

Missio Dei

Exploring God's work in the world

Together,
■ sharing all of
Christ
with all of **creation**

Ryan Miller
and Ann Graham Price,
editors

Number 12 ■ Series editor: James R. Krabill



**Mennonite
Mission
Network**

Missio Dei is published by Mennonite Mission Network to invite reflection and dialogue about *God's mission* in today's world. Some features in the series focus primarily on the biblical and theological foundations of the mission task. Others present ministry case studies or personal stories of attempts to be faithful to Christ's call. Perspectives represented reflect the passion and commitment of the agency: to declare in word and demonstrate in life the whole gospel of Jesus Christ, "across the street, all through the marketplaces, and around the world."

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Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA, exists to lead, mobilize and equip the church to participate in holistic witness to Jesus Christ in a broken world. With offices in Elkhart, Ind.; Newton, Kan.; and Harrisonburg, Va.; the Mission Network supports ministries in more than 55 countries and 31 U.S. states.

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Foreword

When Ryan Miller of Mennonite Mission Network approached *The Mennonite* editors in early 2005 about a series on mission stories, we were interested but a little skeptical.

We embrace mission and encourage our readers to be part of congregations that participate in God's mission of healing and hope in the world. After all, page 2 of each issue of *The Mennonite* carries our mission statement: "to help readers glorify God, grow in faith and become agents of healing and hope in the world." Why skeptical? It's almost second nature to journalists to be skeptical. While we want to promote mission work, we do not want to be seen as simply promoting the organization called Mennonite Mission Network.

With his own background in communication, Ryan understood and made it clear that Mission Network wanted primarily to tell stories of their workers and the people they serve and work with around the world. And he gave us complete editorial freedom. He did not even ask to see our edited version before it went to press.

We agreed to publish an eight-part series of articles, one article each month, plus a sidebar and photos. We decided to begin in November, which Mennonite Church USA had designated mission month.

The title of the series, "Together, sharing all of Christ with all of creation," chosen by Mission Network, is based on the agency's tagline. What it says is important and reflects a holistic view of mission that resonates with Anabaptist beliefs. The first word, "together," reflects a key Anabaptist emphasis: community. No lone-ranger missionaries in this organization.

Another key word in the series title is "all." Sharing "all of Christ" implies that some (many) share only a part of Christ's message. This says that Christ is not merely some ticket to heaven but is concerned about the whole person, body and soul. And not just people. Notice it says "with all of creation." John 3:16 says that "God so loved the world." That word "world" (*kosmos* in Greek) does not just mean humankind but all of creation. So this title is biblical in its emphasis.

The first article in the series ran as the cover story in our Nov. 15, 2005, issue. It showed how common prayer links two continents, Africa and North America, and made the point that prayer is at the heart of mission.

The second article, in our Dec. 20, 2005, issue, tells how Africans and Americans model faith for each other. This fleshes out the “together” and the “sharing” parts of the series title.

The third and fourth parts (Jan. 24 and Feb. 21, 2006, respectively) take us from Africa to Europe and tell stories of a Swedish youth ministry and street-corner evangelism in Spain.

Part five (March 21, 2006) is key because it demonstrates how mission is concerned with caring for God’s creation.

Part six (April 18, 2006) tells how Illinois Mennonite congregations are learning about mission from southern Argentina congregations, thus “reversing the paradigm” of North Americans going overseas to help others.

Part seven (May 16, 2006) shows that peace is not some add-on to the gospel, but an integral part of it, and that many people are being caught in militarism and want to find freedom from its pernicious grasp.

The final article (June 20, 2006) brings back that word “community” and the unlikely way young mission volunteers are finding it with homeless people in Denver.

In these stories you can travel around the world and witness God’s spirit at work through people living out their faith. Through them, may you grow in faith and become an agent of healing and hope in the world.

Gordon Houser, associate editor, *The Mennonite*

Note: The Mennonite is a semimonthly magazine for members of Mennonite Church USA and others interested in the Mennonite church. The original series encompassed eight articles. A ninth article, “Shadow Voices response overwhelms staff,” is included in this book to provide a fuller picture of the range of Mission Network ministries.

Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation

Ryan Miller and Ann Graham Price, editors

Known through God: prayer links 2 continents

Laura Kraybill

It is 3 a.m. and the Friday night prayer service is still going strong. In the sauna of cement walls and tin roof, sweaty bodies kneel against church pews, shouting to God. Children sleep in the aisles on reed mats while their parents pray through the night for friends, families, and an Australian Mennonite couple none of them have met.

Amasaman Mennonite Church's weekly all-night prayer services are not unusual among Ghanaian churches. However, since acquiring the Mennonite Mission Network *Mosaic* mission directory in 2003, their prayer ministry extends to mission workers they have only read about.

On a sultry afternoon in 2003, Edward Dartey, a 29-year-old Amasaman lay preacher, sat under the big oak tree outside his concrete-block compound in Accra and flipped through the pages of the directory, given by a friend. Dartey had discovered the Mission Network online and joined the Network's prayer partner ministry, which distributes daily prayer requests from mission workers to prayer partners via the *Prayer Vine*.

Dartey sought inspiration and information about the roots of Mennonite faith. He found it in the descriptions of three mission families, including Mark and Mary Hurst leading Anabaptism seminars in Australia.

So Dartey typed letters of support to the families. His messages said his church was praying for their work.

That singular e-mail encouragement sparked a relationship that has turned into cross-continental church support.



“Since we have taught folks from all over the Pacific and Southeast Asia, we already have folks praying for us from far-flung areas. But it is humbling to have [a church in Ghana] supporting us,” said Mary Hurst.

Dartey frequently traverses the dusty roads along the southern coast of Ghana to get to the nearest town’s Internet café so he can write to the Hursts. The three communicate through e-mails, cards, and messages of support from their churches. The Hursts send Dartey their newsletter, *Greetings from Oz*, and Dartey, in turn, shares about his church and life.

For their birthdays this year, the Hursts received a set of turquoise and indigo tunics, traditional Ghanaian clothing, as a symbol of support.

“[I wanted] to express the good correspondence we had,” Dartey said. “They are not alone. People care.”

While the Hursts do not mentor or send money to Dartey, they have found ways to support his efforts beyond their prayers.

“[Dartey] was working with the youth and said that they were trying to improve themselves by reading, but didn’t have many books,” Mary Hurst said. “So we did a cull of our personal library and sent three boxes of books for the church library.”

Amasaman’s library consists of 84 books, all sent by the Hursts, stacked on tables in a corner of the church building. Dartey is excited that Mennonites from several churches in his area can better understand their church background through books like J.C. Wenger’s *How Mennonites Came to Be*.

Growing support on a prayer vine

In 1995, Marietta and Sheldon Sawatzky, already long-time mission workers in Taiwan, began a new pastoral ministry in a small Taiwanese church. The congregation, mostly first-generation believers, offered challenges Marietta knew she and Sheldon could not face on their own.

The Sawatzkys began a weekly memo asking for prayer, sent to their personal supporters by e-mail. The spiritual support they received kept them nourished during their ministry.

Today, as Mennonite Mission Network’s prayer network facilitator, Marietta Sawatzky coordinates a prayer ministry that nourishes mission workers across the globe.

Praises and concerns from global mission workers are sent to more than 400 individuals or groups – plus hundreds of Mission Network staff members, board

While Dartey communicates the most with the Hursts, he frequently contacts other mission workers.

“Edward has been an enthusiastic prayer partner, sometimes following up with personal notes to mission workers who have been mentioned in the urgent e-mail requests,” said Marietta Sawatzky, prayer network facilitator.

members and mission workers – who commit to praying either daily or weekly for Mission Network programs and ministry. Additionally, more than 600 churches receive the monthly *Prayer Vine* – a prayer request or praise for each day of the month.

Each partner collects *News from Around the World*, four pages of excerpts from mission workers’ prayer letters; those with e-mail receive urgent prayer requests as needs arise.

Sawatzky said anyone can become involved in the prayer ministry.

“It does not require eloquence of words, but rather a humble heart to pray for God’s working and others’ needs,” she said. “Through prayer, we partner with God and God’s work moves forward.”

For more information about prayer partners, visit www.mennonitemission.net/Stewardship/Prayer

Cliff and Natasha Dueck, mission workers in the Ukraine, received a note from Dartey after the birth of their second child.

“[We were] surprised that he was concerned and loved us enough to write, knowing us only through conference literature, which I myself often don’t have time to read,” Cliff Dueck said.

Dartey started writing to the Hursts and other missionaries because he “wanted to be strengthened, and to share and to know what is going on in others to build the Lord’s ministry.”

When Dartey grew up and learned there were countries outside of Africa and ministries going on in those countries, he was eager to hear how other Christians shared the gospel.

Dartey wanted to learn about North American-style ministry as well as share what he knew. His interest in the strategies of the earliest white missionaries in Africa was one reason he wrote to the Hursts, natives of North America.

Lately, however, Dartey has not been able to afford e-mailing missionaries as much as he would like. Though his true work is as a youth pastor and preacher, these jobs do not keep the lights on. He worked trucking water to neighboring towns and villages until he lost that job

several months ago. Now he looks for odd jobs laying concrete to support his wife and daughter.

Despite financial setbacks, Dartey finds comfort in the Bible. His commitment to ministry, both locally and abroad, remains strong.

“It is not difficult to encourage others when I am struggling,”

Dartey said. “Daniel was in the lions’ den praying for a return to Israel. Jesus struggled, but died for us to gain salvation.”

Looking beyond current struggles, Dartey dreams of attending university to study mission. For now, though, his mission is to collect enough money to buy drums for his church, a purchase he hopes will draw more young people, and to continue building relationships with Christians in Ghana and around the world.

“[These relationships] reflect that we do indeed live in a ‘global village,’ and can share our gifts with one another across international lines,” said Sawatzky.

Dartey sums up ministry in a few words: “This is not a one-man show. We all need to put our shoulders together.”

Africans and Americans model faith for each other

Lynda Hollinger-Janzen

The compelling drum rhythms enticed even the stiff-bodied American observers into the circle of glistening dancers two-stepping to the beat of community health messages. Edward Tachin's gifts as a lead singer were confirmed by the prize he won that day in Dassa, Benin, where one of Mennonite Mission Network's partners sponsored a competition for the best original musical composition about the prevention of Benin's top killer: malaria.



The local radio station broadcast Tachin's song as a public-service message the week after the competition. However, fame can wear a frightening face in the area around Dassa, a region known for its powerful sorcery. Soon after Tachin's award-winning performance, one of his children died.

Tachin stopped singing. He explained the logic of

his reaction to Christine and Phil Lindell Detweiler of Mennonite Mission Network, who ministered in central Benin from 1994-2004.

"The diviner told me someone was jealous of me and took revenge by cursing my child. In order to protect my other children, I no longer sing," Tachin said.

The Lindell Detweilers and their Beninese colleagues had many opportunities to share with Tachin about the hope available to him in Jesus.

"We told him that he could know this Jesus who is more powerful than any other spiritual force, and that Jesus would walk with him and his family through all challenges," Phil Lindell Detweiler said.

But this news seemed too good to be true. Tachin couldn't believe it.

Soon after, François Okoumassou, a village health promoter and colleague of the Lindell Detweilers, invited them for a meal of pounded yams. As they ate, the Lindell Detweilers noticed an unknown girl playing with Okoumassou's seven children.

The child was Tachin's daughter. A priest of traditional religion had foretold that this girl would die within that year. Though Okoumassou assured Tachin that faith in Jesus would protect his family from curses,

the father still deemed the decision too risky. Tachin continued to beg Okoumassou to care for his daughter.

“He knew no harm would come to her in the home of a Christian,” Okoumassou said. The little girl thrived during the year the priest predicted her death. Her survival opened the door of faith for her father.

A few months before the Lindell Detweilers’ departure from Benin, a group of Christians gathered to watch Tachin take action on a decision he had pondered for five years. He set fire to his *gris-gris* (objects used in African traditional religions to thwart curses and guarantee prosperity).

“He needed to burn these things to show that from that day forward his trust would only be in Jesus,” Phil Lindell Detweiler said.

Tachin explained that he finally took his leap of faith because he was spending a large portion of his income for *gris-gris*, but that investment didn’t provide the protection that he desired.

After a joyful time of worship, the Christians returned to their homes.

“We affirmed with the apostle Paul that we know in whom we have believed and are convinced that he is able to guard what we have entrusted to him to the very end,” Lindell Detweiler said.

Witnesses to Christ's healing across the world

In 15 years of Mennonite mission work, Phil and Christine Lindell Detweiler have learned that it is too simplistic to say that being a Christian shields us from all evil.

During their first years of ministry in Liberia, they saw many attempts to live out faithful discipleship destroyed by the evils of a horrific civil war.

When rampant violence wiped out the possibility of work in rural Liberia, the Lindell Detweilers moved to Benin, where they walked alongside an existing church-based community development organization.

They worked in a collaborative manner. They patiently encouraged long-term sustainability rather than quick results. They did not inject huge doses of outside funding. They helped communities create a bank that gave small loans to women to begin cottage industries. The increased income from these businesses enabled women to send their children to school and buy medicine when family members fell ill.

The community-development organization prospered for several years as Beninese Christians lived out their faith through its ministries. But competition and conflict arose within the organization. Some in the agency, including the Lindell Detweilers, received threats.

Within a matter of hours, however, a somber Okoumassou announced his arrival in the Lindell Detweiler courtyard. He brought the news that Tachin's youngest child had been taken to the hospital. Medical personnel diagnosed severe anemia.

Phil Lindell Detweiler accompanied Okoumassou to the hospital, prayed and sat with the family. He left when the child appeared to be improving.

In December 2005, after a scheduled sabbatical year in the United States, Christine and Phil Lindell Detweiler and their three children – Nathan, 12; Annika, 9; and Lydia, 8 – will begin a new community-development assignment with Mennonite Mission Network and partner agency Breakthru International in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

The Lindell Detweiler family anticipates using the mission tools they developed in West Africa in their new location.

"We are conscious of being earthen vessels, but we pray that the Lord would use us with all our failings and imperfections," Christine Lindell Detweiler said. "We are so awed with how the Lord works through the global church to bring healing and hope. We really want to be a part of that work in whatever way the Lord can use us."

Though they won't be returning to Benin, the Lindell Detweilers have faith that as they share their faith with their new South African neighbors, the seeds previously planted will be watered and harvested by Beninese brothers and sisters.

For Phil Lindell Detweiler, the measure of a mission endeavor's success isn't in the number of organizations built or dismantled. Success is found "in the number of transformed lives 10 years after we leave."

Okoumassou visited the Lindell Detweilers yet a third time that same day to announce the child's death.

"We were just floored by the news and cried out to God asking how he could let such a thing happen on the very day Edward affirmed his trust in the Lord," Christine Lindell Detweiler said.

But, Tachin didn't waver in his faith. At the infant's funeral, he repeated his commitment to following wherever Jesus might lead.

"If I had turned to the Lord earlier, this child may not have died," Tachin said.

Tachin attends church regularly with his family. Though he has not resumed singing, his silence is not due to fear of death. He wants to be more grounded biblically before he starts composing Christian songs.

"Edward has been a real inspiration to us," Phil Lindell Detweiler said. "Maybe the North American church should institute a ritual in which we destroy all that

tempts us to trust in something other than Jesus. Shouldn't we, too, make a public statement of our total reliance on Jesus, eschewing the protection of insurance and other material crutches in which we, North Americans, tend to put our faith?"

Roots of Swedish youth ministry trail back decades

Ryan Miller

In the front of Anna-Lena Andersson's Bible – a childhood gift from her grandmother – is space for her family tree. Perhaps more appropriate for the pages of that good book would be a record of Andersson's faith genealogy. The trunk of that tree – the base from which the branches grow – is Grottan, the youth café ministry of the Salem free church that offers a safe place for teens in the town of Jokkmokk, Sweden, to gather and a ministry she now leads.

The tree features branches of prayer, direct mentoring and small nudges from senior church members, trusted friends and even family members. Dig more deeply, though, and the tree's roots become visible, trailing through the dirt to a Bible study nearly 30 years ago that did not involve Andersson or her family at all.

In 1977, newlyweds Tom and Disa Rutschman moved to Jokkmokk where Disa had been hired as a grade-school teacher. Within a week, they joined a group of believers and seekers that had started an ecumenical Bible study. Märith and Lars-Ture Lindholm were part of that group.

Märith was a Christian. Lars-Ture was not, but he wanted the peace that he saw in his wife. Lindholm had been baptized a Lutheran as an infant. He and Märith were, in fact, leading a youth group for the state church in Jokkmokk. But he had no faith.

In Sweden, as in many European countries, most infants are baptized into the state church – often Lutheran, Catholic or Anglican. Baptism, however, does not translate into belief. Most Swedes, while officially part of the Lutheran state church, only see sanctuary interiors for weddings, funerals, baptisms and confirmations. Lindholm wanted more.

After the Rutschmans arrived, the small group examined the New Testament book of Romans and read about adult baptism. Tom Rutschman said Lindholm often pushed the group, asking questions of faith and debating their answers. One day, Lindholm tried to convince another skeptic of the truth found in Christ.

"I found myself defending Jesus. I realized I was a believer," Lindholm said.

The Lindholms chose to be baptized again, this time by the Salem free church. When the state church found out, they kindly suggested the couple find a new place to worship.



Young adults also minister to youth

When Jokkmokk youths find their way to Grottan through the winter chill, they find a group of North Americans ready to greet them. In November, four young adults became the fifth RAD (Reaching and Discipling) team to serve in Sweden.

Tom Rutschman said the youth teams – besides the RAD groups, Jokkmokk also has hosted eight Youth Evangelism Service teams through Eastern Mennonite Missions – are crucial to the Grottan ministry. Team members help teach English in the local schools, interacting with the same students that Grottan hopes to attract.

Lars-Goran Hannler, whose children spent time at Grottan, said RAD team members are “good examples” that draw local youths to the café and impress them with energy and attitude. Some of the local students often spend afternoons and evenings at the RAD house. Often those times involve footballs or Frisbees, but Rebecca Shumaker, a RAD team member in 2004-2005 and the following year on staff at Great Lakes Discipleship Center, said one evening with the students was different.

“This day we invited them to stay and eat supper with us. One of the boys brought up God,” she wrote in a prayer letter. Though they seemed negative about the idea of God, they asked questions and discussed ideas. They had been thinking about God and needed to hear more from the RAD point of view.

Jim Yngvesson, now in ninth grade, is one of those regulars at the RAD house because they have welcomed him.

“If everybody was like them,” Yngvesson said, “it would be a very nice world.”

“I didn’t know what to do and how to act. I had no history. (The Rutschmans) were really needed when they came,” Lars-Ture Lindholm said. “Tom is my teacher. . . . Disa spreads light from Jesus Christ just by being there.”

Tom Rutschman said the group felt strongly that Salem needed to offer youths the chance to discover Christ. Salem members had been renting the church’s basement as storage space. Lindholm had a better idea: Grottan.

Swedish for “the cave,” Grottan began in 1978 as a youth café open two nights a week. It began without the Rutschmans, who left to serve four years in Spain with Mennonite Board of Missions, a predecessor agency of Mennonite Mission Network. Lindholm said the church initially resisted the ministry.

“There were young kids that were drunk. We had a lot of fights,” Lindholm said. “They (Salem members) were terrified. What was going on in their beautiful church? I’m not blaming them, but I told them God would have to stop me. . . . I didn’t do anything but love (the youths).”

After a time, the youths began to love Lars-Ture and Märith back. Teens policed themselves, keeping out the drunks, breaking up fights and preventing thefts. Grottan became a place to hang out without trouble.

The Lindholms did not hide their faith inside Grottan. They printed Bible verses on the walls and offered times for prayer, but neither did they force Grottan visitors to worship. When faith questions arose, they answered them.

Andersson and her friends began asking questions out of fun, gently mocking Lars-Ture for his beliefs. Soon, she said, her tone shifted. She and some friends began staying hours past Grottan's 11 p.m. closing time just to talk to Lars-Ture about God.

Andersson cannot recall meeting a Christian before she first drove her moped to Grottan. Despite her grandmother's gift of a Bible, her family never spoke of faith. She wanted to know more.

As Lindholm remembers, "She came in, sat down on a sofa, and asked for a Bible. Then she just sat there and read."

She devoured the New Testament in a month. She read, listened to cassettes and prayed. Finally, during a Grottan campout, she gave her life to Christ. Soon after, she began attending Salem free church.

"Lars and Märith became my spiritual parents and have been so until today. I still seek their advice," Andersson said.

The Lindholms sought advice elsewhere. Grottan was growing and they felt their biblical knowledge was too sparse to help the young believers become disciples. The Salem leadership contacted the Rutschmans in Barcelona and asked them return to Jokkmokk as mission workers. Since 1983, Tom and Disa have worked alongside Salem church leaders and with youth both at Grottan and in the public schools.

"Life has more to offer [the teens] than getting drunk on the weekend," Tom Rutschman said. "Something should be done to at least give the young people a chance at discovering faith."

Andersson's discoveries continued. Thanks to encouragement from the Rutschmans and other leaders, she became an elder, preached at a time when some thought women should not stand behind a pulpit, and eventually sought more formal theological training.

Today others call her the leader of Grottan, a title she rejects.

"My goals are to be there for the kids and, if possible, become a hand reached out from God to them," she said.

If Andersson's faith roots reach to that 1970s Bible study, she said others have helped nurture Salem's growth from the aging congregation that first greeted the Rutschmans and Lindholms.

"The elderly people of the church prayed and prayed for years preparing the ground for what was to come," Andersson said. Nearly a dozen members of a thriving youth group now assist with the Grottan ministry, allowing Andersson to spend most of her time with the unchurched youth.

Recently, Andersson wrote an e-mail on a morning after a night where more than 40 visitors spent an evening at Grottan. "Last night

a guy who visited Grottan for the first time commented on the Bible verses painted on the walls, just as I did some 23 years ago ...”

She trailed off. If this young man returns next week, or perhaps the week after, he may notice more about Grottan and the lives of the youths and adults behind it.

And perhaps a new branch on Anna-Lena Andersson’s tree of faith will grow.

Evangelist's persistence leads friend to faith

Ann Graham Price

Sara Orcajo Blanco doesn't remember much about the questionnaire that changed her life. She doesn't even remember any of the questions that were on it. It meant nothing to her at the time.

Some 20 years later, that questionnaire provides a singular reminder of the power of evangelism: Blanco is the sole convert, nurtured through personal connections, from a decade of street ministry through the Burgos Mennonite Church.

Blanco had been raised Catholic, and the church people on the streets that cold winter day were asking Blanco and her friend questions about faith.

"They were asking if we knew God, or something like that," she shrugged.

Like many of her peers in Spain, Blanco had grown up in a house divided, with one parent nominally Catholic, the other an avowed atheist. But it wasn't a big deal. She attended church for a handful of important occasions – christenings, first communion, confirmation, weddings and funerals – and at few other times. It was what everybody did.

She figured she knew about as much as anyone else as far as religion was concerned.

She remembers that she recognized one of the people administering the questionnaire. It was a neighborhood acquaintance, Richard, who had recently kicked a drug habit through a Christian ministry.

And what stands out most vividly in her mind, all these years later, is Richard's persistence in sharing his new-found faith in Jesus.

He was with a group of people from the newly formed Burgos Mennonite Church, and they were all talking about Jesus in a way she had never heard before.

"It was the hippie years, democracy was opening up, and people were ready to rebel against the Catholic church," said Connie Byler, who has served through Mennonite Mission Network in Burgos with her husband, Dennis, since 1981.



Byler described the years after the death in 1975 of longtime dictator Francisco Franco as a time when many of the traditional power structures in society collapsed. One of those was the powerful Catholic church, which had been the official state church for as long as anyone could remember.

“The Holy Spirit visited Spain and swept across the youth groups,” she said. “Young people were living in community. Parents were getting nervous. The media called it a cult.”

In this atmosphere of political restlessness, the Bylers and others from the Burgos Mennonite Church – at the time, a fledgling congregation – boldly went out to proclaim the gospel.

“Going out into the streets in the mid-’80s was an expression of democratic freedom here, and served to crack the all-Catholic mentality,” Byler said. “We tried everything, including evangelizing on the streets, although it didn’t seem to work.

“We used every artistic, creative and musical ability we could come up with, every method we heard about,” she said. “We were obeying the voice of the Spirit. That’s what God was telling us we had to do. It was a joy.”

That was how Blanco happened to meet them one day, when she was in her early 20s.

Richard invited Blanco and her friend to watch The Jesus Film. (According to its Web site, the film JESUS is a two-hour docudrama about the life of Christ released in 1979, with the goal of reach-

After first contact, follow up

According to the people involved with Mennonite Mission Network through evangelism ministries around the world, such ministries can be an effective way to bring people to Christ. The key element is follow-up: the presence of ongoing personal relationships to nurture new Christians and help them grow in their faith.

In Barranquilla, Colombia, for example, Blas García helped coordinate a door-to-door survey in a neighborhood where few people attend church. The survey has contributed to the start-up of a new congregation, according to García, a youth coordinator with the Barranquilla Mennonite Church. Participants were invited to attend Bible study groups afterward. Those groups have been well-attended, and many participants have given their lives to Jesus.

García also helped organize the local celebration of the Colombian Mennonite church’s annual day of *Pan y Paz* (bread and peace). On the streets of Barranquilla they shared bread and Scripture passages on peace as a testimony for alternatives to violence.

ing “every nation, tribe, people and tongue, helping them see and hear the story of Jesus in a language they can understand.”)

Blanco and her friend declined this first invitation. But Richard persisted, inviting the two friends to church events. Finally, Blanco heard a direct invitation to accept Jesus into her life.

“I didn’t move out of my seat, although something was born in my heart that day,” she said.

She began attending Burgos Mennonite Church, where she developed personal relationships with the Bylers and others who helped her faith develop and grow. Soon after, she accepted Christ into her heart.

According to García, people in Colombia are eager to learn about Jesus. “Many people come because of problems,” he said. “They’re looking for help, and they’re finding that help.”

But there is another benefit. Doing this kind of evangelism has had a powerful effect on church members, he said. It gets them excited about what is happening in their church.

“We from the church are excited that in such a short period of time we’ve been able to accomplish so much,” he said.

In India, evangelism has been important for many years, but for the last five years evangelism and church planting have been priorities, according to Bihar Mennonite Mandli’s president, Emmanuel Minj.

The process includes person-to-person contact and visiting a family for prayer. Fellowships are started as follow-ups to these initial visits. Most are small home churches and Bible-study groups. Thus far, 34 have received Christ and taken baptism. Seven new fellowships have been formed within the last two years.

She has been a part of the church ever since, where members challenge each other to continue growing in faith. Eventually she became part of the church-planting team.

Today, she lives in a house with another Mennonite woman, intentionally choosing community as an expression of her Christian faith.

She values living in community, she said, because she can learn things from others, and she likes sharing her hospitality and sense of joy with them.

Does she believe she is a more effective witness for Jesus because she lives in intentional community?

“Yes,” she said. The close relationships in a shared living arrangement provide “the opportunity to serve someone, to be a reflection of the Person who is investing in my own life.”

Indeed, she credits close relationships, rather than the street ministry, as the real reason she is a Christian now.

“The same words were used to speak to so many people and nothing happened,” she said. “In my case, I believe it took that personal contact.”

It is a privilege to share her home with others, which she sees as an opportunity to serve someone else and to be a reflection of the One who has invested in her life. If God has a special calling on her life now, Blanco said, it is “to be obedient and submissive to Jesus, to my authorities in the church, and to the people who live in my home.”

For the rest, she is content to continue being faithful and leave the details – the chance encounters with others who may not yet recognize their own spiritual hunger – up to God.

A caretaker of God's creation

Bethany Keener

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and it was very good. Then God created man and woman in God's image and gave them the task of caring for the earth.



Jason Schmidt takes that task seriously.

“Farming allows me to understand the continued miracle of life and how God originally designed right relationships within creation,” said Schmidt, who has been serving in La Jara, Colo., through Mennonite Voluntary Service since 2004.

Schmidt grew up on a small family farm in White-water, Kan. He is familiar with the gentle mooing of dairy cows, amber waves of wheat, and dancing tassels

of corn stretching toward the horizon. Like his great-grandfather who bought the farm in 1892, farming is in his blood.

And like his parents, Jeanne and Ralph, farming is a matter of faith.

To Schmidt, the historical Anabaptist practice of living in alternative ways includes choosing a lifestyle of sustainability in right relationship with all of creation – which includes the environment, farmers, the global community and our bodies.

That's why he was excited when the invitation came to start a Colorado extension of the Santa Fe Family Farmers Co-op last year. He logged hundreds of miles between small family-owned farms, cap pulled down to shield hazel eyes from the piercing southwest sun as his white truck lumbered through mountain passes and flat, dry mesas. He recruited owners of small, organic farms in the San Luis Valley and west toward Durango to start a fresh produce club and establish wholesale accounts for natural food stores in the region. The goal was to provide small-scale farmers with a means to market their produce at a premium price through a joint effort.

His MVS assignment has given him a sense of fulfillment as he seeks to live in right relationship with all of creation.

Paul Cross, organic farmer and New Mexico co-op member, said the farmers who participate do so not because of the money (which isn't much), but rather because of a standard of caring for the earth based in spiritual values.

This conviction is echoed in article 21 of the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*: "As stewards of God's earth, we are called to care for the earth and to bring rest and renewal to the land and everything that lives on it."

Because of financial hardships and the challenge of such a cooperative endeavor, the Colorado co-op needs major restructuring. But Schmidt isn't giving up. "We have a calling as

Christian peacemakers to bring forth sustainable and ethical economic activities and environmental practices," he said.

Without checks that encourage a system of fair wages and environmental caution, the economic and environmental health of farm communities is compromised. These injustices may "lead to disempowerment, impoverishment, and finally to actual acts of violence," Schmidt said.

Wheat field was their mission field

Mary Miller remembers her parents as generous people. Their family was large and didn't have much, yet there was always enough to give away.

"I suspect part of that rubbed off on me," Miller said. She's grateful her husband, Bob, also finds joy in giving from the fruits of their labors on the farm they worked for 47 years. On their 187 acres they fed beef cattle and grew corn, wheat and soybeans.

Watching his green rows of corn and feeling the heavy heads of wheat, Bob felt a connection between his faith and his work.

"We think of farmers being independent, but we're not. We rely on God," he said. Just as God quietly sent the rain and sun, the Millers have quietly given back. By giving to missions, they support many people serving God.

Because they couldn't leave their farm, they were never able to go serve. One year after their children were grown, they decided to give a year's worth of profit away. They took their grain to the mill and sent the check to missions.

They call it their year of voluntary service.

Bob and Mary Miller live in Orrville, Ohio, and are members of Smithville Mennonite Church.

“In the [western hemisphere] we rely on an unbalanced distribution of resources,” according to Luke Gascho, volunteer facilitator of the Mennonite Creation Care Network and executive director of Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center in Wolf Lake, Ind. “That sometimes means wages that aren’t sustainable and abuse of migrant laborers,” Schmidt said.

Grocery budgets, he continued, can either support these practices or move toward a different paradigm. Gascho said this means having to work harder at being intentional about what we buy while living within financial limits.

Purchasing locally grown food solves several of these problems by ensuring fair wages to farmers who are taking care to replenish the earth. It also cuts down on the amount of limited natural resources needed to transport food.

Schmidt thinks the organic and other niche markets may be where small family farms will have to head in order to stay viable against large corporate farms. Despite its difficulties, the market for natural and organic foods is growing as Christians and non-Christians alike look for products that are economically and environmentally sustainable. Many consumers are also in the market for health reasons.

Louis Steele is one such consumer, and the general manager of Nature’s Oasis, a natural food store in Durango, Colo., that purchases food from the farmer’s co-op. Several of his family members who grew up in farming communities are now battling cancer. He’s concerned about how food grown with the help of pesticides could affect his four children.

Not surprisingly, Steele’s convictions also come out of a biblical understanding of caring for all of creation.

As coordinator of the San Luis Valley Food and Ag Policy Council, Schmidt is now developing markets for local farmers, and working with schoolchildren to increase their knowledge about nutrition and agriculture. By summer’s end, he hopes to establish a connection between schools and farms that will help children from an economically depressed region learn how to care for their bodies and the earth in a way that treasures both as part of God’s creation.

Schmidt knows the questions of how to best live in right relationship with all of creation have no easy answers. Ultimately, each individual must decide what it means to be a caretaker of the Creator’s garden.

Reversing the paradigm

Ryan Miller

During each biennial visit to central Illinois, the Argentine leaders would ask their hosts the same question: “Can you show us your missions?”

Illinois Arm in Arm congregations and southern Argentina churches took turns hosting the annual trips as part of a Patagonia mission partnership. In North America, the Illinois group would show their visitors church members involved in other churches’ prison ministry programs, volunteers working for parachurch organizations and positive social-service efforts that existed in the community.

“No,” the Argentines finally said. “Show us *your* missions.”

“We didn’t have anything,” said Michael Dean, East Bend Mennonite Church’s pastor. “Nothing that we were doing on our own.”

For generations, many Westerners have seen mission as their domain – bringing the light of Christ to the outer regions of the world. Today, global mission workers are reversing the paradigm.

Mennonite Mission Network supports international churches in sending workers originating from non-Western countries including Argentina, China, Colombia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Nepal, the Philippines, Switzerland and South Africa. A few now are ministering to North Americans in need of the gospel, or in need of a new vision.

South Africa comes to Virginia

Flinn Ranchod had a vision. From his home with Breakthru Church International in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, he and his wife, Karen, felt called to plant a church but did not know where. Connections with Stanley Green, executive director/CEO of Mennonite Mission Network, provided a mission field in Virginia.

Through the Tidewater ministry plan of Calvary Community Church, Hampton, Va., the Ranchods found a home in nearby Chesapeake. After training with Calvary’s Bishop Leslie Francisco, they began their own ministry. In South Africa, Ranchod said, Christians depend on God to provide for them. But believers in Virginia have plenty of options for support when things go bad. Ranchod’s spiritual camp for new believers helps them deal with their spiritual past, but he said extra options make it easy for leaders to avoid emphasizing reliance on God.

“We can tell them that you can say nice things and have positive willpower ... but there’s nothing more important than reflecting, believing and preaching the cross,” he said.

In April 2005, a handful of leaders from the East Bend and Hopedale Mennonite churches and Illinois Mennonite Conference sat around tables at a Mount Vernon, Ill., Subway restaurant, praying for

“The gospel covers every culture,” Ranchod continued. “I believe God is giving other nations the chance to impact the world.”

Breakthru Pastor Russell Toohey said the church also has sponsored workers in Madagascar, Zambia, Tanzania and the Ukraine.

“We are totally convinced of the need, power and priority of missions. There can be no doubt of God’s heart for missions,” Toohey said. “What’s important to God is important to us.

“The Calvary connection has opened the doors to other relationships with Americans – relationships that have been a great mutual blessing,” Toohey continued. Christine and Phil Lindell Detweiler are now serving through Mennonite Mission Network in Pietermaritzburg.

Francisco said the partnership that allowed for Ranchod’s presence helps Virginia Anabaptists broaden their understanding of church while keeping Christ at the center of their ministry. Ranchod’s presence, and the partnership between nations and mission agencies, is the embodiment of the Great Commission.

prayed the Holy Spirit would transform their communities and connect them to others who would be receptive to their message of salvation.

The Choele Choele church grew as members related to their neighbors in new ways. It expanded one relationship at a time through their communities. Some might say it expanded all the way into Illinois. Sieber’s church was part of the Patagonia partnership, established around decades-old connections between Illinois and Argentina congregations with the help of Mennonite Mission Network. While Argentina Anabaptists initially emerged from North American mission efforts, a relationship change was in order.

the community. They were hours from their homes, on their way to explore beginning a ministry somewhere in the southern part of Illinois.

Within the group was Juan Sieber, a pastor from Patagonia. Sieber was in the midst of a year-and-a-half spent mentoring the Illinois churches – essentially teaching them about mission.

Sieber’s church in Choele Choele, Argentina, had broken away from only using their main church building, divided church members into geographic zones and started ministries within each area – daycares, mentoring, meals for children and plenty of prayer meetings. They

Said Sieber, “We feel the mother church has something to learn from her daughters.”

Sieber’s commission was a period of teaching and encouraging across Illinois. Some listeners resisted the message, according to Wayne Hochstetler, conference minister for Illinois Mennonite Conference.

After all, why would an Argentina mission strategy work in the United States?

“Juan’s response was that (mission) is not a matter of cultural context. It’s a matter of faithfulness,” Hochstetler said. The partnership, he added, allowed Illinois leaders to rethink their tasks with creativity and imagination.

The Southern Illinois Mission Partnership emerged.

They initially used the same acronym – SIMP – but called themselves a project instead of a

partnership. That quickly changed.

“A project implies going down, doing something and leaving,” Dean said. In southern Illinois, the leaders always intended to remain long-term, working with the movements God had already started. But any collaboration needed to be not only ongoing, but spirit-led.

“If this is going to be from God, there needs to be that sense of faith in what happens,” Dean said. “Otherwise it’s just a bunch of guys getting together to do good.”

Dean said North Americans tend to create order and make plans, perhaps because they are often wealthy enough (financially and culturally) to rely on their own resources to accomplish their goals. Sieber counseled trusting God to provide the details.

They identified southern Illinois as a place with little Anabaptist presence, then left the rest to God.

“This was striking out and praying,” said Ray Nachtigall, pastor of Hopedale, Ill, Mennonite Church. So the group stopped to eat and pray in fast-food restaurants on their way south. They prayed for



each community and for the grace to follow God's will. Following prayers in the Mt. Vernon Subway restaurant, Hochstetler talked with an individual who was eating alone. The man mentioned a couple in the community ministering through a small house church. Later, the group met with the city manager – the same couple's names came up in conversation.

The group made contact and explained their vision to support a ministry outreach. The couple responded with tears in their eyes – for a decade, they had prayed for someone to help in ministry.

The partnership now has purchased property with a vision to build a simple building – space for a meeting place but primarily for a residence that eventually will be filled by a mission family. The leaders also hope Mt. Vernon becomes a mission training center, a place to equip, educate missionaries in the SIMP ministry. As other congregations volunteer with the SIMP group in Mt. Vernon, they can see how the relational approach brought from Argentina can be used in any community.

In the meantime, Sieber has returned to Argentina, though he hopes to be back in Illinois in 2007.

“We needed Juan to stimulate our thinking and our imagination. We needed him to demonstrate how missions could take place.” Hochstetler paused. “I think Juan would be very offended if he heard us saying we needed him to keep it going.”

The Patagonia Mission Project partnership consists of Arm in Arm (a group of Illinois Mennonite Conference individuals and congregations), *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Argentina* (Argentina Mennonite Church), *Iglesia Menonita de la Patagonia* (Argentine Mennonite Church, southern zone) and Mennonite Mission Network. The South Africa partnership includes Breakthru Church International, Calvary Community Church of Hampton, Va., Mennonite Mission Network and Virginia Mennonite Board of Missions.

Going through the gauntlet

Ann Graham Price

For Vincent LaVolpa, the defining moment came at a tense check-point in Iraq as a car sped toward him.

Instinctively taking dead aim at the car's occupants, LaVolpa stopped himself a split-second before firing. Instead he shot out the car's tires, bringing the vehicle to a halt.

Inside cowered a little girl and her frightened parents.

LaVolpa was horrified. *It's my job to kill people*, he thought.

In that moment, somewhere deep at the core of Vincent LaVolpa – decorated Army hero, respected unit leader, quintessential soldier's soldier – something clicked.

"Vince came to the Military Counseling Network after he had been in Iraq for a year," said Michael Sharp, who works at the organization for soldiers seeking conscientious objector (CO) status. "He was confused. He didn't know if he was a CO or not, but he knew he wasn't ever going to do *that* again."

A partner of Mennonite Mission Network, the counseling network based in Germany was set up under the umbrella of the GI Rights Hotline, based in Washington.

For Sharp, such an assignment seemed an obvious choice. He grew up in a Mennonite home, where peace theology automatically ruled out any question of military service. Helping soldiers work their way through the complex CO application process offered a more positive witness than merely protesting war.

Better approval process one focus of advocacy work

To Clifton Hicks, the eight months it took to get his conscientious objector application approved made going to work nearly unbearable.

"I've got this big weight on my shoulders," he said. "Whose desk is it sitting on? Has it been lost? Thrown away? I was paranoid about people trying to sabotage the case. My life was hanging in the balance."

That's the kind of drawn-out torment the Center on Conscience & War based in Washington hopes to target, said counseling coordinator Bill Galvin. The center is focusing its efforts on lobbying Congress for laws that will require the military to approve applications in a timely manner.

“[Soldiers] were always ‘the other,’ set up to be our exact opposite: They believe the opposite of what we believe,” Sharp said. “It’s dehumanizing. When you meet them and spend time with them, you find out that these guys are people, too. They have the same kind of questions and struggles we do.”

LaVolpa’s questions began long before the checkpoint incident in Iraq. They had begun while he was still stationed in Germany.

In addition to the counseling network, Mennonite Mission Network is involved in a variety of other peace-building initiatives, including:

- The Peace & Justice Support Network.
- Anabaptist Centers located in major metropolitan cities in Europe and Asia.
- Peace advocacy and reconciliation ministries in areas of conflict.
- Peace-building and conflict-resolution workshops and seminars.

For more information:

ccw:centeronconscience.org
www.mennonitemission.net

The recruiter had promised him money for college and a job as a combat engineer, which was explained as someone who builds bridges. Although LaVolpa had hoped to enter as a medic, this alternative didn’t sound too bad.

“You can always change jobs if you don’t like what you’re doing,” the recruiter assured him.

As it turned out, the main job of combat engineers is demolitions. It was strenuous work, and he discovered he had little time or energy left over at the end of the long work day for college coursework.

LaVolpa tried to change to another job.

“That’s when I found out that you could only change to another job that the Army specified,” he said.

In practice, it meant that LaVolpa could only exchange his current high-risk demolitions assignment for one that was equally high-risk.

Then, only six weeks after he completed training in Germany, his unit was deployed to Iraq. That was where things began to crystallize.

He saw people in his unit get shot. He was himself shot. He began to ask himself some hard questions. Why had he really signed up? If it was for the college money, then why was he supposed to be killing people? Was he responsible if someone else gave the orders?

He decided he had to take responsibility for doing what he was being asked to do.

“I was taking the easy way out. There are scholarships and financial-aid programs to help people put themselves through college,” LaVolpa said. “You don’t want to take someone’s life because you chose a shortcut to college.”



According to Bill Galvin, counseling coordinator at the Center on Conscience & War (part of the GI Rights Hotline), LaVolpa’s experience is not uncommon.

“It’s one thing to say, *I want to serve my country*, and even to know that means going to war,” Galvin said. “It’s quite another thing to be in this training where war is glorified and you’re being taught that it’s exciting to kill people.”

“(Recruiters) play up the money for college, the excitement, the travel,” he added. “If your job

specialty is computer skills, you’re told you’ll have a desk job. But you can be sent to the field. It’s not illegal, but it’s certainly wrong.”

Sharp said it’s hard for civilians to understand the difficulty of the process these recruits face.

“To question what they grew up learning is turning the world on its head,” Sharp said. “It’s hard to understand how the military can be your whole world. You have to follow orders. To stand up and say you’re not going to be a part of this anymore goes against that. They’re completely dependent on something they’re about to deny. The military can take away your livelihood and make your life totally miserable. (COs) don’t have a lot to gain by thinking all this stuff through.”

It doesn’t help that the Army chaplains assigned to make a recommendation based on interviewing them may be especially on the defensive.

“There’s this sense of, ‘Are you saying I’m not a Christian because I’m in the Army?’” Sharp said.

Yet the chaplain is also a critical person in the process, according to Dick Davis, a former army chaplain who himself applied for and obtained CO status after the Gulf War. Davis now works with Mennonite Mission Network as a minister for urban ministry.

“It requires a tremendous amount of work to interview someone properly,” Davis said. “Some chaplains are extremely loyal to the system and will resist anyone applying for CO status. Sometimes they’re belligerent and vindictive. They see that person as a threat and will do everything they can to stymie the process.

“On the other hand,” Davis continued, “I’ve known some chaplains who totally disagree [with CO applicants] but try to provide a genuine service and facilitate the process, giving a fair and objective determination. I’ve known both kinds.”

When COs emerge from this kind of trial by fire, they are generally much stronger in their beliefs.

“Having gone through the gauntlet, they have no choice but to grow,” Sharp said. “It’s adversity to the nth degree.”

Although Clifton Hicks (see sidebar) said the CO approval process was one of the most difficult things he has ever done, it was also one of the most important.

Would he tell other soldiers having second thoughts about war to do the same?

“Yes, and take no other steps,” he said without hesitation. “A CO discharge is the only honorable discharge the military has to offer, and it is the best thing you can do, not only for yourself but for the country and the military.”

Finding community in an unlikely place

Bethany Keener

For many people, “homeless” is a dirty word. It’s a word often automatically associated with the stigma of mental illness or substance abuse, a word that strips dignity and makes us want to look away.

Not so for the four young adults participating in the DEO (Discipleship, Encounter, Outreach) program in Denver. Among people who are pushed aside and forgotten by the public, Loren Bontrager, Aisha Entz, Lena Sweet and Daniel Wiebe have found community working for local agencies that support those who have little.

It starts with the support of congregations that send participants to serve through DEO, a partner program of Mennonite Mission Network. Their first two months are spent studying the Bible, worshiping, and developing spiritually in a community rooted in Christ.

During their eight months of outreach, a broader community – religious groups, institutions, nonprofit organizations and hundreds of generous individuals – supports the agencies they work for. These pieces form a safety net for those who have nowhere else to turn.

According to the Metro Denver Homeless Initiative point-in-time survey, 10,268 people were homeless on the night of Jan. 24,

2005, in a city with an estimated population of 556,835.

Robin Hagedorn was one of them. A year ago her financial situation forced her to sell the house where she and her father both grew up, a house she had hoped to pass on to her daughter one day. Without a job, leasing an apartment didn’t last long.

Hagedorn found a friend who offered her a place to sleep at night and a community of support at the Gathering Place, Denver’s only



day shelter for women and children who, according to Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, make up half of the city's homeless. Without Gathering Place's support, Hagedorn does not know where she would be.

DEO volunteer Lena Sweet of Bethlehem Presbyterian Church in Buffalo, N.Y., said that sense of support is intentional. "The staff, the women who come here, and the rich suburban women donors – we're all the same. We're all looking to be accepted," she said.

The day shelter's philosophy is to accept everyone for who they are. It requires nothing from women in return for services like showers, laundry facilities, phone use and meals in an attempt to foster a sense of community for up to 300 women each day.

Myrtle Thomas comes to the Gathering Place for writing classes and card making, but most of all for the company of the other women. "When you come in and they know you, it makes you feel like somebody. Like you're very important," she said.

DenUM (Denver Urban Ministry), where Daniel Wiebe of Ebenfeld Mennonite Brethren Church in Hillsboro, Kan., volunteers, also has a high regard for dignity. DenUM's food pantry gives away 300,000 pounds of food each year, but director William Lewis said they throw away quite a bit of food as well.

"There's no dignity in giving expired food," Lewis said. During his months at DenUM, Daniel created a system for sorting and storing donated food.

Daniel has seen the faith and thankfulness of the people DenUM serves. And his faith has grown in this community as he has learned how to "trust God to give me strength to interact with people in a way that gives them dignity."

At the Samaritan House Clinic, Loren Bontrager of Clinton Frame Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind., calms a man whose anxiety about an upcoming surgery has sent him into near-hysterics. Somehow, he gets others to smile as they take their seats in the waiting area. In the hallway, he greets some of the 300 residents by their first names.

Program manager Lisa Thompson said the collaboration of Denver's medical community keeps the clinic running. The University

Supportive RAD team stays together

The Thailand RAD (Reaching and Discipling) team has had troubles this year. One member of the team lost her father the day the group landed in Bangkok for language study. Another had emergency surgery. One dealt with family issues of injury and faithfulness back home. Several felt assaulted by physical or spiritual forces.

If the quartet of young adults had not stayed together, they said, they all may have gone home. Instead, they remained in Borabu, Thailand, focused on each other and on the Lord.

Destiny Peshina of Goshen, Ind., quickly identified the source of her strength through her own struggles: "These three people (the RAD team) and God."

of Colorado sends volunteer nursing students. Saint Joseph Hospital provides volunteer doctors, physicians' assistants and resident students.

Survival also takes trust in what Thompson calls a "higher power." Just when Thompson begins to worry that their supplies will run out, local churches and other charitable organizations pitch in.

When West Africans come to Metro CareRing, where Aisha Entz volunteers, to pick up food boxes or for referrals, Entz assists with linguistic skills. "The best part of my job is when I can make someone smile when they hear I'm from Africa," she said.

Having spent her formative years in Orodara, Burkina Faso, Entz speaks French and Jula, a West African trade language. Entz sees a deep value in being there as a "sounding board" at a support agency for those who don't have other places to go.

Yet there is more to be done – and Entz holds the church accountable. She points out that the church she's familiar with is a middle- and even upper-class church. "Christianity holds no bounds, no matter how wealthy you are. The church should be there for the down-and-outers.

"The situation looks so hopeless," Entz said. "What is the church doing? Why isn't there a dent?"

These young adults will bring their experiences and questions back to their home communities. According to Del Hershberger, director of Christian Service for Mennonite Mission Network, programs such as DEO allow young people to discover how God is at work in the world, then use their gifts for God's mission. Additionally, during the last two months of the program, participants return to their home churches to share what they have learned about God's love and healing through communities of faith.

The Gathering Place has been like a church for Sweet this year. Within that community, everyone is accepted. There is no dress code or behavior expectations, and no façade. "You can come at your worst," Sweet said. And some do.

To Sweet, this is what the gospel is all about: building a community based on acceptance of all, simply because they belong to God.

Shadow Voices response overwhelms staff

Melodie Davis

John Clark, 49, has been homeless, without a vehicle at times, without adequate funds, and often hospitalized with bipolar disorder and chemical sensitivities following an on-the-job injury in 1989. On

New Year's Day, he watched Mennonite Mission Network's *Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness* documentary on ABC-TV. He could relate.

After phoning to order a copy of the program, Clark wrote in a follow-up letter: "Like all the mental-health problems mentioned and the people shown on your program, my disability problems are debilitating and frustrating as well." He wants to learn

more from the video so he can advocate for people with mental-health impacts and disabilities.

To date, more than 800 other viewers (and some respondents who've only heard of the program by word of mouth or the Internet) have been moved enough by the Mennonite Media-produced program to order a DVD or VHS copy for themselves. Almost 150 have posted their own story on the program's Web site, www.ShadowVoices.com.

Hundreds more (not tabulated) called Mennonite Media's toll-free number just to talk or get information. Staff members have answered phone calls live at the close of most of the releases, including New Year's Day and many Sundays, in order that people might connect with a real person when they call.

After viewing *Shadow Voices* (aired at various times at the discretion of local stations), many callers wanted to talk at length and tell their stories. Some broke down, such as one woman who said, "This is the first time I've ever talked to someone about my illness."

At the program's Web site, a man named Gary responded to another woman who had written about her depression and was just "waiting to die." The woman responded to Gary, thanking him for his encouragement, which he in turn shared with Mennonite Media.



A woman in New York State found out about the program online, e-mailed a note and then phoned. She desperately wanted to find a Mennonite church in her area, about an hour north of Manhattan. Staff members sent her information about the closest churches in Pennsylvania.

“I want to thank you for reaching out to families in this way,” she said repeatedly.

A man named Ross e-mailed saying, “I can’t really remember the last time I said ‘thank you’ to someone. I’m bipolar and tried suicide five years ago. I saw your TV special [and] for the first time, I smiled and cried. Finally someone knows what I feel like and I know it’s not just me. It is such a taboo subject and my friends, [which are] very few now, dare not even bring it up.”

Burton Buller, director of Mennonite Media, said the response was gratifying, especially “after a year of intensive work, to have more than 70 percent of ABC local stations air the program for free, and viewers responding like John Clark.”

Clark compares his injury to the same type that an unsupervised child might incur as a result of inhaling toxicants from paint cans or aerosols, causing brain injury or death. Living in an Illinois-run apartment for senior citizens and the disabled, and living on a monthly disability payment, Clark said he is adjusting to living slowly in a world set to WARP 10 (a treatment method for chronic pain).

A humorous yet serious look at what we feel and encounter in our day-to-day life operations

Mind-boggling ambiguities
Purloined process faculties
Like an onion; layers deep!
Depressive, yet I can be sweet
Recollection adversities
Under-cranial capacities
Corollary diversities
Past-due eventualities
Enigmatic empathies
Intellectual disabilities
Frowned, can’t bear the mental
grief!

Diversions for relief I seek!
Manic-minded company
By plethora of pills I speak!
So exhausted, need some sleep!
Environmental things plague me!
Catty-whumpous neurosis!
Lying here, I sob and weep!
Twitter-pated, not at ease!
Brain-connection allergies!
Insufferable idiosyncrasies!
Hurtin’, need some sympathy!
Frustratin’ incompatibilities!

“It has been a slow and painful journey of discovery, discouragement and depression, but also filled with hope, abilities, vision, potential, continuing hard work – blood, sweat and tears,” Clark said. “I live an austere, close-to-poverty lifestyle as many mental-health and disability-impacted people do. I have gone hungry many times, at one point growing and eating snails (when he lived in a warmer climate) for protein.”

Now he grows a garden to help provide food for the Rockford Rescue Mission, and works at a variety of hobbies, including some level of proficiency on seven musical instruments.

He says he tries to “do the best I can to offer others around me support and encouragement on getting from point A to point B along this difficult path of mental-health challenges and disabilities.”

Callers wanting to connect with professional help or support groups were referred to National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) at 888-999-6264, a national advocacy group that consulted with Mennonite Media throughout the production of the documentary. The group has extensive chapters and programs, including an entire network of faith-based support groups called FaithNet.

Shadow Voices is a one-hour documentary that focuses on people’s experiences with stigma, recovery and rehabilitation regarding mental illness, parity in insurance programs, and how faith communities can do a better job responding. Ten people with mental illness from all across the United States tell

Sinkin’, sautéed, mental fiends!
 Neuron-bustin’ perplexities!
 I can’t connect and cannot sleep!
 Debilitated harmonies!
 Butter-basted bipolarities!
 Gifted, apt profundities!
 Slow motion synergies!
 Detrimental incongruities!
 Need a little inner Peace!
 Wound, but wounded faculties!
 Eccentric probabilities!
 Magnetic eccentricities!
 Bipolaric magnamity!
 Filibustered frequencies!
 Syncopated, not at ease!
 Ambidextrous inopportunity!
 Hit ’n’ miss security
 Unrequited magnamity:
 Amiable passabilities (possibilities)
 To engender some abilities!
 So I can build more competencies
 To finagle some creativity;
 With actions complimentary!
 And gain impressive amenities!

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their stories, plus many experts and advocates in the field add helpful perspectives, including former U.S. First Lady Rosalynn Carter; former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher; Dr. William Anthony of Boston University, founder of the modern rehabilitation movement; and Dr. Joyce Burland, founder of the Family to Family program for National Alliance on Mental Illness.

The program is produced by Mennonite Media in cooperation with the Interfaith Broadcasting Commission and the Communications Commission of National Council of Churches. The VHS version (\$19.95) contains the program and a DVD version (\$24.95) features two hours' worth of additional programming designed for use by churches, educators and small groups.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of the stories in this collection did you find the most fascinating? Which comes the closest to reflecting your own passion and commitments?
2. The Mennonite Mission Network has chosen as the title of this booklet its tagline: “Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation.” How well do you think this describes the Christian calling and the vocation of the church in today’s world?
3. Some of the key concepts that appear most often in these stories are prayer, faith-sharing, creation care, peace witness, mutuality, community-building, advocacy, healing presence, and offers of grace, encouragement and hope. How closely do these terms come to your definition of “the gospel?” Which terms do you question? Which others would you like to add?
4. Several stories here describe the growing connections between Christians in the United States and those in Africa, Latin America and Asia. How does it feel to be on the “receiving end” as a North American? To be prayed for by a Ghanaian brother? To be challenged to more faithful witness by the church in Argentina? Do you think Western churches are ready for this new chapter in the history of the Christian movement? Is your congregation? Are you?
5. How do you understand the biblical affirmations that “God so loved *the world*” (John 3:16) and that “God is reconciling *all things* to himself in Christ, things *on earth* and things *in heaven*” (Colossians 1:19-20)? What does this tell us about the cosmic scope of God’s reconciling initiative? What does it mean for the way we treat “the earth,” entrusted to our care?
6. Mennonite Media has seemingly touched on a critical social issue in its documentary, *Shadow Voices*, focusing on people’s experiences with the stigma, recovery and rehabilitation of mental illness. If you were a Mennonite Media staff member and could choose which crucial issues in our society need addressing, which ones would they be?

For Further Reading

- ◆ CAMPOLO, Tony, *How to Rescue the Earth without Worshipping Nature: A Christian's Call to Save Creation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992).
- ◆ DEWITT, Calvin; MEYER, Art; and MEYER, Jocele, *Earthkeepers: Environmental Perspectives on Hunger, Poverty, and Injustice* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1991).
- ◆ ERB, Delbert, and SHELLY, Linda, *The Patagonia Story: Congregations in Argentina and Illinois Link "Arm-in-Arm" for Mission* [Missio Dei series, No. 9] (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Mission Network, 2005).
- ◆ KRABILL, James R., *Is It Insensitive to Share Your Faith? Hard Questions about Christian Mission in a Plural World* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2005).
- ◆ KRABILL, James R., and SHOWALTER, Stuart W., editors, *Students Talk About Service* [Missio Dei series, No. 7] (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Mission Network, 2004).
- ◆ MURRAY, Stuart, *Changing Mission: Learning from the Newer Churches* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2006).
- ◆ MURRAY, Stuart, *Church After Christendom* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2004).
- ◆ *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network* [Missio Dei series, No. 10] (Elkhart, Ind.: Mennonite Mission Network, 2006).
- ◆ For further stories and resources, check out these sites:
 - www.MennoniteMission.net
 - www.Thirdway.com
 - www.mennoniteusa.org/peace
 - <http://BeyondOurselves.MennoniteMission.net>
 - www.themennonite.org
 - <http://www.mc-network.de> (Military Counseling Network)

The Missio Dei Series

- No. 1 Calvin E. Shenk, *Understanding Islam: A Christian Reflection on the Faith of our Muslim Neighbors* (2002).
- No. 2 James R. Krabill, *Does Your Church “Smell” Like Mission? Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church* (2003).
- No. 3 Donna Kampen Entz, *From Kansas To Kenedougou ... And Back Again* (2004).
- No. 4 Alan Kreider, *Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes?* (2004).
- No. 5 Peter Graber, *Money and Mission: A Discernment Guide for Congregations* (2004).
- No. 6 Craig Pelkey-Landes, *Purpose Driven Mennonites* (2004).
- No. 7 James R. Krabill and Stuart W. Showalter, editors, *Students Talk About Service* (2004).
- No. 8 Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, *“A New Day in Mission:” Irene Weaver Reflects on Her Century of Ministry* (2005).
- No. 9 Delbert Erb and Linda Shelly, *The Patagonia Story: Congregations in Argentina and Illinois Link “Arm-in-Arm” for Mission* (2005).*
- No. 10 *Together in Mission: Core Beliefs, Values and Commitments of Mennonite Mission Network* (2006).*
- No. 11 James R. Krabill, editor, *What I Learned from the African Church: Twenty-Two Students Reflect on a Life-Changing Experience* (2006).
- No. 12 Ryan Miller and Ann Graham Price, editors, *Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation* (2006).*

*Available in Spanish.

Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation

Ryan Miller and Ann Graham Price, editors

When Ryan Miller of Mennonite Mission Network approached *The Mennonite* editors about a series on mission stories, they were interested but a little skeptical. Although they embrace mission and encourage readers to be part of congregations that participate in God's mission of healing and hope in the world, they didn't want to appear to be promoting a single mission organization.

With his own background in communication, Ryan understood. Mission Network wanted primarily to tell stories of their workers and the people they serve and work with around the world, he said. *The Mennonite* would have complete editorial freedom.

The resulting series, "Together, Sharing All of Christ with All of Creation," based on the Mission Network's tagline, reflects a holistic approach to mission that resonates with Anabaptist values.

"In these stories," writes Gordon Houser, associate editor for *The Mennonite*, "you can travel around the world and witness God's spirit at work through people living out their faith. Through them, may you grow in faith and become an agent of healing and hope in the world."

Ryan Miller is news director for Mennonite Mission Network, responsible for weekly news packets available through an e-mail distribution list and online at www.MennoniteMission.net. Miller is managing editor of the online publication Urban Connections and works with writing, editing and photography for other Mission Network projects and publications.

As senior writer for Mennonite Mission Network, Ann Graham Price prepares the primary identity pieces for the organization, including the annual report, brochures, direct-mail pieces, articles and Web content. She serves as managing editor for the Missio Dei series and the Mustard Seeds newsletter. She also edits and maintains Style & Grace: The official style guide of Mennonite Mission Network.

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