



Intersections

Stories of invitation to walk in the path of Jesus

Franconia Mennonite Conference • April 2007

Grassroots Mexican Anabaptist movement emerging:

La Paz: A ready message for the world

David Landis

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LA JOYA

The Flores family drives a minivan up the dirt road, damp and slippery from last night's rain that left a coating of snow on the overlooking volcano. On the rear hatch, there's a decal announcing, *El Señor es mi pastor; nada me faltará. The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.*

The road winds up and over, through a quarry littered with trash into a small settlement of primitive houses made of cement, plastic and pieces of wood. Upon arriving at La Joya, Lupita Flores and her three sons unload guitars, posters with song lyrics, and coloring books and we walk together into one of the houses to meet glowing children, their mothers, and a mop-like dog for the evening church gathering.

This weekly gathering of women and children at La Joya began two months ago when the Flores family began visiting the community to explore the possibility of starting a church. The family comes from Iglesia Cristiana de La Paz, an Anabaptist congregation on the southeast corner of Mexico City that has a vision to minister and disciple to the needs of the world. Lupita continually reminds us in a faithful tone, "If God wants to start a church here, it will happen."

ORIGINS OF LA PAZ

The name La Paz, translated "the peace," comes from the metro stop located nearest to the church community. As the church grew with the nurturing of Kirk and Marilyn Hanger, it adopted the metro stop name with its logical connection as an Anabaptist congregation and a reminder of the peace of Christ. The church's vision comes from Ephesians 6:15, as they strive to be always ready to go out and announce the message of peace. As the congregation departs each Sunday



morning, they remind each other with this verse. *Estén siempre listos para salir a anunciar el mensaje de la paz.*

After Kirk had served as pastor at Methacton Mennonite Church in Norristown, Pa, for nine years, he and Marilyn moved to Mexico City in 1993 as missionaries from Franconia Mennonite Conference and Mennonite Board of Missions. "It was tough going initially," says Kirk, "and we were almost willing to quit a few times." There were power struggles with local leaders. Some even threatened to deport Kirk, accusing him and the church of stealing kids from the community and selling their organs to the United States.

After two years, things began to settle and the church grew to more than 50 people, requiring a larger meeting space than the Hangers' patio. In 1999, Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, along with other contributors, helped to purchase property. Soon after, the congregation was able to construct their current meeting location of La Paz with the help of local paid workers and occasional volunteer groups from the states.

David Flores leading worship at La Joya.

photos by David Landis

Intersections

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Equipping
leaders to
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others to
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God's mission



Culturally half-bred Mennonite:

Theologically completely Anabaptist

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When other Mennonites meet me they don't assume that I grew up Mennonite and most certainly don't ask where I'm from or who my parents are. In fact the only time I get people to engage in "The Mennonite Game" with me is either through happenstance; my resemblance to my mother and the front plate of my car have been random clues; or when I throw out the information that my home congregation is Slate Hill Mennonite Church and/or my mother's maiden name is Zimmerman.

Ever since my days at Eastern Mennonite University I have been keenly aware that my last name, being from an area not readily associated with Mennonites, and not having gone to a Mennonite high school set me on the outside of the world I thought I grew up in. In an attempt to join a system I cannot beat I jokingly call myself a half-breed Mennonite.

Two years ago I made the conscious decision to remain Mennonite. It was a decision tempered by exclusion from people who were supposed to be like me. People who grew up in Mennonite churches, know what Whoopie pies and Relief Sales are, can identify different coverings, and chose to go to a Mennonite college like myself. I walked onto the campus of EMU and walked into a world I had not been aware of before. I met peers who were far more developed in their theology yet underdeveloped in their patience and understanding for those of us who had not been submerged in the Mennonite world. I felt looked down upon for my still developing understanding of Anabaptist history and theology. Many of my classmates had little patience for my newly expanding world view.

It seemed that none of us had learned in our prior church and school experiences that there is a difference between the culture of our denomination and the theology. It was assumed that because we were all Mennonites we would not only understand that not all of us are plain-dressing but that we would also all be on the same page in theological praxis. Truthfully, beyond the cultural differences, knowing I was pacifist, and a vague knowledge of the *Martyrs Mirrors*, I had no real clue what was different about being Mennonite compared to the variously denominating Christian friends I grew up with.

Interacting with my less than patient Mennonite peers led me to question my allegiance to the denomination. I started to identify myself as Christian but not Mennonite and became friends with EMU classmates who were either a lot like me in their Mennonite status or not Mennonite at all. It wasn't until after college, when I participated in a service-learning program, Mennocorps PULSE, that allowed me to live with people who were not Mennonite but excited about our theology that I began to learn and embrace what it means to be theologically Anabaptist.

This issue of *Intersections* is filled with stories of and encounters with Mennonite brothers and sisters who are culturally different yet theologically the same. In his reflection on La Paz, David Landis notes the cultural problem Mexican Mennonites have in simply identifying themselves as Mennonite; they are "confused with the plain-dressing German colony Mennonites who are publicly known for their cheese-making skills." Instead they have embraced the broader term Anabaptist (Anabautista in Spanish) which encompasses their theology but not the cultural entrapments from which the movement has emerged. The truth is that our sisters and brothers need not be attached to our cultural practice in order to embrace Anabaptist theology.

It is encouraging to know that Anabaptism transcends cultural differences and is relevant to those who are not descendants of the original Anabaptists. In the stories of Ivan and Martene Hestand, Ryan Badorf, and Devon Levensood, it is beautiful to witness how our theological praxis opens doors for us to not only reach out to others who are culturally different but to have those we serve change our lives in the process.

As the Mennonite World Conference's latest edition of *Courier* notes there are nearly 1.5 million Mennonites around the world. These brothers and sisters abroad and in our congregations may not look alike, eat the same foods, dress alike, or even speak the same languages but we share a bond that goes beyond all these cultural norms and more...an Anabaptist faith.



photo by Conrad Erb

Considering Mennonite history in our hemisphere:

Deep roots at Germantown offer security and identity for the future

Randy Nyce

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Mennonites have long memories. As director for the Historic Mennonite Meetinghouse in Philadelphia's Germantown neighborhood I have the privilege of sharing those memories and hearing the longing that many have to find their connections with the stories of the past.

Over the years the stories of Germantown and the first permanent Mennonite settlement in America have taken a deep significance in my life. The sacrifice and commitment of that first group of Mennonites who created what has been called "the gateway for Mennonites in America" is a story worth repeating.

Colonial Germantown Mennonites is a meaningful cue of the value that memory has to remind us of where we have been and lead us confidently to the new works that await us.

Some of those stories were gathered into a book published this winter entitled *Colonial Germantown Mennonites*. Written by longtime Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust board members, Jan Gleysteen and Leonard Gross, the book, complete with photos and map, invites the reader to stroll through these historic neighborhoods. The Tour Guide section is couched within a short history of the Germantown Mennonites, describing in colorful fashion the life and faith of the first German immigrants in the "New World."

Colonial Germantown Mennonites is a meaningful cue of the value that memory has to remind us of where we have been and lead us confidently to the new works that await us. I doubt that many of those gathered in that log meetinghouse for the first baptisms and communion in America considered what they were birthing. Through their actions and commitment, the Mennonite Church in the Americas began.

Our collective memory is a blessing. We remember well the stories of those who have laid a solid foundation for today's church. I am incredibly

thankful to have grown up with the stories of people like Dirk Willems and Clayton Kratz. Both have inspired me and serve as motivation to live a life that is fully devoted to the way of Jesus.

We hold our stories close and rightfully so as they provide us with deep roots that give us the security and identity to venture into new places. They have been the fire around which we gathered strength in the time when Mennonites were branded as a sect of seditious fanatics. But, the reality for the Mennonite Church in America is, as a whole, we are no longer a persecuted people.

I wonder whether our deep devotion and sense of identity inadvertently keeps some at arms length. Held too closely, our history can become a barrier defining who is in and who is out. Are we willing to expand our stories to include the stories of our Asian and African brothers and sisters for whom persecution is not a far off story to remember? How can their stories become ours, and ours become theirs?

When the Israelites crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, they built an altar at Gilgal as a reminder of the wondrous work that God had done. As the years went by when they wandered past that sacred place they remembered and told their children the stories of how God had moved in their midst.

So it is with our stories of faith. Germantown is the Gilgal from where the American Mennonite stories began. With confidence in a God who has delivered us faithfully in the past, we can boldly move to the future creating new stories and inviting others to join us.



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first Mennonite
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American Menno-
nites" through its four
witnesses of history,
service, education,
and evangelism.**

meetinghouse.info

**The historic 1770
Meetinghouse in
Germantown.**

La Paz, continued from page 1

Connect and Contribute

The vision of the emerging La Paz network is to multiply churches, develop leaders, and send mission workers to those parts of the world where US Americans are not usually welcome.

The La Paz network now includes four emerging congregations. La Paz members are also working in two other neighborhoods in eastern Mexico City to develop new churches.

One of the new congregations, Vida Nueva, is pastored by Javier and Rosa Ruiz. This congregation of over 100 members is in the process of buying a property for their church. They meet for worship under a tarp with a dirt floor and in these rustic conditions, at the edge of the largest, recently constructed townhouse community in Latin America, Vida Nueva continues to grow.

Leadership development is key to making the vision of continued church multiplication a reality. Mario and Carmen Lopez finish seminary this summer and will return to join the pastoral team.

When Bolivian pastor Ruben Mercado assumed leadership of La Paz in 2003, Kirk returned to the United States to plant Nueva Esperanza/ New Hope, a bilingual congregation on the outskirts of another capitol city, Washington DC. The network based in Mexico continued to expand, stretching to over 15 churches, missions and organizations in Mexico, Bolivia and the United States.

A TEAM OF DIVERSE LEADERS

As new persons become a part of the network, they also carry their accompanying ministries. Four pastors from four different countries share the leadership of the Mexico-centered La Paz network: Kirk Hanger (United States), Ruben Mercado (Bolivia), David Casana (Argentina) and Victor Zaragoza (Mexico). As the pastors move back and forth from their respective countries, opportunities are created for exchange, learning, and discipleship.

The La Paz network operates through the principle of scattering relational seeds widely and intentionally while simultaneously watching for fruit and continuing to sow more seeds.

LaPaz's pastor in Mexico City, Ruben Mercado, is visionary and compassionate with an unending quota of energy to expand the church. Coming from a family profoundly involved with witchcraft, Ruben grew up deeply and personally involved with drug trafficking, alcoholism, gang violence and abuse. An encounter with God transformed Ruben's life and he began the Christian walk, later directing him into pastoral ministry. One of his dreams for the La Paz area is to build a drug rehab center, a desperate need for many persons in the community.

David Casana comes to the pastoral team at La Paz after working as an economic consultant to the Argentinean Senate in Buenos Aires to reduce national debt. Through connections to Anabaptists in Argentina, he changed vocations and began working with the church. He has since served as the president of Faith Biblical Seminary, expanding this network to eight locations in Mexico to train church leaders.

Victor Zaragoza, the former leader of a Mexico City gang of over 400 members, is the only native Mexican on the pastoral team. He and his wife Julie have started two ministries, one called Pescadores de Hombres (Fishers of Men) which is a roaming evangelical medical clinic that visits nearby villages. The other is their home, Refugee Ranch, expanded so they are able to take in abandoned and neglected children. Julie says, "Even if we have 48 kids, we're going to church on Sunday. I don't care if we need a bus..."

Each pastor brings different leadership gifts, whether as an evangelist, a visionary, an administrator or with pastoral care. Together they sort out their cultural differences, knowing that they share the same vision---to give people evangelical encounters with Christ.

NETWORKING MODELS FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

The La Paz network operates through the principle of scattering relational seeds widely and intentionally while simultaneously watching for fruit and continuing to sow more seeds. The church chooses to focus attention on strategic areas, such as rapidly developing suburbs of Mexico City or where they sense strong leadership through personal connections. "We want to anticipate what is coming so we will be ready when the opportunities arrive," explains Kirk.

The churches in the La Paz network translate into a variety of shapes and forms in their emerging contexts. In some locations, traditional church structures are used for gathering, but in others,



it's a former tortilleria, the rooftop of a public building, or the apartments of developing leaders. Coming from a reality where resources need to be utilized responsibly, the Mexican church shows it's resourcefulness and creativity in how it gathers for worship.

Energy and resources seem to be directed towards moving persons between various parts of the ecclesial network, investing in keeping persons connected even after they leave the geographic center. For example, one of the young leaders of the church, David Flores, who is involved with the La Joya community, will spend the next year working with youth in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, through Mennonite World Conference's YAMEN program and Pastor Ruben's connections. The church in Mexico will stay connected with David by sending others back and forth, hoping to use his presence in Bolivia for transformative growth with the churches in Mexico and developing the network.

Pastor Ruben, states, "We are learning to develop this network from the Apostle Paul and how he worked. Starting churches is natural. When we see opportunities for growth, we should take advantage of it. When we see fruit, we will support its continuation."

The network model shows its value by bringing in a greater diversity of persons and connections with which to learn and grow. The network has been most successful when it functions freely as a grassroots movement without the rules and paperwork that larger church institutions usually require to stay organized and secure. Pastor Ruben feels that the most authentic church model is one where the church's energy is free to multiply as the early church did throughout the Mediterranean and into the world.

BEING ANABAPTIST IN MEXICO

To be called Mennonite in Mexico might mean that you will get confused with the plain-dressing German colony Mennonites who are publicly known for their cheese-making skills. For this

reason and other cultural perceptions of Mennonites, many Mennonite affiliated churches have appended the word Anabautista to their church signs. Having more of a theological definition than a cultural one, the word Anabaptist helps

...the word Anabaptist helps the Mexican public transcend traditional EuroAmerican perceptions of being culturally Mennonite and extends their theology to the broader community.

the Mexican public transcend traditional EuroAmerican perceptions of being culturally Mennonite and extends their theology to the broader community.

Each member of the Mexican Christian Anabaptist Mennonite community expands on a different facet of what it means to express their faith through this theological context.

As David Flores prepares to leave for Bolivia, he says Anabaptism means being born again to faith and entering a new family. As Pastor Ruben facilitates movement within the ever-expanding network, Anabaptism means that the church integrates the social and spiritual needs of the community, keeping equilibrium with the Bible and the world. For Lupita Flores, it means ministering to women and their children in La Joya. Anabaptism includes the freedom to cut her hair and not wear skirts down to her ankles while being a part of the family of God.

Each person says that it means that the movement of God's spirit is free to flow through the community, reaching out to bring new life to connected relationships around the world. It seems to be Anabaptist in a global age may require that we need change the way we call ourselves to build relational networks with those we care about.

Support emerging ministry with La Paz:

\$500 supports outreach efforts for a month in partnership with Philadelphia Praise Center among the 10,000 Spanish-speakers in South Philadelphia.

\$750 supports an equipping weekend for pastors traveling between international/national locations in Mexico and the United States.

\$1000 helps to sponsor a term at Faith Biblical Seminary in Mexico to equip and train emerging leaders, church planters, and pastors.

For more information contact Noel Santiago at nsantiago@franconiaconference.org.

From Left: A woman worships at Iglesia Cristiana de Paz (ICP); Girls in Sunday School at ICP; Women fellowship after a service at La Joya; A young woman teaches Sunday School at ICP; Recent graduates display their diplomas from Faith Biblical Seminary.



I was a stranger and you took me in:

Welcoming refugees and a gift of new friends

Ivan & Martene Hiland, *Blooming Glen*
marvanh@msn.com



Rustam, Sasha and Nigar Lomidze in ESL class at Blooming Glen Mennonite with teacher, Julie Delp.

Mennonite Church USA has roots in seventeenth-century churches planted by immigrants from Europe. Our church continues to grow and be enlivened by immigrants who join us from many countries. As Christians, we believe we are called to welcome these sojourners in our congregations and communities, especially as our government creates increasingly harsh immigration laws in the name of fighting terrorism..... (Statement on Immigration, July 2003)

Elmurad, Rustam, Alime, Sevda, and Dilbar Lomidze gather for a birthday celebration.

Two years ago, Blooming Glen Mennonite Church was contacted by Lutheran Children and Family Services to help with assisting displaced Turkish families relocated from Russia into the Philadelphia area due to persecution. These were families originally from the what is now the Republic of Georgia who were forced to leave their homeland in 1941 and resettle in Uzbekistan due to their ethnicity.

When the USSR crumbled in 1989, they once again were unwelcome and resettled in the Krasnodar region. Here persecution by the local Cossack authorities made life miserable and forced them to live in the shadows. It was a story that echoed that of Russian Mennonite immigrants.

The love of family is something that we share across religious and cultural differences.

Two families came to live in our community. One family has three daughters and the other has four (both fathers are brothers). Members of our congregation contributed time and resources to assist these “strangers” in acclimating into our community. There were housing and medical issues to deal with, jobs to be found, English to learn, and many opportunities to interact and learn. The adage “many hands make light work” was true



as more than 50 persons in our congregation participated in the initial call for help.

Imagine fleeing a country where you were not welcome (even after living in it for 14 years) and coming to a country where the language is different from any of the three or four that you already speak. The alphabet is completely different and your religion is practiced by only a small minority of the people.

Though there was significant culture shock, both families were dedicated to succeed. English is not an easy language to learn and we initially communicated with a lot of smiles and hand gestures. We provided initial transportation for jobs, doctor visits, and other needs until some of the families were able to obtain driver's licenses. The children adapted quickly to school and found new friends.

One Blooming Glen member recently had a joyous moment with Jamilya (one of the Turkish mothers) when she gave her a child's book with a simple explanation of the Koran written in English. Jamilya had never seen the Koran in a language she could understand (it is usually written in Arabic). Although she read it faithfully, she never understood its meaning. Now she has a well worn English book that she treasures.

Watching these immigrant families interact is a source of joy. The love of family is something that we share across religious and cultural differences. The love they have for each other is heartwarming. They also accepted us as part of their family and placed their trust in us, even though we were as much "strangers" to them as they were to us when we met. We are more connected to strangers than we can imagine.

Recently Lutheran Children and Family Services hosted a meeting to hear how sponsoring organizations experienced the challenge of acclimating refugees into our communities. One of the challenges facing this organization is that there are more persons needing to be sponsored, but few churches who are willing to open themselves to this work. As persons shared, there was no doubt that resettlement required work.

Despite the difficulties and the sometimes unexpected levels of work involved, a common thread kept the ministry intact. The group had a clear sense they were doing the Lord's work, that this is a ministry they were called to through the Spirit of God. We remember the words of Jesus, "I was a stranger and you took

As if they were our own: An interview with Janet Panning (Plains), Program Director of Lutheran Children and Family Services' Refugee Resettlement Program

What challenges exist in recruiting congregations to work with refugees?

We are asking congregations to do the impossible – to love a family that has fled war and persecution, to love them into self-sufficiency in a very short period of time, and to love them enough to allow them to make choices that the congregation may find difficult, knowing that there is no guarantee that the love will be returned. The challenges of refugee resettlement are tremendous – housing, employment, transportation and so on – it takes many hands and much emotional energy for an intense period of time. We are asking for a lot.

In what ways would you like to challenge Franconia Conference congregations to host a family?

Iraqi refugees will be traveling to the US this fall. We may be asked to help up to 100 in the Philadelphia region. What will be their first impression of our country? Will they find a congregation and community welcome? Or will they find a continuation of prejudice and conflict? Every Franconia Conference congregation has an opportunity to make a difference.

What stories do you like to tell?

When I returned from Mennonite Central Committee in 1998 and began working at Lutheran Children and Family Services, one of my first clients was a refugee woman who said "I have another daughter who is missing. When the soldiers came to our village in the night, we were chased out of our house and ran through the woods. I realized my 4-year old daughter was not with us and ran back to get her but all I found was her shoe. I found another baby next to the dead body of her mother and picked her up and ran with her. I love her as I love my own children. I pray to God that someone found my daughter and loves her the same way."

This story became for me a metaphor for what refugee resettlement is all about. We are asking churches to reach out and pick up that other mother's child and love them as if they were their own. This particular family found their daughter 10 years after they lost her and she joined them in the US in 2004.

How to help

Both individual volunteers and larger church groups can become involved in this welcoming ministry. Refugees often arrive in this country with nothing more than a suitcase, and so your donations of beds, furniture, or other household goods are very much appreciated. Congregations are needed to collect new items to make "Welcome Boxes" for refugee kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms and school backpacks (see supply lists on blog). Volunteers are also needed to help with English tutoring, transportation to medical appointments, assistance locating employers, emergency housing and general cultural orientation. Individuals are also desperately needed to become foster parents for refugee children and for undocumented children awaiting deportation. For congregations interested in a deeper level of commitment, opportunities to sponsor a refugee family are also available. Please call Lyn Back at 215-747-7500 x207, or visit www.lcfsrefugees.blogspot.com, if you would like to find out more.



Martene Hestand and Zeynara Lomidze discuss finances.

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Liberty Ministries

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ministry for offenders
in prison and on the
street.**

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**Left: Ryan Badorf on
site at Tabernacle of
Christ Church.**

**Right: Pablo and
Ryan playing games.**

A life changing opportunity to serve:

From Liberty House to Vina del Mar

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“Buenos dias, Hermano Luis.”

“Buenos dias, Hermano Ryan.”

Thus was the greeting between Ryan Badorf and Brother Luis, construction foreman, as they met each morning for work in the hills of Chile.

Ryan Badorf graduated from Liberty House phase one in July 2006 and is currently in phase two. He went to Chile, November 13-22, 2006, with Perkiomenville Mennonite, to help the Tabernacle of Christ Church in Vina del Mar with the construction of a new church building.

Ryan regards the trip to Chile as a life changing experience.

The primary work was to mix and pour cement for the floor of an addition to their church building. Ryan, who works as a carpenter for Dennis Gehman Custom Remodeling of Harleysville, was a great asset to the ministry team.

During the trip Ryan took the opportunity to share his testimony one evening at Tabernacle. Everyone rejoiced with Ryan as he shared the story of how the Lord redeemed his life from addiction and hopelessness to being a new free man in Christ. Learning of Liberty Ministries and its discipleship program assisting men coming from prison was a new concept for Tabernacle.

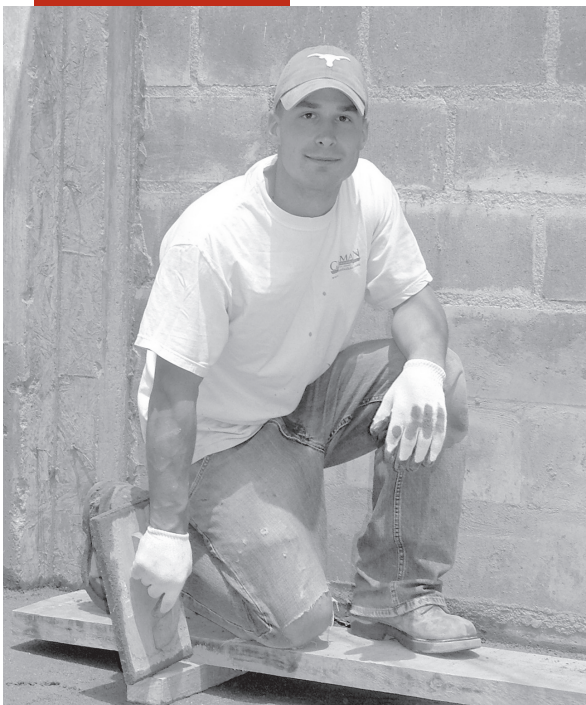


Devon Levengood and Ryan Badorf (center) with youth from Tabernacle of Christ Church.

Other highlights of the trip included building relationships with Tabernacle’s youth, singing on the beach of the Pacific Ocean at midnight, and learning to speak a little Spanish. Devon Levengood, Administrative Assistant for Liberty Thrift and I were also on the team.

Ryan regards the trip to Chile as a life changing experience. “Being in Chile helped me realize that God, family, and friends are really more important in life than possessions. I saw people who have much less than I do, yet were content and rejoicing in the Lord. I made some lifelong friends and I hope to return someday. I am so thankful to the Lord for the opportunity to use my gifts to bless others. So many people at Liberty Ministries, my church family, and friends have given much to me that I wanted to give back by helping others”.

Originally published in Liberty Ministries’ Spring 2007 quarterly newsletter, this article is used with permission.



photos provided by Charles Ness

Growing and stretching through service in Chile:

Reflections from Tabernacle of Christ Church

photos provided
by Devon Levensgood

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I am going to be in Chile for a total of two and a half months. This is my fourth time in Vina del Mar. I came for the first time in October of 2005 with a group from my church, Perkiomenville Mennonite. Perkiomenville has been working with Tabernacle of Christ Church here for a few years now. Twice I have been here on work teams helping with the construction of a new church-building. I keep coming back because I feel a strong connection with the people and I can see that God is at work here in Chile.

Tabernacle sent a team to Pennsylvania a few years ago to help my church with Summer Bible School. They had never experienced anything like it before and our children's Sunday School classes began collecting money for Spanish Bible School materials for Chile. Soon they were ready to start planning for their very first Summer Bible School. I had been praying about going to Chile for a longer period of time and this seemed like the perfect opportunity for me to go and help.

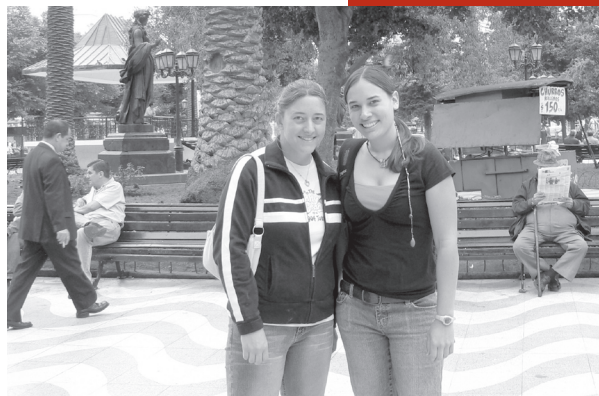
I keep returning to Chile because I feel a strong connection with the people here, and I can see that God is at work here.

I did not make this journey alone. My pastor, Charlie Ness, met Danielle Gehman, a camp counselor, this past summer at Spruce Lake Wilderness Camp. Danielle is a Spanish major at Kutztown University and had been thinking about taking some time off of school to spend in a Spanish speaking country. She was immediately interested in coming to Chile.

Before coming to Chile I met Danielle only two times, and one of those times was the night before leaving to come to Chile. I am so glad that Danielle is with me. We make a great team. I am thankful for her gift of translation as I am getting to know the people more personally, because Danielle is here and translates for me.

We have already had Bible school at Tabernacle. Our first few weeks here were spent preparing for the Bible School, pulling together materials for the craft projects, and walking around the

church's neighborhood handing out invitations and registering kids. Over 50 children showed up everyday for the Bible School. A young woman named Karina and I led games during the week. We all had a lot of fun learning the songs and playing games.



Since the end of Bible School there are three kids who have been attending services at Tabernacle and several children say "Hi" to us as we walk through the neighborhood. We will also be helping with another Summer Bible School at Vision of God, another congregation connected with Tabernacle.

Our second major project is teaching English classes. We have a beginner class and an advanced class at Tabernacle on Monday and Thursday nights and we are teaching a beginner class at Vision of God on Wednesday and Saturday nights. I never had a desire to be a teacher and feel like my classes don't always go well so this is a challenge for me. But I am trying my best and hope that the people are learning something.

Our third project was a mission trip to Peru. It is a little weird and yet very exciting to be on a mission trip while planning another one. As a team we are doing a lot to prepare for this trip. We hold prayer meetings every Friday and once a week everyone in the group fasts to focus on praying and preparing ourselves. It is so great to see God work everything out for each of our team members. Some of them didn't have all the money that they needed and no idea where they were going to get it. We prayed and trusted. One Sunday, Pastor Alfredo felt the Lord calling him to check the prices of the plane tickets online. The prices were drastically cheaper than any other time that he had checked. He immediately purchased the tickets for the group and we were ready to go.

God has been growing and stretching me in the last four weeks. Adapting to a new church, a different culture, and a foreign language has been challenging, but it has been a great learning experience. I have been out of my comfort zone a number of times already.

Devon Levensgood and
Danielle Gehman in
Valparaiso, Chile.

An emerging partnership

Perkiomenville Pastor Charles Ness met Pastor Alfredo Navea at a conference in New York City that instigated a new relationship with a network of congregations in Vina del Mar, Chile.

This small network of congregations has adopted the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective and is developing relationships with both Franconia Conference and Anabaptist/Mennonite efforts in Mexico.

Want to be a part of the ongoing work?

A gift of \$1000 will enable a pastoral visit with our emerging partners in Chile for further training in Anabaptist leadership and formation.

For more information contact Steve Kriss at skriss@franconiaconference.org

A call to pray for Colombia

Currently, Janna Hunter Bowman, a member of the Bally Mennonite Church, is serving with Mennonite Central Committee in documentation for human rights issues and studying at Colombia's Mennonite Seminary.

This past fall MCC released the first of the series of documented testimonies entitled "A Prophetic Call: Colombian Protestant Churches Document Their Suffering and Their Hope."

As part of this project Colombian churches are inviting their North American sisters and brothers to take part in the Days of Prayer and Action for peace in Colombia, May 20-21.

To learn more about the documentation project and other aspects of MCC's work in Colombia, go to mcc.org/colombia.

Reflections from the Winter Peace Retreat

My heart is singing on the peace journey

Monica Haas, *Alpha*
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I am 38 and a new Mennonite Christian in the beginning of my peace journey. I can't share big sophisticated words or any biblical theology with you but I can share what my heart is singing. When God puts people in my life to help motivate me on my journey, I am overjoyed and grateful.

I grew up within Roman Catholicism. After my confirmation, I didn't attend church regularly or have a relationship with God. My family and community always agreed that war is necessary to protect our freedom. Growing up I thought this didn't seem right, yet I never heard otherwise. I dismissed the thought and went on with my life figuring I was fine as long as I didn't have to kill anyone or actually see anyone being killed. It became normal not to question it.

You can imagine my shock at age 36 when the Lord of Peace revealed to me that I am the Beloved Daughter of God. I was led to a nurturing, healing Mennonite church, a huge leap for me considering I had never heard of a Mennonite before. Ever since I have been hungry for Jesus' teachings and studying Anabaptist ways.

Recently, I attended the annual Peace Retreat at Spruce Lake to hear Father John Dear speak about active nonviolence. It was music to me. These are the clear messages that I heard as essential for peacemaking: The Sermon on the Mount should not be only read and studied but taken literally and actively. We should engage in intimate prayer with God, form community, and

become fearless. We should not be afraid to speak in a passionate manner, tell we are followers of Jesus, and that all acts of violence on any of God's children is wrong and is not Jesus' way.

As brothers and sisters we're all in this together. We might be from different religions, ethnic backgrounds, or at different places on the peace path, but we are in this world together. We are all needed to help with the everyday struggles against violence, even when it is unpopular. Simple pacifism is not good enough anymore. We need to unite for God's same purposes.

Father John talked about making time to listen to what God wants us to do and simplifying our lives so that we are not distracted. Between our jobs and accumulating possessions we're so busy that we get off the path of peace. Gandhi used to meditate an hour in the morning and at night. I have been practicing giving my fears to God so that I am able to hear what God asks of me.

One of our small group sessions raised this question: Where are you going and how far are you willing to go on your peace journey? I used to have my life all planned out, but those days are over. The day I was baptized at Alpha Mennonite Church, at age 37, was one of my most life changing experiences. That was the day I said, "I am yours Lord; do with me as you please." Now I live one day at a time, lovingly embraced by God, and willing to follow the Lord wherever he leads.



Monica Haas

New staff welcomes a change to serve

In mid-February Franconia Mennonite Conference welcomed Denise Alderfer as Associate Bookkeeper. Denise works at the Souderton, PA, Conference Center twice a week assisting Conrad Martin, Director of Finance, with bookkeeping duties.

Denise was looking for a change in her life when her shoulder was tapped to apply for this position. She wanted to work in a place where she could serve others. She was encouraged by the opportunity to work with Franconia Conference in bookkeeping because of the possibility of service with her skills. "I felt like this role would allow me to serve the church and use the gifts I already have," she explains.

Denise is also glad for the opportunity to be more involved with the Mennonite church and hopes to gain deeper understanding of what it means to be Mennonite.

Denise lives in Souderton and is a member of Covenant Community Fellowship, Lansdale, PA. She and her husband Mark have two sons, Jordan and Evan.



photo by FMC staff

DIRECTORY OF CONFERENCE RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

***Bethany Birches Camp**, 2610 Lynds Hill Road, Plymouth, VT 05056; TEL: 802-672-5220; www.vtchildrenscamp.com. *Inviting youth to growth, joy, hope, healing, and excitement in everyday life, through Jesus Christ.*

Camp Men-O-Lan, 1415 Doerr Road, Quakertown, PA 18951; TEL: 215-679-5144; www.menolan.org. *As a Christian camp, our mission is to use the unique qualities of an outdoor setting for developing Christian commitment, character, leadership, and service, and to provide a place for retreat, worship, study, fellowship, recreation, and personal development for individuals, families, and groups.*

Care & Share Thrift Shoppes, Inc., 783 Route 113, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 215-723-0315; FAX: 215-723-5907; careshareshoppes@verizon.net. *To improve the quality of life for people suffering from poverty, oppression, and natural disaster by creating a market for reusable items and expanding the market for creations by third world crafts persons. We do this because of our faith in Jesus Christ and our belief that God's love is for all people.*

***Christopher Dock Mennonite High School**, 1000 Forty Foot Road, Lansdale, PA 19446; TEL: 215-362-2675; FAX: 215-362-2943; www.dockhs.org. *In partnership with the family and the church, developing the God-given abilities of students in preparation for responsible stewardship of life as members of God's people in a global society.*

***Community Home Services**, Souderton Center, 781 Route 113, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 215-723-1906; FAX: 215-723-1590; www.community-homeservices.org. *A ministry of support and services to enable the elderly to remain in their own homes.*

Crossroads Gift and Thrift, 206 DeKalb Street, Norristown, PA 19401; TEL: 610-275-3772; crossroadgift-thrift@juno.com.

***Delaware Valley MEDA**, PO Box 64653, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 215-721-3030; FAX: 215-723-1211; delvalmeda@yahoo.com. *Brings faith and values issues to the marketplace and professions.*

***Dock Woods Community**, 275 Dock Drive, Lansdale, PA 19446; TEL: 215-368-4438; FAX: 215-362-2682; www.dockwoods.com; *A living dedication to the enhancement of life for older adults and families rooted in the Mennonite heritage of Christian values.*

***Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust**, 6133 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144; TEL: 215-843-0943; FAX: 215-843-6263; www.meeting-house.info. *Preserving and sharing the 1770 Mennonite Meetinghouse and the stories related to America's first Mennonite settlement and the "Gateway of North American Mennonites" through its four witnesses of history, service, education, and evangelism.*

***Indian Creek Foundation**, 420 Cowpath Road, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 215-256-1500; FAX: 215-256-3018; www.indiancreekfoundation.org. *Improving community through services for persons with developmental disabilities.*

***Liberty Ministries**, PO Box 87, Schwenksville, PA 19473; TEL: 610-287-8601; FAX: 610-287-5481; www.libertyministries.us. *A Christ-centered ministry for offenders in prison and on the street.*

***Life With God Broadcasts**, PO Box 64092, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 610-730-8008; David Kochsmeier, Radio Pastor. *Proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Mennonite Central Committee Material Resource Center Harleysville, 461C Indian Creek Road, Harleysville, PA 19438. TEL: 215-513-9561. *The MCC Material Resource Center of Harleysville serves as a liaison between the MCC Material Resource Center of Ephrata and peace churches of Eastern Pennsylvania. Through this outreach, we share God's love, hope, and joy in the name of Jesus Christ.*

***Mennonite Disaster Service**, PO Box 65794, Souderton, PA 18964. www.mds.mennonite.net. *Helping God's healing and hope flow to those whose lives were affected by disaster.*

***Mennonite Historians of Eastern Pennsylvania (Mennonite Heritage Center)**, PO Box 82, Harleysville, PA 19438; TEL: 215-256-3020; FAX: 215-256-3023; www.mhep.org; *Preserving the local and broader Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage, encouraging a greater appreciation for its principles and promoting a contemporary Christian witness.*

***Peaceful Living**, 850 Old Skippack Road, PO Box 130, Lederach, PA 19450; TEL: 610-287-1200; FAX: 610-287-7121; www.peacefulliving.org. *Creating belonging for persons with developmental disabilities within a faith community.*

***Penn Foundation, Inc.**, 807 Lawn Avenue, Sellersville, PA 18960; TEL: 215-257-6551; FAX: 215-257-9347; www.pennfoundation.org. *Provides continuum of behavioral health care services for all ages. Penn Foundation's Dayspring Counseling Center offers individuals, couples, and families counseling services from a Christian perspective.*

***Penn View Christian School**, 420 Godshall Road, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 215-723-1196; FAX: 215-723-0148; www.pennview.org. *Penn View Christian School offers academically excellent education from a biblical perspective. The faculty and staff, in partnership with families and churches, seek to nurture the God-given potential of each student in a Christ-centered community.*

***Philadelphia Mennonite High School**, 860 North 24th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130; TEL: 215-769-5363; FAX: 215-769-4063; www.pmhsonline.org. *PMHS exists to provide a Christ-centered, quality education in a multicultural, urban context that equips students to become servant-leaders and peacemakers.*

***Quakertown Christian School**, 50 East Paletown Road, Quakertown, PA 18951; TEL: 215-536-6970; FAX: 215-536-2115; www.quakertownchristian.org. *QCS, a Mennonite school, is in partnership with home and church in the process of developing physical, spiritual and social life skills for each child using Biblical values and a challenging academic environment to instill a sense of Christian community and service.*

***Rockhill Mennonite Community**, 3250 State Road, Sellersville, PA 18960; TEL: 215-257-2751; FAX: 215-257-7390; www.rockhillmennonite.org. *Providing a wide range of services to meet specific needs and encompass the whole person.*

***Spruce Lake Retreat**, RR 1, Box 605, Canadensis, PA 18325-9749; TEL: 800-822-7505; FAX: 570-595-0328; www.sprucelake.org. *To enable and encourage "Christ-centered discoveries in an outdoor setting" by providing opportunities for Christian nurture, meditation, fellowship and recreation in an informal, natural setting for children, youth, adults and families.*

***Souderton Mennonite Homes**, 207 West Summit Street, Souderton, PA 18964; TEL: 215-723-9881; FAX: 215-723-9876. *Promotes dignity of life and wellness supported by knowledgeable, caring staff and surrounded by a comfortable, well-maintained environment.*

*denotes charter member

Join us for prayer

On Saturday, April 28, 2007 a meeting for prayer and intercession will be held at Methacton Mennonite Church, Norristown, PA. The meeting will begin at 10 a.m. and end at 12:30 p.m.

Prayer circles gathered during the kick-off for Franconia Conference's prayer ministry.

Connecting, encouraging, and resourcing:

Building a network of prayer

Sandy Landes
slandes@franconiaconference.org

What does the ministry of prayer have to do with Franconia Conference? In November of 2006 I began seeking the answer to that question as the newly appointed Prayer Ministry Coordinator. My overall goal is to see the church grow in unity as stated in Ephesians 4 so that we as a body of believers will grow in maturity and make known the mysteries of the gospel to this community, region, and the world.

God is already at work building houses of prayer around FMC as congregations are developing active prayer ministries.

God is already at work building houses of prayer around Franconia Conference as congregations are developing active prayer ministries. While

Noel Santiago and Jeannette Phillips have worked at encouraging the intercessors, Noel felt the need to have someone on staff to encourage and connect the prayer ministries of the different congregations.



Sandy Landes

I hope to connect with what God is already doing in congregations through prayer, to provide an environment of encouragement and resourcing for those in prayer ministry, and to provide a network of prayer support for conference related needs. I also hope to reinforce a clear message to our members of the value and importance of prayer in the local church.

We are hoping to have regular times of gathering for those involved in prayer ministry to resource and encourage them. We held our first meeting at the end of January with representatives from 17 congregations. It was a time of connecting with others and hearing their stories of answered prayer, struggles in growing the prayer ministry and the excitement of where God is leading the body of Christ as we walk in obedience.

I hope to see the church grow in its understanding of prayer as a gift of intimacy. I want to see prayer become central to everything we do, not an add-on at the beginning or end of a meeting. Without acknowledging the power of the Spirit we fall into the trap of doing things by our own strength. God wants our churches to be "houses of prayer" for all who come and for us to take that ministry of prayer into our communities. My hope and prayer is that we will grow in prayer and understanding God's heart for us as a body.



photos provided by FMC staff

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Franconia Mennonite Conference
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