

Beyond OURSELVES

POSTCARDS FROM EUROPE

They aren't there to sightsee: Mennonite mission workers in Europe

You've got a friend in Europe

By Melanie Hess

Connie Byler often begins a sentence with the phrase, "I've got a friend..." Connie, in her many years of ministry in Spain, has made friends everywhere. She knows people all across Burgos and throughout the surrounding villages, including military generals to whom she taught English, and a Guatemalan immigrant named Ruth who came to Spain to take care of two blind men.

Her friends call her on the phone and she drops in for visits. She knows the people at the local supermarket because she shops there regularly with men from the hospice where she volunteers. She remembers the illnesses that people are dealing with, the emotional problems, the family issues. Building relationships is her mission.

Amy Schmid, a freelance photographer, and I traveled to Europe to see firsthand what our mission workers are doing and how they're a part of God's work there. Our trip was amazing, because everyone we visited took the time to tell us people's stories and take us to see places where people are carrying out God's mission.

Connie and Dennis, Janie and Neal, Linda, Mary—all the people who've dedicated years of their lives to being in one place, learning about the culture, speaking the language, and loving the people—it's hard to overestimate how much influence these workers have had through decades of continued presence.

While traveling, I felt a sense of intimidation when I realized that my words and Amy's photos have to convey what we experienced. It was at a youth meeting in Spain, watching the young adults worship and pray together, that I first found myself wishing that you—mission supporters from Mennonite Church USA—could come and see this for yourselves. This desire returned many times throughout the trip.

But many of you won't have this privilege, so we want to give you just a small taste of what we saw and heard of God's presence, in the hope that you will see and hear it, too.

Feedback

▶ Let us know what you think of this issue.

What inspires you? Engages you? Infuriates you?

BeyondOurselves@MennoniteMission.net

Web spotlight



In Argentina business is mission

Photo by Bob Martin

The Villa Mercedes block factory is providing a firm foundation for Argentine mission workers.

While there's no foundation other than the one laid by Jesus Christ, Argentine missionaries along a 650-mile *ruta misionera*—missionary route—from Buenos Aires to Mendoza recognize they also need to do some foundational work to support themselves.

The Argentina Mennonite Church has long dreamed of sending missionaries into the vast countryside to spread their faith, but finding the resources to support themselves and their families can be challenging and time consuming. Sergio Curto, a pastor in Argentina, had the idea of starting small businesses in outlying areas so missionaries can make a living while they establish ministries.

The idea has since borne fruit in the town of Villa Mercedes with the establishment of the Beraca block



▶ Check out a video about the Villa Mercedes block-making factory by scanning the QR code or by visiting www.MennoniteMission.net/Block.



Photo by Dean Smith

Sergio Curto (left) shares his vision for the block-making factory with Hugo, a neighbor of the factory.

factory, a small business run by a young couple with big plans for mission. After a couple of years setting up the business and developing relationships, there is a small group of new Christians who meet two or three times a week in people's homes.

This factory—a small enclosed lot big enough for mixing cement, molding the blocks, and letting them dry in the sun—is just one way missionaries can support themselves. Future evangelists may open food stands, corner stores, or other businesses.

May 18

Mission Network
DAY OF PRAYER

How do you pray?

www.MennoniteMission.net/Dayofprayer



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Cover: Eiffel Tower postcard illustration by David Fast



Post haste

The postal service is in trouble. E-mail, texting and electronic communications are leading to a precipitous decline in handwritten letters and, by the same token, postcards.

What a pity! I love receiving postcards. They signal that in someplace interesting, and sometimes exotic, I was remembered. Unlike a tweet that is broadcast, often to an unknown mass, this was addressed to me. It was personal and came with my name attached. I always appreciate the greetings and the wishes that are shared by a friend or a loved one who has traveled some distance, and amid all the experiences of that far-off (and sometimes not so far-off) place, has thought of me. I feel joined to my friend and somehow connected to the place from which they are writing. For, almost always, the postcard is adorned with pictures that bring glimpses, often beautiful, of a place that has been visited. As I admire the pictures of landscapes and people, buildings and monuments, flora and fauna, and maps, my world is expanded. No longer are these just foreign places; they become identifiable through the images on the postcards and the stories that are told of those places and peoples, even when the stories are necessarily brief.

For these reasons, during the first few years when I traveled in my assignment, I always sent postcards to Ursula, my wife, and especially to my boys. I wanted them to know that though I was far-removed from them, they were in my thoughts and in my heart. I also wanted them to connect with the world I was experiencing, even if vicariously. My objective was to help broaden their horizons. Somewhere in a box, I couldn't tell you where, is a collection of postcards that I sent over the years. No one opens the box anymore and the words that were written are likely long ago forgotten. I know, however, that the images remain, perhaps grown

indistinguishable by time and faded in detail. More present and alive, undoubtedly, is the enduring sense my sons yet have of being connected to a world that lives beyond the reach of their sight.

In this issue of *Beyond Ourselves*, we are pleased to share “postcards” that showcase mission work from all over Europe. I pray you will read with interest the stories that are shared. Our desire is that you will feel connected to a particular part of the world and to specific people and stories of how God is at work in those places. We hope that when you hear of these places in

“We hope that when you hear of these places in the future, they will not represent mere geographical locations, but will bring to mind images of people and stories of God’s healing and hope being shared and experienced.”

the future, they will not represent mere geographical locations, but will bring to mind images of people and stories of God’s healing and hope being shared and experienced. We yearn that as you feel connected to the people and the ministries reflected in these stories, you

will remember to pray that God’s blessing will be upon those who witness as well as upon those who receive the good news of God’s healing and hope in these places.

As we share these postcards, we want you to know that you are thought of, with gratitude for your friendship and the sharing of your prayers, your gifts, and your encouragement. With these postcards we also wish to send you our greetings, our thoughts, and our prayers that God’s blessings of joy and peace will be with you in abundant measure, and that wherever your travels take you, whether near or far, you will journey in the companionship of Jesus. And, if you think of it, send us a postcard!

Stanley W. Green

Stanley W. Green
Executive Director
Mennonite Mission Network





Dancers at a citywide praise dance gathering in Macau.

Beyond
NEWS

Dance for the Lord

Ministry of movement in Macau

In a park near Macau Mennonite Church in China, a group of uniformly-dressed people can be seen daily moving in unison, offering rhythmic praise to God.

To the left they sway, gracefully swirling their arms to the music, toward the sky, and then the same motion to the right. Forward they step, arms pumping, like synchronized swimmers on land. They smile as sweat beads cool their foreheads.

Bailey Chow and Treasure Chow, pastors at Macau Mennonite Church, began the praise dance group in the park as a form of outreach. Treasure Chow leads the group, having taken a 10-week instructor training course in 2010. Since the group formed, 10 women have become members

of the church after joining the dance group.

Group dancing in parks is already a long tradition in Chinese society, so praise dance is an appropriate form of outreach in this context, said Tobia Veith, a joint worker of Mennonite Mission Network and Mennonite Church Canada.

“We seek to authentically share life with them,” she said, “and believe that God’s Spirit will work through members of his congregation and others in the praise dance group.”

Spirit-led GPS leads to accidental outreach

Apparently, South Hutchinson, Kan., is a completely different place than the southern part of Hutchinson, Kan.

The Colorado Springs Service Adventure unit found that out the hard way over Thanksgiving weekend, when they accidentally gave a presentation to the youth group at New Life Nazarene Church in the southern part of the town of Hutchinson—not South Hutchinson Mennonite Church, where the group was scheduled to speak.

Despite the mix-up in locales, the Service

Adventure group found a receptive audience in the Nazarene teenagers. Lyle Goertzen, youth leader at New Life, had been gone over Thanksgiving and was a bit stressed out on Sunday morning when he discovered no one had planned a lesson for the youth.

He was busily getting the music prepared for the service when the Service Adventure team walked in the door and asked where the youth room was.

“Having not been around for the prior week and weekend, who was I to

question?” Goertzen said. “I was sure the pastor had just forgotten to fill me in.”

After they had finished, the Service Adventurers realized they were in the wrong church. Goertzen gave them directions and sent them on their way.

Goertzen believes the mix-up was really just the Spirit working in unpredictable ways.

“I am glad they made the mistake,” he said. “I’m hoping that the seeds that your group left us with on Sunday will have in some way found their way into the hearts of the youth.”

Ultimate forgiveness

Reconciliation in Ivory Coast

As the government of Ivory Coast seeks to unify the nation after 10 years of civil war, a Mennonite Mission Network worker, together with a team of Ivorians, is urging Christians to forgive those who tried to kill them.

In a post-trauma healing and reconciliation training project, church leaders learn systematic ways to counsel those who have been ravaged by war, to forgive in order to heal communities and help the nation move toward unity. Martine Audeoud, who, along with her husband, Gary Wittig, are Mission Network associates serving with the West Africa

Alliance Seminary (la Faculté de Théologie Evangélique de l'Alliance Chrétienne), has been coordinating the project's training efforts.

Nearly 25 Ivorians have been trained on how to counsel people from communities that have suffered unspeakable horrors.

"Community members learn to identify where their hurts are," Audeoud said. "They learn who Christ is and that he died for their hurts, and that because of his death and resurrection they can grant forgiveness."

Audeoud described some initial results of the seminar training.

In one instance, a pastor's neighbors tried to burn down his house while he and his family were inside. He took his family to the bedroom and they started praying. Miraculously, the fire stopped and the house didn't burn, but the pastor



Photo by Laura Livingston

then left the village with his family and asked to be moved to another pastorate. After attending the healing and reconciliation seminar, he canceled his request to be transferred and said that he wanted to go back to the village and serve the people that had been his enemies.

Kouassi Koffi Grégoire, who pastors the area's Assembly of God churches, tells participants in the reconciliation training seminar how God has freed him of ethnic hatred and unforgiveness.

New workers enter service

Mission workers beginning assignments between September and November 2011

Dwell

Tyler Mostul, Beaverton, Ore., is serving in Los Angeles.

Marquis Norma, Philadelphia, is serving in Miami.

MVS

Andrew Buschert, Goshen, Ind., is a program assistant for IT serving with MK Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence in Rochester, N.Y.

Janae Detwiler, Wilmington, Mass., is a development assistant with Partnership for the Homeless in New York City.

Clinton Harris, Manhattan, Kan., is a volunteer coordinator with Ten Thousand Villages in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Christopher Hinojosa, Winfield, Ill., is a legal assistant with RAICES in San Antonio.

Ellen Morey, Elkhart, Ind., is a volunteer with Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, and neighborhood food coordinator with Good Earth Farm of Michiana and Elkhart Local Food Alliance in Elkhart.

Joel Unzicker, Goshen, Ind., is a recreation and leisure coordinators' assistant with Out and About in Boulder, Colo.

SOOP

Joyce Bontrager, Goshen, Ind., served two days in Akron, Pa.

Fay and Harold Brubaker, Harrisonburg, Va., served one month in Glendale, Ariz.

LeAnne and Norman Gross, Oneida, Ill., served one week in Akron, Pa.

Ernest and Lois Hess, Lancaster, Pa., served more than a week in Three Rivers, Mich.

Gerlof and Roelie Homan, Normal, Ill., served one month in Elkhart, Ind.

Anne and Bruce Hummel, Millersburg,

Ohio, served one week in Akron, Pa.

Lila and Ronald King, Harrisonburg, Va., served two months in Petitscodiac, New Brunswick.

Boyd and Mabel Knicely, Middlebury, Ind., served one month in Glendale, Ariz.

Dave and Karen Mast, Ephrata, Pa., served three months in Toano, Va.

Nathan and Viola Miller, Beach City, Ohio, served three weeks in Hickory, N.C.

Alethea Putnam, Seattle, served three weeks in Bloomfield, N.M.

Miller and Vernabelle Stayrook, Goshen,

Ind., served one week in Abbotsford, British Columbia.

George and Mae Stoltzfus, Landisville, Pa., served three weeks in Hickory, N.C.

John and Virginia Wenger, Goshen, Ind., served one week in Cambridge, Ontario.

Dottie and Roland Yoder, Lititz, Pa., served one week in Akron, Pa.

International

Dustin and Tiffany Wyse-Fisher began a two-year term as a resource couple for staff at the Corrymeela Community, Northern Ireland, a peace-building

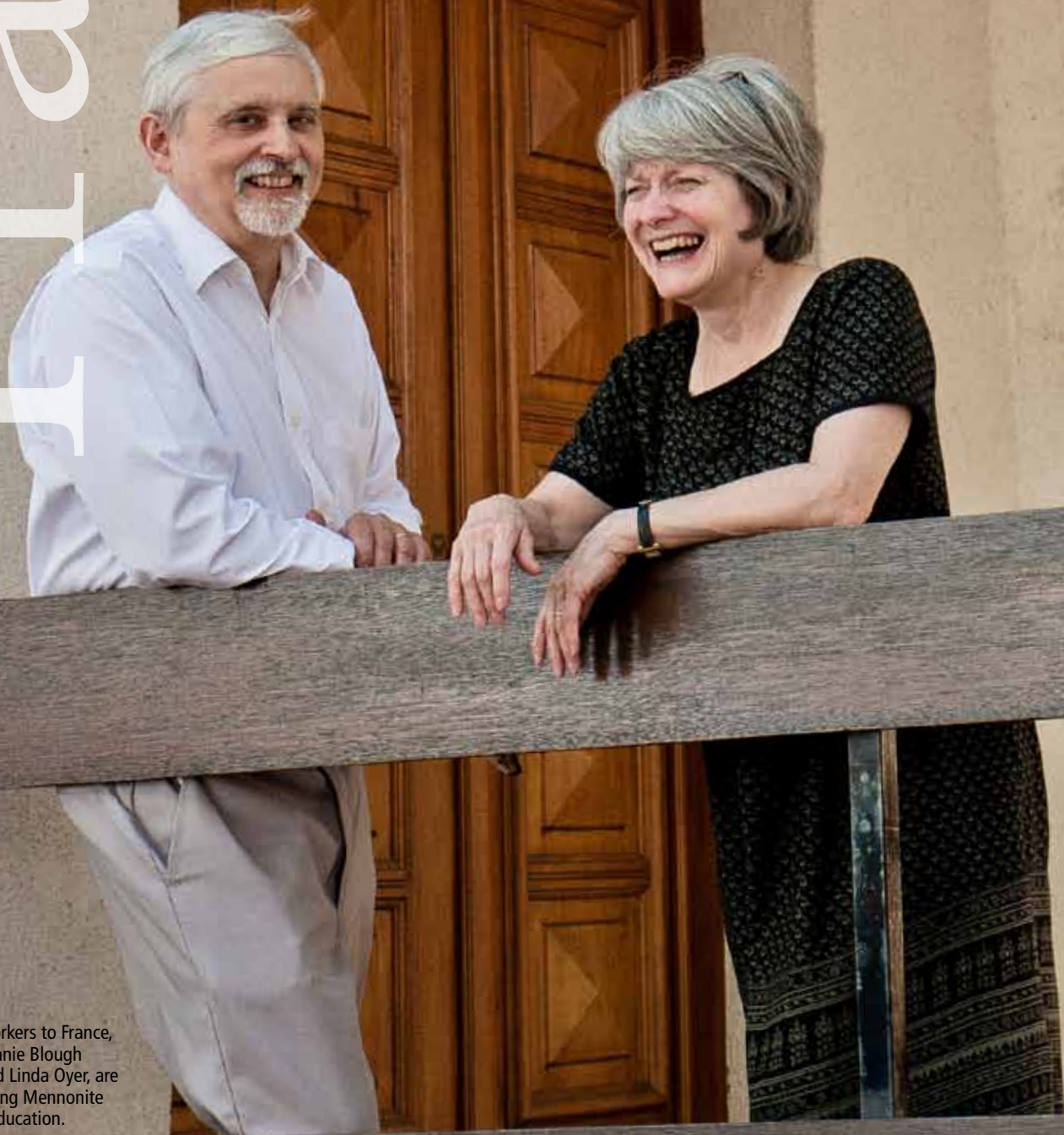
program. They are members of First Mennonite Church of Morton (Ill.).

Paul and M. Naomi Kniss served a brief special assignment as fraternal church visitors to the Bihar Mennonite, Mandli, India. They are from Ridgeway Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Va.

Mark and James Kniss served a brief special assignment as fraternal church visitors celebrating Nav Jivan Hospital's 50th anniversary in India. Mark is from Ridgeway Mennonite Church, Harrisonburg, Va., and James (Mark's son) is from Mount Joy (Pa.) Mennonite Church.

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France



Mission workers to France, Neal and Janie Blough (above) and Linda Oyer, are like a walking Mennonite seminary education.



This seminary has legs

Mission workers help lead an Anabaptist resurrection in France

Story by Melanie Hess

Photography by Amy Schmid

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were almost no Mennonites left in France. Between the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine (historically home to many Mennonites) into Germany, and immigration to North America, the population had dwindled significantly.

By the end of World War II, the distinctive edges of Anabaptist theology had been slowly worn away by years of secularization, injections of Evangelical theology, and two world wars. Those who still professed Mennonite faith joined the French army or were shipped off to the front by Hitler's invading forces.

Now, nearly 70 years later, Anabaptist theology has crept back to France. It started with the

help of a small network of European Mennonite historians and pastors in the early 20th century and was supported by Mennonite Central Committee relief efforts. It continued to develop thanks to the work of John Howard Yoder and several key French Mennonite leaders.

In the mid-1970s, two mission workers arrived from what was then Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. They didn't expect to stay more than a few years, but Janie and Neal Blough have spent most of their adult lives working in and around Paris. They were preceded by other long-term workers who began working in Paris in the 1950s. Robert and Lois Witmer, along with French Mennonites, laid the foundations upon which this generation built. Linda Oyer, with another mission agency, also arrived in Paris in the 1970s, and then

Above: Isaac Francisque and Maxime Kennel play after worship at *Eglise Evangélique Mennonite* near Paris.

joined MBM in the late 1980s. She, too, has been a long-term presence in the country.

Oyer and the Bloughs are, according to their director, Tim Foley, “like a walking Mennonite seminary education.” Through long-term presence, research, teaching, friendships, church leadership and more, the Bloughs and Oyer have made a major contribution to the resurrection of Anabaptism in France.

Neal Blough and Oyer are writers, having recently contributed chapters to the 11th book in a series on Anabaptist faith perspectives, this one on redemption and salvation and edited by Claude Baecher, a French Mennonite. The Paris Mennonite Centre started gathering an Anabaptist library in the late 1980s, and French-language resources have been shared with Mennonites from Quebec to Benin.

“If I look back over the last 50 years,” said Neal Blough, “interest in and reception of Anabaptist/Mennonite theology is as strong now as it ever has been.”

According to Blough, French Mennonites have more doctorates than any other Evangelical denomination in France. Therefore, there’s been plenty of teaching and historical research, and the library of Anabaptist theological material has grown.

The Mennonite church in France is comprised of a majority of historically Mennonite churches in eastern France, while the three Parisian congregations are more recent and have many members of immigrant origin. According to Neal Blough, one of the ques-

tions that pastors and Mennonite Centre staff are asking is, “What does it mean to be Mennonite or Anabaptist in a secular, urban context?”

“Intercultural congregations are a fascinating place to deal with the basic tenets of how we live out our theology,” said Blough. “An urban multicultural congregation is the place to do it. These are like laboratories of Mennonite theology. How do you take that core and give it different flesh in different settings?”

Janie Blough focuses on worship from an Anabaptist perspective. She’s in the midst of earning a doctorate in worship studies while training new worship leaders at her church. As part of her doctoral studies, she’s asking questions: How do you build worship? What should be in worship? What is liturgy?

Janie was recently commissioned in her church as a worship minister.

“The term ‘worship minister’ doesn’t really exist in France,” she explained. “No one is specifically a worship minister in terms of training.”

But churches need someone who is in tune with the whole congregation and each person’s distinct spiritual needs, Janie said. In addition to her work within her own congregation, Janie helps train leaders from other churches to play that role.

“More and more people are becoming interested in these things,” Janie explained, “and I’m being asked to do training sessions in Mennonite churches and other denominations.”

But beyond their educational work, the Bloughs and Oyer are clear examples of what happens when people dedicate their lives and careers to work in one place. All three of them are regularly invited to speak or teach at conferences and in congregations, as well as to write. Oyer is particularly involved in a European Christian women’s leadership organization.

Anne Meynier-Schweitzer, Oyer’s friend and colleague, attended a women’s conference where Oyer spoke. Oyer’s talk was on the many different kinds of spiritual expression that can exist, both between denominations and within a single denomination. At the end of the event, Oyer arranged a worship experience that honored the traditions of all the women present.

“There were more than 140 women from denominations from Catholic to Baptist to Salvation Army washing each other’s feet and sharing bread and wine,” Meynier-Schweitzer said. “And she made it all happen.”

(L to R) Viliène Luma, Adèle Malongo, Catherine Copol, Claircilia Caroly and Janie Blough sing in the choir at *Eglise Evangélique Mennonite* near Paris.





The sun sets over Odessa Theological Seminary.

Faith 101

Seminary faculty in Ukraine see a bright future for joining God’s work in their community

Story by Melanie Hess
Photography by Amy Schmid

On the outskirts of Odessa, Ukraine, across a field and along a rutted road, is Odessa Theological Seminary—a small collection of buildings, a congregation that meets in a cement block structure, and a new church that’s been under construction for years. The seminary has about 30 full-time students and a small group of faculty.

The seminary has its challenges: how to develop the programs to best teach Christianity in a post-Communist context, how to find and work with students, and, of course, how to fund its work. In Ukraine, the average annual income is about \$3,000.

But faculty members are optimistic about the school’s future, and are finding ways to connect with God’s work in the community.



“We are starting to place an emphasis on Christian education. The church really needs that. We’re dreaming that somehow we’ll be more involved in that area—perhaps with homeless children. That is something that gives us hope for the future, not just as a school, but also as Christian workers.”

Alexander Geichenko, dean of the Odessa Theological Seminary

“I love to see the mature women come to the part-time programs—people who are keeping these small-town Sunday schools afloat. Some of the women in the Christian education program come in and they’re like piranha fish. They’re hungry.”

Mary Raber, professor and Mission Network worker



“We have an ongoing challenge in that there are more than 50 theological schools in one Baptist union. Some schools think that they would be more competitive to have foreign professors, but we try to place an emphasis on local professors—we need to pay them, but it’s good for our future.”

Alexander Abramov, professor of history

Kingdom building

Congregants join together, constructing a new church to accommodate growth

Story by Melanie Hess

Photography by Amy Schmid

Since merging two years ago, congregants from Christian Evangelical and Burgos Mennonite churches have done small projects together many times. Now, the church, called United Anabaptist Communities, has taken on its biggest project: finishing the construction on a new church building—the first Mennonite church building in Spain.

Helping out (left): A construction company erected the building, but everything else, including the floors, interior walls, a kitchen, the bathrooms, the doors, the ceiling, and landscaping, was done by church members, mostly by working together long hours every Saturday morning for many months.

Tight quarters (below): The storefront where the congregation currently meets in downtown Burgos has been crowded for months. Each week, anywhere from 120 to 140 people fill a small, L-shaped room for worship. While the growth was something to celebrate, it became clear that a bigger building was needed.



Spain





Long-term relationships: Mission workers Dennis and Connie Byler talk with Yolanda de Miguel, a member of the congregation.



Expertise around every corner: Heliodoro Lopez, worship leader, choir member, and full-time volunteer, works on the church entrance.

Giving free hugs

Young adults embrace street evangelism

Having a space for the youth to hang out and invite friends is important to the church. They plan to make a place for that in their new building. Pastor Agustin Melguizo says that the youth and young adults at United Anabaptist Communities are an example of God's work in the church.

"The youth and young adults are not content to simply have their own experiences with God," he said. "They want to share those experiences with their peers."

Friendship is key, Melguizo said, and the youth have taken to the streets to begin to build relationships. Each Friday before their meeting, the young adults set up a booth, offering "free hugs" and inviting people to write prayer requests on slips of paper. They then bring the box back to their gathering to pray over the requests. After a few weeks of doing this, they began to see familiar faces, as people came back to see them again. Two girls who spoke with the young adults on a Friday night came to church the next Sunday.



Raquel Costas, Vanesa Moreno, and Andres Vallejo, members of the youth group at United Anabaptist Communities, review the prayer requests they collected on the street.





Crossing barriers

Mission workers in Northern Ireland provide friendship and hospitality at drop-in center

Story by Melanie Hess

Photography by Amy Schmid

Peter and Jenna Liechty Martin are Mennonite Mission Network workers in Belfast, Northern Ireland. They work with Edgehill College's reconciliation program, and volunteer with EMBRACE, an organization that helps churches connect with new immigrants and marginalized people in Belfast.

It's sometime around 1 p.m., and the church function room is humming with voices. Although the building hasn't been used for regular Sunday services in years, today it is full of people chatting, playing pool, and readying themselves for lunch.

In one corner, Debra Leso and her friend, Joy Rufus, sit on couches talking while their toddlers play together. They stop occasionally to break up a spat over a toy that both little girls want to play with, or to sing a song. Dave Cunningham, a



local man with a vision impairment, brings over his new glasses—the ones that allow him to see faces and move around more easily.

“Debra, look through these glasses and tell me what you see,” Dave says. “They’re very strong.”

“The drop-in center brings people together who wouldn’t otherwise meet, providing a space for friendship and community.”

Jenna Liechty Martin



Peter and Jenna Liechty Martin

Janette Preston, who, along with her husband, Keith, heads up the center. Peter Martin is playing pool with several community members who are waiting for lunch to be served.

Jenna and Peter found out about the drop-in center because of their work with EMBRACE, and volunteer there as part of their wider work with the reconciliation program. The center provides a

place where new immigrants and other neighborhood residents can come for lunch, friendship and recreation.

A women’s aerobics class takes place in the evenings. And there are computers where people stop to check e-mail and browse the Internet.

For Jenna and Peter,

Debra holds the glasses to her eyes and laughs. “I can’t see anything.” She moves the glasses away from her eyes, continuing to peer through them. “And now I see in 3D!” she jokes.

Debra is an immigrant from South Africa by way of Norwich, England. She likes the drop-in center because it allows her to get out of the house with her 2-year-old daughter, Oratile.

In the midst of the busy chatter of people, Jenna Liechty Martin is setting tables for lunch and chatting with



working at the drop-in center ties directly into their wider work with reconciliation because of the way it connects people through relationship.

“The drop-in center brings people together who wouldn’t otherwise meet, providing a space for friendship and community,” Jenna said. “It’s also a place where some of the barriers of culture, language or religion, which sometimes divide, are crossed to form a thriving and dynamic community.”

Debra Leso comes to the drop-in center because it allows her to get out of the house with her 2-year-old daughter, Oratile.



Debra Leso and Joy Rufus admire Dave Cunningham’s glasses.

'If I die before you do'

Speak out for Colombians suffering violence

By David Shenk



Despite a warm, sunny afternoon in Colombia's Valle de Cauca region, the words of Juan's poem, titled "If I die before you do," sent chills down my spine and tears to my eyes.

Juan's eloquent poetry portrays the nightmare that he and his family have been living ever since paramilitary groups began occupying their small town in southwestern Colombia. When Juan was forced to flee his home and leave his wife and two children alone in the house because of direct threats against his life, paramilitaries took advantage of Juan's absence to occupy his home with his wife and kids and wait for his return. After members of the paramilitary began to show torture videos to Juan's 5-year-old son, his wife, in desperation, escaped with their children. Currently living in hiding in the safe house

"You are the only hope we have left. Please tell your government to stop sending Colombia military aid and weapons."

where I met Juan and his family, they are struggling to get by as they live in fear of being found, yet haven't lost hope of returning to their village someday.

In August, I spent 10 days in Colombia with a Witness for Peace delegation. I met with many people who have lived through equally horrific experiences in a country plagued by a complex war that has left more than five million people displaced and tens of thousands dead.

Fueling the fire are influences from both multinational corporations and the U.S. government. In 2007, Chiquita Banana admitted to paying off the AUC paramilitaries (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia), a group designated by the U.S. State Department as a terrorist organization in 2001. Taxpayers in the United States have contributed more than \$7 billion in military aid to the Colombian war on drugs since the year 2000; however, that money has proven to be a wasted investment, con-

sidering that cocaine production has increased in recent years, along with massive displacements.

As I continued my journey through Colombia alongside other delegation members, we listened in disbelief as the women of a small Afro-Colombian village recounted the horrific story of the massacre carried out by paramilitary groups in which they lost seven community members. As trucks loaded with cargo roared by on the highway next to our humble meeting space in an outside wooden patio, the women explained that paramilitary groups had committed similar massacres in other communities located beside the only major highway connecting the main port city of Buenaventura to the rest of Colombia in an attempt to forcefully displace the communities, widen the highway, and make way for an expected increase in commerce pending the approval of the proposed free trade agreement between the United States and Colombia.

The implementation of such a trade agreement would have devastating effects for Colombian small farmers who would no longer be able to compete with the price of subsidized imported goods from the United States. With no other viable options in the agricultural

market, many small farmers would be forced to either abandon their land in a country already plagued by displacement, or make a living in the only other profitable market available to them, the cultivation of coca for the production of cocaine.

When Juan shared his poem with us, his words hit me like a jolt of electricity: "You are the only hope we have left. Please tell your government to stop sending Colombia military aid and weapons. They are only causing more violence, death and suffering for our families. Our dream is to live in peace and without fear."

Juan's yearning is just one of millions of cries for an end to the misery that is devastating a beautiful country, people and culture. Juan's dream depends on my actions. Juan's life depends on your actions. The future of Colombia depends on our actions. May we help Juan's words to ring out loud over the painful sounds of a war-torn country, and a people suffering death and injustice.

David Shenk is a volunteer with Mennonite Mission Network and Virginia Mennonite Missions and works with the Colombian Refugee Project, a shared ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Central Ecuador and the Quito Mennonite Church, which addresses refugees' long-term needs. This article originally appeared on the Episcopal News Service website.

Community change

It's not about me

By Shannon Richmond



One of the valuable lessons I learned this year while working at the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence was that my year of service wasn't really about what I could bring to my community. From the first neighborhood association meeting I attended, I realized that there were great people living and working in my neighborhood who had grown up here and knew far more about the problems and successes of the neighborhood than I did. It was definitely a lesson in humility. Who was I to walk onto the scene and assume I could change things for the better?

I'm not denying that my presence has an impact on the community, because I believe all of us impact the communities to which we belong. But this past year has taught me to stop assuming that I have more of the truth about nonviolence or community change than anyone else.

I've realized that I have a small piece of the truth, just like everyone else. It is only in listening and engaging with others that these pieces can come together. It wasn't about me bringing something to people who are underserved or oppressed; my service experience has been about getting humble and learning from the wisdom that surrounds me.

And I've learned a lot: how to explain and facilitate different restorative justice processes, how to edit grants, and how to fundraise for a nonprofit. I've learned more about the method of Nonviolent Communication, including experience in sharing it with others. And I've learned about peacemaking on the ground: that it starts with each of us. I've learned that if I don't hold nonviolence in my heart, I have no right to ask anyone else to do so. I've learned that when you connect with someone as a human being, mountains will be moved. And a lot of it comes back to that humility that I've learned this year. Again, it's not a humility that says I don't matter—it's a humility that leaves me feeling grateful and open.

Nowadays, I never know who will be my teacher on nonviolence and community change. It is a fun mystery to be involved in—this state of gratitude of how my time of service really wasn't about me teaching anyone else anything. It was about learning how to let others teach me.

Shannon serves with the Rochester, N.Y., Mennonite Voluntary Service unit.

Teach us to swim

European Anabaptists navigate seas of secularism

By Ervin Stutzman



I am grateful that this issue of *Beyond Ourselves* focuses on mission in Europe. My own perceptions of Europe have been indelibly shaped by our family's experience in the country of Wales. In 1988–1989, I had the most unusual privilege of serving as the ministerial liaison officer for an ecumenical evangelism effort called Tell Wales with Luis Palau. As part of my role, I crisscrossed the picturesque terrain, meeting ministerial groups and speaking in churches of many different denominations.

On one of those trips, I drove out of my way to see the memorial to Mary Jones at Llanfihangel-y-Pennant. As a child, I had read the story of Mary, a Welsh lassie from the early 19th century who saved up her money for six years and then walked 25 miles barefoot to obtain her own copy of the Welsh Bible. It was hard to find a copy in those days. Her story invigorated the work of British foreign Bible societies in the early 1800s. I also visited the sites of chapels erected during well-known Welsh revivals in the early 1900s, and read about the phenomenal growth of those churches.

But what impressed me most about Wales is that it, like much of Europe, is now a post-Christian society. Many of the church facilities erected during a time of great revival now lie empty or are being used for secular purposes. Others are kept open by a few old people, hangers-on to a former era of faith. Even so, our experience in Wales showed me that the church can be vibrant and vitally alive in the midst of secular challenges. I saw demonstrations of God's power at work. I witnessed the power of Christian unity. And I saw the transforming grace of Jesus Christ at work.

I am grateful for the vibrant witness of the church workers in post-Christian Europe who are highlighted in this issue. Their quiet witness is inspiring new life that reaches to our shores. Stuart Murray, for example, is touching the lives of American Christians through his book, *The Naked Anabaptist*. Along with other Europeans who have recently embraced Anabaptist thought, he is showing the way forward in a society that no longer supports Christendom. As our own culture sinks into a pool of secularism, our brothers and sisters in Europe can teach us how to swim. By God's grace, our faith will not only survive, but thrive.

Ervin Stutzman is executive director of Mennonite Church USA.



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Children from Hively Avenue Mennonite Church fill their mission banks with money. Photograph by David Fast.



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