



Mennonite Air Mission Board

The Mennonite Air Mission board provides a vital connection between the missionaries who are sent and those who support them. These men are involved in the work in many ways, both seen and unseen. They each bring valuable perspective, life experience, ministry experience, and spiritual and material support that enables the mission to function. We could not do what we do without their leadership!

First, we acknowledge the contributions of several board members emeritus (no longer active, but still welcome to attend meetings and provide counsel). Urie Sharp, Wesley King, and Pete Shirk are all in this category, having served for many years in various capacities.

The rest of the board, in the order of their length of service, is as follows.

Lee Lehman, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Lee is a member and deacon of Strasburg Mennonite Church (Cumberland Valley). He has served on the board since 2002. He and his wife Margaret are closely connected to Guatemala, with family on the mission field. If someone cannot remember when something happened or a decision was made, Lee is the one to ask!

Duane Eby, Hagerstown, Maryland. Duane is a member and the bishop of Mount Olive Mennonite Church (Cumberland Valley). He has served on the board since 2004 and is currently the chairman of the board. He and his wife Sharon served in Guatemala for seventeen years, and this experience as a former missionary is invaluable and the source of many stories!

Amos Hurst Jr., Lititz, Pennsylvania. Amos is a member and deacon of New Haven Mennonite Church (Mid Atlantic Mennonite Fellowship). He is married to Carolyn. He joined the board in 2006 and has served as the treasurer since 2008. The treasurer position is a difficult and demanding job, probably requiring more day-to-day work than any other non-missionary role. His consistency and dedication is highly valued.

Stanley Neuenschwander, Leetonia, Ohio. Stan is a member and the bishop of Hebron Conservative Mennonite Church (unaffiliated Mennonite). He has served on the board since 2009, and he and his wife Janice have additionally contributed to the work through several children on short-term stints in Guatemala ("as arrows in the hand of a mighty man").

Brian Yoder, Riner, Virginia. Brian is a member and minister of Wills Ridge Mennonite Church (unaffiliated Mennonite). Brian has been part of the board since 2014, but he and his wife Janelle served in Guatemala for twelve years prior. Brian's experience as a mission administrator, minister and bishop in the field, and life in Guatemala generally, has helped many on the "frontlines." He has the crucial role of "personnel recruiter" and has heard many reasons for why one cannot serve in Guatemala.

David G. Martin, Richland, Pennsylvania. David is a member and deacon of Rehlersburg Mennonite Church (Hope Mennonite Fellowship). David joined the board in 2021, and he and his wife Erma



L-R, Amos Hurst, Darel Myers, Duane Eby, Laurel Eby, Pete Shirk, David Martin, Brian Yoder. Not pictured, Stan Neuenschwander and Lee Lehman.

(continued on page 3)



EDITORIAL

Justin Zimmerman

Lessons From the Opossum

A rat scurried across the dusty road under the glare of the headlights. Or was it a rat? Stopping my truck, I got out and approached the creature cowering against the rock face on the right side of the road. It was not a rodent at all. Rather, it was a juvenile opossum! Leaving the creature to its own devices, I continued the night journey home. It turns out Central America is home to over a dozen opossum species, but the one I saw was likely the “common opossum” (*Didelphis marsupialis*), also called the southern or black-eared opossum.

Possums are rather unusual creatures, as they are marsupials. Marsupials are so called because the females have a “marsupium,” a pouch used for protecting their young after birth. Unlike placental mammals, these mothers give birth to extremely “altricial” young. Born in a helpless, immature condition, altricial young require the care of the parents for some time.

Marsupials have a very short gestation period, just a few weeks for most species. The “joey” is born in an essentially fetal state: blind, furless, and small. Despite its lack of development, it crawls across its mother’s fur and makes its way into the pouch where it latches onto a teat for nourishment. The pouch serves as an external womb for the next several months. The joey is fully reliant on its mother’s milk for nutrients and immunological defense. After this period, the joey begins to venture out of the pouch, feeding and learning survival skills. However, it returns to the pouch to sleep and seeks refuge in its mother’s pouch when frightened. Young opossums may hitch a ride on their mother’s back when ranging about.

What advantages do marsupial animals have over placental ones? An early birth removes a developing marsupial from its mother’s body much sooner than in placental mammals; thus, marsupials do not need a complex placenta to protect the embryo. It’s true that early birth puts the tiny newborn marsupial at greater environmental risk, but it also reduces the dangers associated with long pregnancies, eliminating the need to carry a large fetus to a full term in bad seasons. And certainly, opossums are prolific. They can have five to nine offspring at a time and do so up to three times a year. They do not mate for life and are generally solitary outside of mating.

Opossums eat anything that is edible, dead or alive. They can even eat toxic toads and venomous vipers! Their ability to digest anything allows them to survive in a wide variety of habitats, although the common opossum prefers forests. They nest in trees if they can

but will also dig burrows if no other suitable spot is available. This sometimes causes trouble when they choose to burrow under a house! They are mainly nocturnal, which is why I lived in Guatemala for over three years before seeing one—as I am generally not nocturnal myself!

Opossum’s chief predators are humans, dogs, and cats. And that leads to a very interesting defense mechanism that is so well-known you probably already thought of it: “playing possum.” Opossums will pretend to be dead so convincingly that dogs (or cats) hoping to have fun teasing and playing with a live “toy” will grow bored and move on. Then the opossum will “revive” and make its escape.

This defense mechanism reminds me of a spiritual problem some people have. Opossums pretend to be dead, though they’re still alive. But some people pretend to be alive spiritually when they’re actually dead. This is called hypocrisy, and it is abominable in the sight of God!

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matthew 23:27, 28). This is a very grave condition, indeed!

Missionaries often face the grave danger of hypocrisy, both within themselves and in those they are supposed to be helping. It is easy for us as foreigners to appear righteous in a foreign setting. And nationals have sometimes tried “religion” for the material benefits they perceive that “wealthy northerners” can bring. Both situations can only be sustained for a time. Both are greatly damaging to the church. Neither will not get past the Judge of all.

Only genuine disciples can successfully point the lost to Christ. Only a genuine relationship with God can truly overcome sin. Jesus did not mince His words when addressing hypocrisy. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matthew 15:7–9).*

How much better to hear, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord (Matthew 25:21).* May you be encouraged to live as a faithful, dedicated servant!

Board... continued

have also seen children and grandchildren serve in Guatemala. David assists Brian with personnel placement and is the assistant chairman of the board.

Darel Myers, Knoxville, Maryland.

Darel is a member and deacon of Yarrowsburg Mennonite Church (Cumberland Valley). Darel joined the board in 2022 and serves as the secretary. His wife Melisa has fond childhood memories of Guatemala, as her parents were involved in the early missionary efforts of the Mennonites.

Laurel Eby, Cabins, West Virginia. Laurel is a member and deacon of North Fork Mennonite Church (Southeastern Mennonite Conference). Laurel is married to Tara. As the newest member of the board, he is learning a lot of information and history, a process accelerated by several visits to Guatemala in the past year.

The board's annual "in-country board meeting" held in Guatemala City is always a busy few days, but the staff in the field is always encouraged by their visits. Most of the board was able to make it to Guatemala this February, and most of them also took extra time to visit at least one outpost. The social time with all the missionaries and board members on Friday night was definitely a highlight, and the singing was tremendous!

As the stateside connection for Mennonite Air Missions, the members of the board represent the churches and groups who support with prayer, personnel, and finances. Your input and interest matters. Look them up for a visit or give them a call if you wish to learn more about Guatemala. They will certainly be glad to tell you about the opportunities to get involved in the work!

Andrew Crider's Ordination

The Lirio de los Valles chapel was full. The parking area out front was full, even though many who attended were shuttled in from mission headquarters a few blocks away. The supper plates served to each one were quite full. The hearts of this congregation were full of gratitude and joy. This was an important event for the church.

On this evening of February 6, Andrew Crider would be ordained to help care for this congregation, joining Byron de la Rosa (lead minister), Jorge Avila (deacon), and Daniel Ticas (deacon) on the ministry team.

After a delicious supper, the service began promptly at 7:00. The service exemplified "doing all things decently and in order," with each brother taking his allotted times for singing (Larry Martin), meditation (Brian Yoder), message (Duane Eby), and ordination vows (Victor Ovalle). Brothers Isaías Muñoz and Duane Eby joined Victor as they laid hands on Andrew and commended him to the service of the church and its Lord.

Afterward, several brothers of the congregation expressed how they had been praying for another leader to help with the load and were grateful for God's leading and answer. Although Andrew and his family have been living in the city and working with the church for only a little over a year, they have already been a blessing and help to many, both in the local church and in the broader work of MAM.

The ordination occurred just over a year after the sudden death of Andrew's father Keith at mission

headquarters. This, in addition to the usual burden of responsibility that comes with the work of a pastor, stirred emotions in the Crider family and the various missionaries and board members present. But God's grace has been and will be sufficient. Please pray for Andrew, Laurretta, and their children as they continue in the work. And please pray for more men to be ordained. Many needs are here, and the workers are few.



Andrew and Laurretta Crider

Staff News



Don and Betty Heatwole

Welcome to: **Don and Betty Heatwole** from Denmark, South Carolina. They are members of the Barnwell Congregation (South Atlantic Mennonite Conference). They will be serving as houseparents at Headquarters in Guatemala City for a few months.

Farewell to: **Jason and Leanna Stoltzfus**, as they have completed their time as houseparents at Headquarters. They are returning to Somerset, Pennsylvania, and will be missed! We appreciate the excellent job they did.

Keri Wenger, as he has completed his term of service in Santa Rosita, El Petén. He is returning to Morgantown, Pennsylvania.

Blessings to each of you as you settle into new routines and places of ministry!



Prayer and Praise Items



- ✦ Pray for the salvation of lost souls in Guatemala.
- ✦ Pray for wisdom for the teachers in MAM schools this year.
- ✦ Praise God for His work in the life of Isaí Rosales, a wayward young man who recently repented!
- ✦ Praise God for a successful and blessed Latin American Leaders Meeting! It was held in El Salvador this year.

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or email your request to newsletter@mennoniteairmissions.org.

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