

The MennoNet

First Mennonite Church of Richmond, VA Newsletter – Fall 2018



The Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale October 5-6, 2018 — by Rosalie Eshleman

What is a relief sale? Most of us know “relief” is to help alleviate suffering and hunger in the world. The Virginia Mennonite Relief Sale is a yearly church-wide thrust to challenge new (or old) ways of generating funds. The sale has been going on for many years. First it took place in Waynesboro on the grape vineyard of Paul Wenger, Sr.’s family. When the event became too large for the farm, it was moved to Expoland at Stuarts Draft. In recent years, it has been taking place at the Harrisonburg Fairgrounds. It happens in the fall and all sorts of food items, quilts, wood-crafts, furniture, and numerous other products are donated for sale. This is where many members of FMC gathered on Friday and Saturday on October 5th and 6th to enjoy food, fellowship, and help raise funds for the many causes that the Mennonite Central Committee supports.

If you have not attended one of these sales, you should consider a trip to the valley in 2019. There was a silent auction and supper on Friday evening. The auction was on Saturday for hand-work, quilts, comforters and furniture; created by local (& other) impressive craftsmen. There were the usual cakes and pies, doughnuts made on-the-spot and other delicious foods too numerous to mention. There was chicken barbeque cooked on the spit and apple butter made in huge, black kettles during the day. The Charlottesville Mennonite Church made funnel cakes. A potato bar was one of the many lunch items for sale. Concord grapes from the Wenger Vineyard continued to

appear for sale (that is where grapes for the FMC winning dessert contest came from). Event coordinators reported that there were over 16,000 donuts sold,; 2000 chicken barbecue half's eaten; 12,000 Friday night suppers; and 17,000 breakfasts purchased and enjoyed. Ten Thousand Villages had a large booth full of products from around the world.

The auction on Saturday always brings lots of excited bidders. Two years ago, Jean Oswald and I made a small feed-sack wall-hanging that brought \$130. Last year, a larger one brought \$500 to help the cause. Again, this year, I made and donated a feed-sack “cathedral windows” hanging that sold for \$775 (See cover photo). I made that piece from woolen fabrics from our dear departed, Ida Mae Leatherman, who was a very important early FMC Richmond Church pioneer in music leading, storytelling, and Christian generosity. Several FMC ladies assisted me in the knotting process.

When it's time for the next relief sale, come early on Saturday for a great breakfast and start your day to a fun event! Bring home a strawberry pie, a dozen doughnuts, a gallon of cider, or other goodies of your choosing. Maybe you'll want to buy a quilt. In any case; you'll know you are spending your money wisely to help the needy in the world. This year, event coordinators estimated the Relief Sale generated about \$370,000—an all-time record!

FMC Outreach Opportunities — by Tina Eshleman



After the summer series of speakers from Richmond-area organizations working to promote peace, justice and racial reconciliation in the community, we held a discussion during the Sept. 2 Sunday School hour to respond to what we heard on what organizations we might like to be support with our time and/or financial contributions. FMC People who attended that session expressed the most interest in:

— **Circles RVA (see photo above of youth visiting Circles RVA)** is a new nonprofit supported by multiple congregations and community partners, whose mission is to empower individuals and families to move out of poverty. The first group of about 10 participants or “circle leaders” began the program in August. They go through a 12-week training curriculum and are each matched with two allies for up to two years. Resource teams offer support for various needs. (12 votes)

— **Richmonders Involved to Strengthen Our Communities (RISC)**, an interracial, interfaith, nonpartisan organization uniting 22 congregations to take direct action for just policies and practices in Richmond, Henrico and Chesterfield. Focus areas include elementary reading, childhood trauma, job training, and affordable housing. (11 votes)

— **Garden City**, the new church being started by Tyler and Kendra Yoder on Richmond's South Side, in the Manchester neighborhood. They would like financial support as well as possible collaboration on events and projects. (9 votes)

— There was also some interest in continuing our work with refugees through **Church World Service** and partnering with another church in **Coming to the Table** discussions. The Rev. Diane Mosby, pastor of a predominantly African-American church in our area (Anointed New Life Baptist) expressed interest in partnering with us on a discussion about race relations.

I agreed to follow up on opportunities for our congregation to become involved with **Circles RVA**. Director Kim Vullo told me that the biggest need they have right now is for groups to provide meals for their Tuesday evening gatherings. Ideally, they would like a “meal team” to commit to three or four suppers per year, consisting of an entree and vegetables for 65 people. Bread, dessert and drinks are already provided. There is a kitchen available, but they ask that we prepare as much food beforehand as possible. Meal teams should arrive no later than 5:30. The meal is served at 6 p.m. cafeteria style, and the meal team is responsible to clean up the kitchen at 7. We are also invited to sit at tables with Circles RVA participants and get to know them and find out more about the program. The Google doc used to schedule meals shows that there are openings on Oct. 23, Nov. 27, Dec. 11 and 18, and any Tuesday in January, February and March.

In addition to serving food, Kim said: “General hospitality would also be an area where church members could help out. Something as simple as attending to the front and back doors and opening them for guests as they arrive. Or being the ‘hall monitor’ for the kids program, which is held upstairs in the church. Or assisting with the sign in and name tags — all ways to engage on an episodic basis and learn more about the program and figure out what feels right. I am sure that there are a million other areas where we can use help and my suspicion is that by engaging in the weekly meetings, those opportunities will present organically.”

Paul Joireman and I are also following up with **RISC (Richmonders Involved to Strengthen Our Communities)**. Their first network-wide event, the Community

Problems Assembly, will be held on Monday, October 29, at 6:30 p.m. at Ebenezer Baptist Church (216 W. Leigh St.). Three hundred RISC members will gather to vote on the next problem to address together, as well as hearing updates from public officials on the organization's recent initiatives and welcoming its 23rd member congregation. Until then, RISC is holding "house meetings" across the region as part of its fall listening process.

To discern whether our congregation wants to become a member of RISC, the organization recommends that we gather a group of interested people (five to 10, ideally including the pastor and church leaders) to shadow the RISC process through the year as follows:

- **Fall:** Group members hold a house meeting to share concerns and attend the Community Problems Assembly to witness the problem-selection process.
- **Winter:** At least one or two group members participate in research teams; all group members stay informed on progress of research.
- **Spring:** Group members attend the Justice Rally and invite six or more congregation members with them to the Nehemiah Action Assembly.
- **Summer:** Group members attend the Justice Celebration and meet with congregation's decision-making body to share experiences and process membership in RISC.

If we decide to join the RISC network, these commitments are required:

- **Preach, teach, plan and work** toward the vision to turn out at least our average weekly worship attendance once a year to the RISC Nehemiah Action Assembly.
- **Build an effective Justice Network**, involving a broad representation of our congregation in a process of building relationships, investigating issues, developing leaders and solving the issues which affect them and the community.
- **Invest** in the financial sustainability of the organization through the annual payment of dues (\$500 plus a figure representing the average weekly attendance, approximately 80 at FMC).
- **Elect** two leaders in our congregation to serve as members of the RISC Board of Directors, guiding the governance of the organization in quarterly meetings.

Church Visions by Ryan Ahlgrim

I am deeply grateful to the congregation for allowing me a sabbatical this past summer. Mennonite Church USA suggests that pastors receive three months of sabbatical in every fourth year of ministry. Last year, FMC's Pastor-Congregation Relations Committee graciously allowed me to use three and a half weeks of my sabbatical a year early so I could go on a study tour of Israel and the West Bank. This year I still had about two months available for use. During the months of May, June, July and August, I used a total of seven weeks, spread out at different times, for sabbatical. During those weeks I:

- Attended the Sent Conference in Chicago
- Attended the Festival of Homiletics in Washington, D.C.
- Learned history and art in Italy (I allocated one week of my three-week vacation as sabbatical)
- Attended nine churches to get ideas for FMC
- Interviewed three pastors and other youth workers with innovative ministries
- Read a book on moral philosophy and watched several online lectures on moral evolution
- Wrote two articles for publication on church-related moral themes
- Presented three workshops on church-related themes

My sabbatical had two major emphases: One was to learn more about innovative ministry practices that might be incorporated into our church, and the other was to explore more deeply some ideas that I was exposed to in a course I took at Union Presbyterian Seminary last winter: "The Evolution of Morality and Moral Systems." Regarding the first emphasis, I was particularly interested in learning from churches that were multiracial, that had a strong small group program, and that had a mission for local peace and justice-making consistent with our theology. I learned the most from the following congregations:

- Tabernacle Baptist Church. This is a traditional church located in the Fan. But a few years ago, it was transformed by a massive influx of refugees from Burma who identified as Baptist. The congregation doubled in size in the space of about six months and was suddenly multicultural and multiracial. The congregation now has a program for dialoguing on racial issues.
- East End Fellowship. This fairly new church was created with the specific purpose of serving the needs and improving the lives of disadvantaged people living in a depressed area of Richmond. Their motto is: "Seeking God's joy and justice for our neighborhood." Racially integrated, they tackle issues such as housing, employment, transportation and education. They meet on Sundays at 4 p.m. in an old theater converted into a community center.

- Hill City. Also, a newer church, this is one of the fastest growing churches in Richmond with three services and about 1,400 in attendance. Originally geared for millennials, it is now also appealing to boomers who drive in from Mechanicsville. Their motto is: “A safe place to explore faith.” They have made the staff, worship team and greeters racially diverse. Like many growing churches, they have a very well-organized small group program with trained leadership.

From visiting with these churches and talking with various pastors and youth leaders, I am seeing some possible ways in which we might enhance our outreach, youth program, small groups and a strategy for a justice ministry. I would also like to explore the formation of a mid-week service designed in a way that may be able to connect with the community beyond what we are doing now.

My second sabbatical emphasis — exploring the formation and foundation of morality — has sharpened my own thinking about the critical role religious communities play in nurturing meaning, purpose, cooperation, social stability and enhanced altruism. At a time when many people — millennials especially — are leaving the church, I am seeing ways we can make a meaningful and profound appeal. These two sabbatical themes merge as I ponder new ways for us to introduce our vision and mission to the community. In the months ahead, I hope to bring some proposals to the Church Council or the congregation. Let us celebrate the congregation we are! God has gifted us, and I am excited by what we are doing and are going to be doing in Jesus’ name.

Peace Camp at FMC, August 6-9, 2018 by Jean Oswald



On the last day of peace camp, the children were given the opportunity to practice their peacemaking skills in a very small way. For snack, some kids were given graham crackers. Some were given icing. They soon discovered that the icing on

graham crackers was an enjoyable snack, but they had to share their portion of the snack. For four days, 26 children from around Richmond gathered in the commons for music led by Jay McGee and a Bible story presented in drama. All the stories highlighted biblical peacemakers: Jesus (Blessed are the Peacemakers), Abraham and Lot (Peacemakers find ways to solve problems), Ruth and Boaz (Peacemakers help each other) and Jonathan and David (Peacemakers speak up to make a difference). Then children rotated to art, cooperative games with Jay McGee, peacemaking lessons and visitors from various cultures. Children learned about Taiwan from Hainah Ellison, India from Joe and Maggie Sprunger and Venezuela from Carolina Lugo. Snack time gave the children time build relationships. During the closing gathering, Peacemakers Mayerly Sanchez, Severn Cullis-Suzuki and Ivan Fernandez Anaya were introduced to the children. The Mennonite Media's publication: "Peace Lab" provided the basis for our week of peacemaking.

Thursday, the children remained at camp all day. After eating a bag lunch, the middle school kids traveled to Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden to volunteer in the children's garden. The younger children walked to visit Mrs. Gaaney and Jack Burnett. They sang and shared stories from Peace Camp. Returning to FMC, they watched a movie while the older kids helped put string in school kit bags and filled 33 bags with school supplies. The week was rounded out with dinner served on Thursday for Peace Camp families plus FMC volunteers, which was well attended with nearly 30 people.

Keeping up with the Majidi family

The Majidi family arrived in the U.S. in January 2017 as refugees supported by Church World Service. FMC has provided additional support as the family transitions to life in Richmond. On September 9, Qaimagh graduated from the 13-week "Hila" sewing class where she refined sewing skill learned in Afghanistan. Now employed at Elegant Draperies, she's delighted to find satisfying work. Zia is able provide transportation to and from her workplace in route to his job at Franco's Clothing store. A new school year finds Hamid in sixth grade at Douglas Wilder Middle School in Henrico County and he has adjusted quickly to the expectations. Muzghan is in fifth grade and Naveed in first grade remain at Glen Lea Elementary School, just several blocks from their home. They attend after school care at Fifth Street Baptist Daycare Center.

God's Kingdom: The 3D Experience by Jean Oswald

Virginia Mennonite Conference Assembly 2018 was held July 19-21 in Hampton. The annual gathering was hosted by C3 (Calvary Community Church) and focused worship, delegate sessions, Bible studies and workshops around the theme: "God's Kingdom: The 3D Experience." Explaining the theme, Johnnie Gnanamanickam of the Assembly visioning team wrote, "Jesus lived out what it means to be truly human through a life of upward communion with the Father, 'inward' fellowship with his chosen followers and 'outward' compassion and healing towards the hurting world around him."

The assembly was welcomed by C3 Hampton, an urban church with a relevant, progressive ministry. C3 is all about building community, restoring hope and transforming lives, a place where people love, learn, grow and serve. The assembly was invited to embrace this vibrant church and its mission, to go with the flow and be prepared to experience Assembly in a different way. Worship on Thursday evening led by C3's worship team was indeed different from what we at FMC experience on a Sunday morning. The music team composed of a band and several singers led inspirational worship.

Thursday evening's message was given by the engaging Dr. Natalie Francisco, co-pastor of C3. She focused on the 3D experience of God's kingdom with "preparation and position for transformation, the outpouring of God's spirit and the evidence of the spirit among us." Friday evening's worship service evening was led by FMC members, Barbara Bowman, Tina Eshleman and Don Oswald. Glen Guyton, the current executive director of Mennonite Church USA, gave the message "We have seen the Lord." Being at Calvary was a "homecoming for Glen, as he learned to know Mennonites at Calvary church many years ago. The evening service concluded with a commissioning service for persons from Virginia conference. These persons include pastors, mission service workers, chaplains and spiritual directors.

The delegate sessions held Friday morning and afternoon and Saturday morning, consisted of reports from various commissions and agencies associated with the Virginia conference. The time was focused on two issues: (1) Navigation Misconduct and (2) Restructuring for Mission.

(1) "Navigating Ministerial Complaints" is a document which provides for transparency concerning protocols and policies associated with disciplinary issues and credentialed leaders. A revised draft of the policy has been distributed to delegates and in the fall, district leaders and members will study the document and give feedback.

(2) Last year, the conference council initiated the Polity Task Force (PTF), which conducted its study last year (FMC participated) and gave a report to the delegate session in February 2018. The conference then commissioned a VMC Restructuring for Mission (RFM) committee. Its primary task was to adapt conference structures for the purpose of promoting and strengthening Anabaptist Christian faith/life. The committee met six times this spring with a primary focus on the role and functions of districts. Draft documents were given to the delegates for discussion. The delegate sessions had lighter moments with group team building games, one of tossing balloons around; stories from persons involved in missions and a Bible study led by Dillion and Esther Sinclair, fraternal guests from the Jamaican Mennonite Church. Friday afternoon, delegates participated in a workshop, one option being "Perils of the Legacy Church" by Pastor Ryan Ahlgrim. The weekend was a time of connecting with old friends, making new connections, and being challenged to love, learn, serve and grow!

The Secret Life of the Egg Cartons — by Lana Gainey Gantt



If you ever go into First Mennonite kitchen and look above the refrigerator, you might see empty egg cartons. So, why are there empty egg cartons over the refrigerator? Glad you asked the question. After working for a major communication company, I was in a reduction in force layoff in 2011 during the recession and the financial crash. What I thought would be maybe a few months of not working turned into over a year. For the first time in my adult life, I was not working and after a few weeks, I was bored and stressed out. A colleague who was a part of the layoffs mentioned that he was helping at FeedMore on Friday with a group of individuals who were currently underemployed, unemployed or just graduating from school. FeedMore is also the Central Virginia Food Bank program which provides meals through Meals on Wheels, a backpack program for school children, as well as being a referral program for the other local food pantries. Area grocery stores donate egg cartons to FeedMore when eggs are broken, and the cartons still have eggs which are intact, but due to safety laws, they need to be repacked and regraded. I always believed in recycling and saw this as an opportunity to help FeedMore meet a need despite my having limited financial resources.

I started volunteering on Fridays and it became an anchor for me while I was looking for work. One of the major obstacles which the program faced was not having enough egg cartons for their mobile pantry program. During a Wednesday night FMC church dinner, while drying the dinnerware, someone asked how I was doing, and I mentioned I was volunteering, taking my egg cartons to FeedMore. A few Sundays later, another member told me that there were empty egg cartons in the kitchen for me to take to FeedMore. I was totally surprised and there have been egg cartons on top of the refrigerator for the last almost 7 years. Church members who sensed my life was overwhelming at times have taken the egg cartons for me to FeedMore to drop off — for which I would like to say thank you. Saving egg cartons may not seem like a major task; however, it is a small way to help the environment and to support an organization on the front line of addressing the problem of individuals being hungry in our community. So, I would like to say thank you again to all who have brought their egg cartons to First

Mennonite to help alleviate hunger in our community. On August 24, 2018, 26 eighteen-count egg cartons were donated along with 15 dozen eggs for a total of 41 cartons. One carton of eggs does not seem like a lot but combined with others can make an impact to relieve hunger in our community.

Reflections of Education 2 — by Christine Suders

Every teacher has their “thing” that they’re known for. Their trademark. Their nickname. Their biggest pet peeves. For one of my former coworkers, her “thing” was that she expects to be called “Dr.” instead of “Mrs.” For another, his “thing” is that he let students braid or spray paint his hair before big football or basketball games. Another always wear Crocs, and still another is known for her obsession with Freddy Krueger. Sometimes you choose your trademark as a teacher — it’s something you control, and you’re very intentional about it. But sometimes, the kids decide what your “thing” is going to be. I may not have had much control over what my students said about me on the sidewalks (will mark you tardy, will take your phone, seems mean at first but is mostly nice, loves cats and coffee too much). But I entered year one of teaching already knowing what I wanted my signature to be: independent, student-selected reading.

People always asked me, “Oh, you teach 11th grade? So what novels do you read?” I know they expected me to rattle off the familiar titles — *The Scarlet Letter*, *Grapes of Wrath*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Many of you probably read those in high school. I know I did. But you know what I didn’t get to do in high school English classes? Read self-selected books. And that was a huge adjustment for me. It will surprise no one when I share that I was a voracious reader as a child. I don’t remember learning how to read — it’s just always been a part of who I am. Since I was homeschooled until eighth grade, I didn’t have an English curriculum (grammar, yes, but not language arts).

My curriculum was “go to the library every week, fill a bag up with books, and read them all as quickly as possible.” I read *Little Women* in second grade, *Heidi* in fourth grade, and every single Janette Oke book by the time I was in eighth grade. I read *Island of the Blue Dolphins* at least 20 times. I devoured books, my friends.

When I entered public high school, I no longer had time to read stacks of books every week. And the novels we read in high school? A double dose of “boring” with a capital “B.” We spent so much time picking apart every other sentence, pausing after every paragraph, and over-analyzing every character, that I often found it impossible to be engaged with the story. Oh, and one time I got in trouble for reading ahead, so I stopped doing that. Sadly, public high school killed my love of reading, and I didn’t really rediscover it until after college. Thank you, Harry Potter series. I didn’t want to be that teacher for my own students. The one who took readers and turned them into nonreaders. I wanted to build a classroom of readers, and I had the research to back up my decision to incorporate more independent reading into my class.

Couple 'Church Planting' in Richmond — by Tyler and Kendra Yoder



Tyler & Kendra Yoder spoke in an adult Sunday school class in August at FMC. They are from Harrisonburg, and they are trying to “plant a church in the Manchester neighborhood of Richmond. We are called to be ambassadors of Christ and to partner with God's ongoing, reconciling work in South Side Richmond. We are planting Garden City Church in the Manchester neighborhood.

**** Happening right now —** Friends, we have been on a ride -- and for those of you who know it, it has felt like the Tilt-a-whirl, which happens to be my (Kendra's) favorite fair ride! You sit on a car, rolling on a circular track that rises and falls, all while spinning in circles. Sometimes you don't spin at all (anticipation), sometimes you spin slowly (meh), and (the best!) you whip around so fast you think you'll fly off (or at least I thought so when I was 7). We got to slow down in the beginning of August by going on vacation with Tyler's family. Even before we got back, though, things started spinning! While still on vacation, we signed a lease on a little house (with a red door!) in Manchester, right where we wanted to be, and I got a call about a job that had just come available. I interviewed, and we got our keys the Monday after vacation, and we spent our first night in our new home Wednesday. On Thursday, I got a job offer from the Monday interview, and Friday I accepted it. I am teaching at Carver Middle School in Chesterfield County and expanding their art program from one teacher to two!

**** How God is working —** Tyler is looking for a part-time job and I am finding my rhythm in my new job! We plan to keep meeting our neighbors, setting up home, and recreating where we can meet people. There's a dance studio a few blocks away (for Kendra), some group bike rides in Manchester (for Tyler), and the community pool is right next to Blackwell Elementary (really close to us), where lots of people hang out.

**** Challenges we are facing —** All the rapid changes made us more tired than anticipated as we arrived here in Richmond and facing the reality that we can't move as quickly as we want to for a little while has been challenging.

**** Joys we've experienced in the process --** Seeing God answer our prayers has been so wonderful! Thank you all for joining us in praying — we get to see God's provision together! He provided a home for us, and a job for me, and we trust that He will provide everything else we need - including rest and energy!

**** How You Can Help —**Come join us! We need people to come live in Richmond and share in the joys of serving Christ in Richmond's Manchester neighborhood. We need financial support to continue supporting ministry opportunities at Garden City

Church. We need your creativity and ideas to dream about how we might continue joining with Christ's work among his people in Richmond. We need prayers — daily, constant, and powerful — to renew and refresh our hearts and the hearts and lives of those we live, work, and worship with in this beautiful city.

** Fundraising— Our Total Goal is \$186,000 over the next three years (through 2021). We have currently received \$40,000. We still need \$146,000. We are supported through Virginia Mennonite Missions, Eastside Church (Harrisonburg), and a coalition of churches across Virginia. Donations support expenses related to the ministry of Garden City Church and Tyler & Kendra's living expenses. To give and learn more about supporting the future of Garden City Church, visit: www.vmmissions.org/worker/tyler-and-kendra-yoder

** Our Prayer Requests— Finding a job for Tyler, beginning in a new classroom as a first-year teacher for Kendra; that God would sustain us as we figure out a new rhythm in a new city; continued fundraising, and meeting people of peace who are ready to hear the Gospel and can give us credibility.

The MennoNet is The Newsletter of First Mennonite Church of Richmond, VA Our Pastor is Ryan Ahlgrim. Email him at pastor@firstmennonitechurch.org. Our church's address is 601 E. Parham Road. Submit Church Questions to the Pastor or to the secretary at: secretary@firstmennonitechurch.org. Our phone number is 804-264-3200. Tina Eshleman (teshleman@comcast.net) and Murray Ellison(bluemur@verizon.net) are the *MennoNet* Editors. Submit articles and Photos with the Editors with your personal vision for 2018 and 2019. Thanks

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