Nuba.

VMMissions Mourns the Loss of John Gnanamanickam



John Gnanamanickam, affectionately known to many as Johnnie G, passed away unexpectedly

on April 13. Johnnie had been a member-at-large on the VMMissions Board of Directors since 2018. Before the family relocated to Kentucky, he had served as an associate pastor at Mt. Pleasant Mennonite Church. He also managed a business-consulting company called Red River Innovative Global Solutions and

had a key role in helping VMMissions develop strategies and commitments in the area of “business as mission.”

President Aaron Kauffman notes, “Johnnie was a spiritually sensitive and devoted follower of Jesus, and we will greatly miss his smile, his thoughtful questions, and his faith-filled prayers. Please pray for Priscilla and their four children that they would know the shepherding presence of Jesus as they walk through this dark valley.” VMMissions is grateful for the willingness of Liz Driver to complete Johnnie’s unexpired term as a member-at-large on the Board of Directors.

● Journeys Into Marriage and Mission

Long-term workers Laura Campbell and Laura Green share ways God has used marriage and mission to reshape their priorities.

AS SHARED WITH CAROL TOBIN

Married couples have the opportunity to experience the sometimes seamless, sometimes arduous path toward being of one heart. To learn more about how God has helped achieve this in the lives of two women serving in overseas ministry: Laura Campbell, serving in Podgorica, Montenegro, and Laura Green, serving in Termoli, Italy, I asked the “two Lauras” to share reflections on their own calls to serve, and experiences in partnering in ministry with their husbands.

Which of you, you or your husband, was the first to sense a call to serve in overseas mission?

Laura Green: This is such a hard hitting question for me. Shawn definitely felt the call first. He had grown up as a missionary kid in Italy and when we began dating, he shared that he had a heart for missions. I assumed that meant short term trips or assisting missionaries from stateside. Not long after our first anniversary, we were given the opportunity to serve in Sicily for a year. Shawn, of course, was ready to get on the next plane to Italy. I however, was not. My initial internal reaction—which I didn’t let show on my face—was, “You have got to be kidding me, there is no way!”

I agreed to go to Italy for the one-year assignment. During that year, the question of the future hung between us. I remember one of our last nights in Italy in 2007. We were in Bari, sitting on a bench on the boardwalk. Shawn asked if we could see ourselves in ten years living and serving the Italian people. He could, but could I?

That conversation began a season of intense internal wrestling with the letting go of my dreams/plans and being willing to walk into the unknown. It was hard. But Shawn never pushed me. He would simply ask if I was still praying about Italy. I always responded that yes, I was praying about it, but what I didn’t say was that my prayer was that I wouldn’t have to go!

After an eventful year back in the US, learning about God and his provision and heart for the people of Italy, God graciously turned me around and I surrendered completely. We left for Sicily in August 2008. There are so many blessings we would have missed had I said no!

Laura Campbell: When Steve and I first met, he was returning from a one year term of mission service in Albania, and I was the receptionist for VMissions. Our very first

date included talking about our future hopes. My dream was to go to a lesser-reached people group and tell them about Jesus. We agreed even before marriage that this is where we were headed.

During our first year we took a short term trip to teach vacation Bible school in the Albanian villages where Steve had served. This was an important step, because even though I felt called to serve, I had never served cross-culturally. Following that trip, we agreed that we wanted to serve in a region where neither of us had a language advantage (I had studied German at university). We also wanted to be able to serve equally in a location where I, as a woman, would not have to stay in the background.

Early on, we learned that evangelicals comprised less than .01% of the population in Montenegro. Later, we met two pastors from Montenegro. At the time there were only three in the whole country! We really felt God telling us that this was where we were to go. We did a one year term through tranSend. Three years later, we returned with our two daughters and have kept “re-enlisting” ever since.

What does it look like to walk together as partners in ministry?

Laura Campbell: In the beginning, our basic job description was to serve in the church as the pastor directed, and to relate to neighbors through friendship evangelism. Steve and I both believe strongly in discipleship. We want to see whole households come to faith as they did in the book of Acts. We hope that by discipling believers and training them to witness to and disciple people in their circles of influence, God will cause the Montenegrin church to grow.

Steve began Discovery Bible Studies with several of the men from church. In the early years, it was easier for Steve to go out than for me. As our daughters Ruth and Esther have grown, I have also been able to use this tool with women. Our public school connection enables us to meet many new families. We invite them to church outreach events.

Early on, I felt limited by my inability to speak the language, and there didn’t seem to be a specific role for me





Shawn and Laura Green are serving in Termoli, Italy, with children Lucas, Emmanuel, Matteo, and Isabella. Photo courtesy of Shawn and Laura Green.



Steve and Laura Campbell serve in Podgorica, Montenegro, with daughters Ruth and Esther. Photo courtesy of Steve and Laura Campbell.

in the church. All the children in the church—including mine—were two years old and under. As they grew a little older, it was hard for them to sit still during the service. It occurred to me that an opportunity was being wasted. Here was a whole generation of children with believing parents! We could be using the time to teach them. With a lot of help, I translated the stories in a children's Bible storybook into Serbian/Montenegrin. We chose a Bible verse and song to go with each lesson. Since that time, we have had up to 35 children in Sunday school. In this way, we are preparing the churches of the future to have a firm foundation in their faith and knowledge of salvation.

Steve and I pray for each other, especially when one of us is in a meeting or dealing with stress-filled situations. We allow the other to decompress and "vent" after these meetings! We respect that there are some things told to each other in confidence and don't demand to know or complain that our spouse is keeping secrets from us. I believe we model a healthy respect for each other and a willingness to do things that transcend gender stereotypes. You might see Steve cooking a meal while I assemble bookshelves! We are also intentional about spending time together. Following our example, two couples with whom we minister have begun to do the same.

I bring a love for God, and a good layman's knowledge of Scripture and church history. I am creative and I am an

intercessor. I hear God saying that he has given me love for the people of Montenegro, and so whenever I lack the language or other skills to "help" those around me, I can still love them and pray for them, standing in the gap for those who don't yet know him.

Laura Green: I know that God has drawn us together as partners in the work here. Though I assumed I would be teaching conversational English as an outreach once my older boys were in school, I'm now a mom of four kids! I care for the home and children, thereby freeing up and releasing my husband to be able to serve in his giftings. So, right now my main ministry is internal. As the extrovert spouse, this season has been at times a struggle, but not without its blessings! I have an important role in encouraging younger moms, both in the church as well as local seeking friends.

We partner and participate in ministry as a family. This requires flexibility! Since we were the main young family with children when we arrived, we have been able to model a Christian family for first and second generation believers with young children, and through daily interactions in our Termoli neighborhood. I'm so thankful that God has allowed us the opportunity to serve the Italian people and be a witness here. I am so grateful that he didn't give up on me even when I was fearful!

● Together for a Purpose

In both marriage and the church, God brings together people who have different gifts and ways of perceiving the world in order to build communities that provide a foretaste of the kingdom of heaven.

BY TYLER YODER

My pulse was increasing, my muscles tense, my stomach in knots. I was starting to sweat as I told Kendra that it would be better for us to just walk the 15 minutes back to our car, order online, and drive to pick up the food, rather than simply go inside the double doors of the restaurant right in front of us. I did not want to walk into an establishment I had never been in before and have to figure out their take-out policy and menu in front of their employees.

At first I couldn't explain to Kendra any rationale behind my logic. It was just what I impulsively felt would be best. After noting her confusion and realizing the absurdity behind my approach to this innocuous scenario, I remembered an article I had just read. The article addressed the rise in social anxiety being experienced as we are re-entering social situations we have been deprived of during the pandemic.

So I confessed to her, "I think my social anxiety is kicking in. I'll go in to the restaurant if I can follow you and you do most of the talking." Bolstered by her confidence, I followed her through the double doors, approached the counter and proceeded to order some chicken pad thai that needed just a little extra sriracha sauce to be perfect. But while eating the food, I kept silently asking God the question: Why would you call someone with social anxiety to plant a church?

I have always struggled with mild social anxiety. I never know when it is going to flare up or how severe it will be. It has been a consistent small voice in the back of my head ever since I first remember feeling it in ninth grade biology class. Kendra and I have learned that we can use her steadfastness in social situations to help me through my anxiety at times. There is something about having another person with you that helps you stand firm in the face of life's challenges.

We encounter the same phenomenon in church communities. People within a local church gather to support each other and help each other become more Christ-like. We yoke together and carry each other's burdens as we also practice casting our burdens on Jesus. Having a community of committed Christ-followers around us increases our strength. "A cord of three strands is not easily broken" (Ecc. 4:12). As we support each other and together learn how to follow Christ more fully, we model this way of being for the world. Alexia Salvatierra says in *Faith-Rooted Organizing* that churches

work "to change the broader community while also becoming a model community." She insists that we cannot change the broader community if we have not first worked at becoming "a model community." This work of "becoming" is continuous until Jesus makes all things new.

In our marriage, Kendra and I are always learning how to relate with each other better, and we will continue to learn for the rest of our lives. We cannot let the never-ending aspect of this discourage us. This work is essential for us to become that model community, to become a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of heaven. This doesn't mean that we will have the "perfect marriage" and that people from all nations will flock to us to hear our marriage advice, but it does mean that we need to be intentional in small ways to reconcile our differences and build each other up in love. We each have different gifts and ways of working in and perceiving the world, and this will cause tension, innovation, and joy in our marriage. With God's grace, and intentionality on our part, we can both lean into and work through these differences.

One of Kendra's passions is exploring ways of being human, researching various personality tests and organizational systems. This research has helped us immensely, both in our marriage and in our church planting work. We have learned from Malcom Gladwell's *The Tipping Point* that I am energized by information and ideas; she is energized by people. We realize that we need someone on our team who is energized by exciting people about the ideas! We have learned from Chapman's *The Five Love Languages*. I feel loved by acts of service while Kendra feels loved by words of affirmation. We have learned from DISC profiles that I am motivated by chances to use knowledge and she is motivated by opportunity.

Each of these learnings, and more, have helped Kendra and me to become more of a model community together. Moreover, they have helped us learn more about how to interact with members of our church, encourage them in their





Tyler and Kendra Yoder walk through the Manchester neighborhood of Southside Richmond, Va., where they have planted Garden City Church as VMissions church planters. Photo by Carol Tobin

daily lives, train new leaders, and see what our group might need. We are in the process of becoming a model community between the two of us, and our church gathering is working to become a model community as well.

This is one reason we have felt called to focus on house churches as the centerpiece of planting Garden City Church. Lasting discipleship happens most consistently within smaller groups. Smaller groups provide more opportunities to be bolstered by each other's confidence. We can work at becoming a model community together.

So back to my earlier question: Why would God call someone with social anxiety to plant a church? Well, I have learned that God is not just calling me to plant Garden City Church, but he has placed Kendra and me with each other to embark on this work together. In fact, it isn't even just Kendra and I that are planting Garden City Church. God has also called others to partner with us in this work. We have been trained and sent by Eastside Church in Harrisonburg. We are appointed workers through Virginia Mennonite Missions. God has called people here in Richmond to join us. To

say that I alone am called to this work—or even just Kendra and I—falls short. God has called all of us together for a purpose: to plant Garden City Church in Richmond, Virginia's Southside, to see this part of Richmond reflect Christ.

What is the purpose to which God is calling you? And who does God intend to be your partners? None of us are on this journey of life alone, and none of us can do it alone. God has graciously given us the local church—the family of God—to go through this journey together. As we learn about our individual giftings and personalities and how we complement each other, as we learn to carry each other's burdens, as we learn to bolster each other's confidence, as we learn to bear with one another, Jesus is made tangible among us. "They will know we are Christians by our love" when we are together—together for a purpose.

Tyler Yoder serves with his wife Kendra as church planters with Garden City Church in Richmond, Va.

● Seats at Clara's Table

A gifted evangelist, Clara has discovered that God is blessing her with partners whose gifts complement her own.

BY CAROL TOBIN

Leaning forward eagerly over an aromatic cup of Turkish coffee, Clara declares, "God is bringing people to this city so that they can have the opportunity to meet him. At the same time, he is gathering his servants. He is preparing us for a harvest."

What city is she talking about? Harrisonburg, VA. Who are the people being brought here? The many refugees and immigrants who have been able to make "The Friendly City" their home. And who are the people being gathered by God in preparation for a harvest? That is what this article is about!

Clara senses that she has been handpicked by God for her work in Harrisonburg. "I was living in Maryland, an immigrant from Jordan. I was very discouraged. Nothing was opening in a secular job, no ministry. I thought, maybe God wants me to minister back in Jordan. I had promised a friend that I would attend a church meeting with a handful of people I didn't know." In what she sees to be a divine encounter, Pastor Blake Wood from Faith Community Church (FCC) in Harrisonburg came to this same meeting. Clara was interested in talking with him afterwards because he mentioned traveling to Jordan. He asked, "What are you doing?" Clara said, "Nothing. For the last four months. I am just volunteering with refugees here." He told her that his church had been praying for two years for someone to serve among Arabic speakers in Harrisonburg. Would she be interested in coming?

"I could not have imagined what I was stepping into, how overwhelming it would be to connect with these women and families! I know their language. I represent a connection to their culture. There are so many needs! They forget that I am like them. I say to them, 'I am as homesick as you are!' But I am able to offer them Jesus.

"However, the burden was too great. And so I was honest with Pastor Blake. 'I need more. Some kind of support.' And straight away he understood. He connected me with Jason Showalter at VM Missions.

"Within two days, I was helped to envision developing a Ministry Support Team (MST). FCC is very supportive of the vision and generous with finances. But God wants to bring people who can stand with me in prayer and care for me as a person."

Miriam Basinger and Linda King are two such persons whom God has brought.

MST coach, Karen Yoder, approached Miriam about chairing the MST. What Karen didn't know was that God had been speaking to Miriam. "I had just hit a sort of wall



Clara meets with Linda King (right), a member of her Ministry Support Team. Photo by Carol Tobin

in my professional life. Frustrated, I told my husband, 'I'm doing the whole career thing, but what is this for?' I heard God saying, 'Focus on what is eternal.' And then came this request. The first time I prayed for Clara, the Lord immediately gave me a picture of her completely surrounded by pillars of prayer. I want to offer her that protection! I have befriended many Muslim students over the years, but I am not an evangelist. I am glad to be a seed planter and let someone else do the harvesting. It's teamwork. Together we have a beautiful outcome."

Linda King, a member of FCC's leadership team, is also serving on Clara's MST. "I know nothing about the culture. But I love the stories! I can help Clara by writing them down. They are moving. They are profound. Working with Clara has been eye opening. Faith validating. Faith stretching! I was recently reminded about the feast that awaits us in heaven. Wouldn't it be just like God, ... if you sit down at the feast, look around and think, 'I don't even know who these people are!' But then you realize that they are people who were impacted by your prayers, by your giving! How wonderful! I will have a seat at Clara's table!"

Clara knows that this ministry is not meant to be on her shoulders alone. "This affiliation with VM Missions is helping to broaden my vision so I can reach and share the ministry with other churches. I want others to join the celebration of saved souls, to help with discipleship and come alongside the refugee families." And what she says continually is, "This is all God's doing. I don't have to struggle. He is bringing me people! He has already prepared everything!"

Are you one of those being called? You may have just the gifts needed to grant you a seat at Clara's table!

Carol Tobin is Mission Advocate and Content Editor of Transforming for Virginia Mennonite Missions.

● Our Family Rediscovered Sabbath

BY SETH CRISSMAN

Every spring, my parents visit us and help us plant our garden. Our friend Greg often comes the week before and tills up the soil that is dry. Dad and I do the rest with shovels if need be. We turn over the soil so that ground that has been previously fruitful can be fruitful again. We prepare it to receive new seed, and even tend the small plants growing outside the garden's borders. We're not world-class gardeners but we pick and harvest each green bean and pepper with a deep sense of gratitude for the miracle that is seed and soil.

Several years ago, when we only had one daughter, my dad helped us plant onions far in the back row of the garden, right up against the fence. I had forgotten to plan a place for them, and so that was the only spot left. Those poor onions didn't get watered much. Up against the back fence, they didn't get quite as much sunlight as they needed. They got weeded quite a bit less as well. I remember seeing them shoot up some green stems that rose a couple inches above the soil before withering and dropping down. There was no onion harvest that summer.

The next spring, now with two children in our family, I went out with our oldest, Eliana, to survey the lay of the garden so we could get ready for Pappy and Grammy's spring visit. There were the onions, nearly every single one from the season before. Their stems reached high and strong, brought to life by the sun's warmth and the spring rain. We remembered to water those resurrected onions. We weeded around them. We picked and ate and shared them.

I wish we had cared for them in the first season, and harvested onions in both seasons. But in the most wonderfully surprising way, new life came from what was forgotten and seemed lost. I remember reading somewhere that seeds, even forgotten seeds, have in them everything needed for life and a predisposition to grow.

Theresa and I work together every day, partnering together as followers of Jesus. We tend the garden of our family. We team together professionally through our work at VMissions and with church communities and neighborhoods. Working, playing, parenting as followers of Jesus. Seeking to make Christ and Christ's Kingdom known.

In December 2019, Theresa suggested that we begin a few faith rhythms as a family, mostly concerning Sabbath. We've job-shared and worked bi-vocationally these last several years and at times it has been difficult to stop and disengage and receive God's rest.

So we outlined our hopes—as well as the “why” behind the practices we were about to embark on—and started! It felt risky, but right. Here's what we did:

- As much as possible, we completed all work before stopping to Sabbath on Saturday.
- We sang the same songs every Saturday evening.
- We got out the same candle, and said the same prayers.
- We practiced putting away technology for 24 hours.

Allowing God's Word to take root in the soil of our family in a new way has been profound. This new movement was really something very old in my life, old seeds that were planted in me long ago by my parents and siblings.

My family did something very similar growing up. Every week we paused. We remembered. We lit candles and read scripture and sang songs. We “sabbathed.”

Those simple Sabbath seeds lay dormant for a while in my life, and I'm grateful for this resurrected Sabbath seed sown into my life through my parents' faithfulness.

God has been doing new, beautiful things in our family as we have paused, and prayed, and remembered God who saves and liberates and frees us, and leads us in paths of righteousness and justice.

As we “sabbath,” we begin to get a glimpse of what God might be calling us to in this next season of ministry. And as we pause, we can better understand God's love which saves us from sin and violence and oppression and hatred and indifference. This is good fruit that God is growing from the seed of Sabbath that has taken root in our lives.



Seth Crissman serves with his wife Theresa and four children in discipleship ministries in Harrisonburg, Va.



At the VMissions worker retreat in 2017, workers and staff intercede in prayer for Seth and Theresa Crissman (seated) as they were commissioned and sent into ministry with Kids Clubs in the Shenandoah Valley. Photo by Carol Tobin

Call to Prayer: The Honor of Co-Laboring

BY RUTH HERSHEY

From the time I was a little girl, I heard that I needed to pray. How important prayer is for people who want to follow Jesus, and I certainly wanted to follow Jesus. How powerful prayer is to change things around me, and there certainly were things around me that I wanted to see changed.

However, I found prayer, in the ways that it was modeled to me, very difficult. I struggled to find the right words. I felt self-conscious saying my prayers out loud. If I tried to pray inside my head, it lasted a whole five seconds before I was distracted. I always felt guilty, feeling I should be praying more. But to be honest, I didn't really "get" prayer. If God already knows my thoughts, even before I think them, why do I need to voice them? And since he is sovereign, isn't he going to do what he wants whether I pray or not? Maybe you've had the same struggles.

God really does want to teach us to pray. He has been taking my husband

and me through such a journey over the past two decades. Step by step, he has been teaching us how to hear him and obey. Prayer has become much more than something that we "should" do. It is something we desire and enjoy, something that feels like a great honor.

In John 15:14-16 Jesus is speaking to his disciples, "You are my friends if you keep on doing what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you [my] friends, because I have revealed to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and I have appointed and placed and purposefully planted you, so that you would go and bear fruit and keep on bearing, and that your fruit will remain and be lasting, so that whatever you ask of the Father in my name [as my representative] he may give to you."

These verses speak of a dynamic relationship of asking, hearing, and obeying. As representatives of Jesus,

prayer keeps our relationship with God moving and growing as we declare and live out his purposes on the earth. Could it be that the God of the universe desires to speak to me? Could it be that he wants to share with us his dreams and plans and that we get the amazing privilege and honor to co-labor in relationship with him to see those things accomplished on the earth? The answer is Yes, Yes – more than we know!

This fall, we are going to be offering a three month journey of learning to love him more, love one another more, and love the world around us more—through prayer. Learn how to develop a culture of prayer with your friends, within your small group or church. Come with us as we practice together creative, encouraging and powerful ways to pray. Catch the details on page 3.

Carol Tobin is Misson Advocate and Content Editor of Transforming for Virginia Mennonite Missions.



Norma Teles with a child at the Joshua Center in Lezhë, Albania. Courtesy photo

● Worker profile: **Norma Teles**

Assignment:

Since 2005, all of my energy and attention has been on the Roma community in Lezhë, Albania, and the learning center that was born out of my concern for the Roma children. I noticed that the Roma children did not feel comfortable at children's meetings in the church. I saw that they were not attending school and that they lacked basic skills. I started to go to the area with a friend, just two days a week. By fall of that year, I was ready to register the first group of Joshua Center students! We now serve 32 children ages three to six in a part-time preschool program, offering educational and recreational activities. The Joshua Center provides a safe place for the children. We encourage the participation of the family, helping them to be involved in positive ways with their children's development. I also connect regularly through a girls club with older girls aged 9-19 and with a group of mothers.

Biggest challenge:

The beginning of the school year is always a challenge. It is an intense time for me, as new children join and others return. But within a few weeks, the miracle happens and we all settle into a routine. However, the really big challenge is to engage the family in the process. Some parents don't see the importance of education. But this challenge has opened the opportunity to work with the mothers every two weeks, and it has been very encouraging to see them grow. The children also challenge me with great questions. For example, a 12-year-old recently commented to me, "Being a Christian is too easy to be true. How does a person go to heaven without sacrifice?"

Biggest joy:

I have great joy when I see a child come to Jesus! One of the first lessons in our curriculum is about God's love. The children learn, "God loves me, I am special." These simple lessons impact lives; these precious children soon

Service program: tranForm

Serving since: 1999

start to affirm that they are special. I have seen mothers crying because the children whom they have scolded have replied, "I am not an idiot! I am special. I am a child of God." Just the other day one little girl began to cry when we were singing. When I asked her why she was crying, she said, "I felt something in my heart. I felt loved."

A typical day:

A typical day at the Joshua Center begins with a welcome, followed by a morning circle involving prayer, a Bible story, songs, and other activities. Then we offer a healthy meal and other educational activities. In the afternoon we have our afterschool program that helps the first through fourth graders do their homework. We offer them a meal and activities that contribute to their development, like handicrafts, cooking, sports and recreation. A highlight is when we have the girls club. I love to see these older girls thinking deeply about God's words, memorizing verses and sharing with others.



Transforming (USPS-15280)
Virginia Mennonite Missions
601 Parkwood Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22802-2498

VMissions workers commissioned in 2021



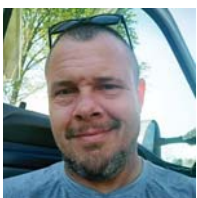
Elena Buckwalter de Satalaya
Children's, youth, and women's ministry, in partnership with Mennonite Mission Network, Iquitos, Peru



C. Farah
Immigrant and refugee ministry, Harrisonburg, Va. (Sensitive ministry)



Lydia Musselman
College ministry, in partnership with Eastside Church, Harrisonburg, Va.



Nathan Carr
Prison ministry alongside jail chaplain Jason Wagner, Harrisonburg, Va.



Becca Gaines
College ministry at James Madison University, in partnership with Every Nation Campus, Harrisonburg, Va.



R.W.
Education ministry, Western Asia (Sensitive location)



Andressa Coutinho
Church planting ministry alongside workers Rafael & Solange Tartari, Shkoder, Albania.



Hannah Lee
College ministry at James Madison University, in partnership with Every Nation Campus, Harrisonburg, Va.



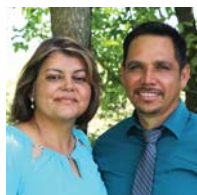
Ashawrie White
College ministry at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Va., in partnership with Every Nation Campus.



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Seth & Theresa Crissman
Discipleship ministry, Harrisonburg, Va.



Armando & Veronica Sanchez
Church planters with Iglesia Shalom, Waynesboro, Va.



Jacob & Hosanna
Business for Transformation and discipleship ministries, South Asia (Sensitive location)



Mike & Risha Metzler
Church planters with Mosaic of Grace, Harrisonburg, Va.



John David Thacker
Church planting, Charleston, W.Va.



Tyler & Kendra Yoder
Church planters with Garden City Church, Richmond, Va.



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