

A lifetime of peacemaking begins in a war zone

“When you serve for three years as a civilian in a rural village in the middle of a war zone, it will have a profound impact on your life. You will never be the same after that,” Doug Hostetter said as he recently shared the story of his work in Việt Nam from 1966 to 1969.

Doug, a member of Evanston Mennonite Church, is a credentialed leader in Central District Conference and served 12 years as director of Mennonite Central Committee’s United Nations office. Currently he is a part-time UN representative for Pax Christi International.

He told the story of how he began a lifetime commitment to prevent wars in an online interview for the Common Humanity Peace Channel on YouTube. After graduating from Eastern Mennonite College (now University), he volunteered to go to Việt Nam. “So many of my colleagues were being sent to Việt Nam against their will; it was only right for me as a Mennonite to volunteer to do my alternative service with MCC in Việt Nam.”

Biggest surprise: Doug admitted that when he went to Việt Nam, he discovered that most



Doug Hostetter shared some of his experiences of working in Việt Nam with Mennonite Central Committee in an interview for the Common Humanity Peace Channel on YouTube.

U.S. soldiers did not fit the stereotype he had of being anti-social bullies. Việt Nameese soldiers also didn’t fit what he expected. “They were both nice kids,” he realized.

War is “largely because of the propaganda and stereotypes that we believe about the other side. We (the U.S.) thought of ourselves as valiant soldiers who were protecting them against communists. We were viewed as imperialists. If you have good people on both sides, both of which believe the other is the ultimate evil who can’t be negotiated with, then you can have a very good war.”

Discovering the need: MCC assigned Doug to a rural village, Tam Kỳ, in a Central Việt Nameese province called Quảng Nam. His assignment was to learn from the local people what they most needed and then to use MCC resources to try to meet that need.

In a wartime situation, the first thing the enemy does is to destroy the infrastructure—schools, hospitals and market places, Doug explained. “When I got there, the children in the refugee camps had not had schooling for two years.”

Doug was just learning the Việt Nameese language, so couldn’t teach the children, but he could teach English in the local high schools. He used those contacts to recruit high school



Doug with Bửu Bùi Tấn, one of the high school literacy teachers, and children.

Lifetime of peacemaking (continued)

students to be volunteer teachers during the summers and on weekends, and together they began literacy classes for children in the refugee camps.

This literacy program in Tam Kỳ grew to include more than 90 high school student teachers who taught more than 4,000 children how to read and write their own language.

Unexpected impact: Doug chose to rent a small cottage in a village. “I wanted to live close to the people. If I am going to be serving God, I can’t be living in a compound surrounded by guards,” he thought. Living in that way, without protection, breaks down some walls and fosters trust in the community, he learned. The National Liberation Front took over that village several times while Doug was living there, but his house was never harmed. Over time, as the literacy program expanded to more villages, he was able to travel by motorcycle through the countryside where members of the military could not go even in an armed personnel carrier.

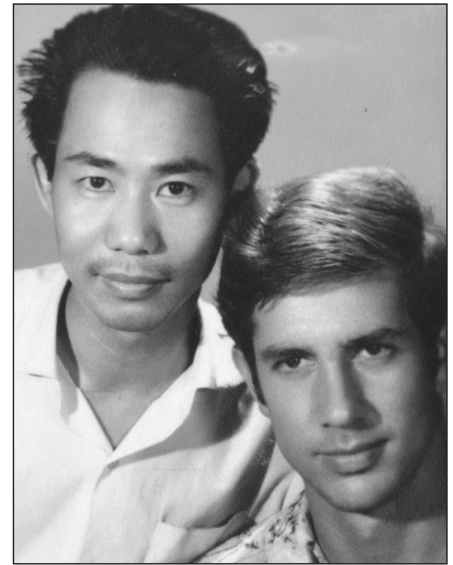
Doug’s presence and work in the area was breaking down stereotypes on both sides, but this created a new problem. Military leaders realized it affected the morale of the soldiers, because the soldiers realized the Việt Nameese did not hate all Americans. So the U.S. Embassy in Sài Gòn asked MCC to withdraw Doug from the combat zone.

A journalist, whom Doug met while traveling, wrote a story about this, which appeared in the *New York Times*. The story pointed out that the U.S. government should not interfere with the work of non-governmental organizations nor should it tell a church organization how to function. As a result of that publicity, Doug was allowed to remain in his village.

Danger develops: A month later, through contacts with one of the student teachers, Doug learned that his life was in danger. The father of this student told Doug that the CIA had a file on him and had established a program through which they would try to kill him. But the father told Doug that next time the intelligence agents came to the village, he would tell them that Doug was a deep-cover CIA agent.

Doug sought counsel from a local pastor who

told him that if he left, it would seem to confirm the rumor, and MCC would never again be able to send someone to that area. Next Doug talked with an artist friend in the community, Lê Đình Sung. His advice was, “You need to trust that your friends know who you really are.”



Lê Đình Sung and Doug Hostetter

45 years later: “I never understood what that meant until 45 years later when I returned to Việt Nam,” Doug explained in the interview. He discovered that although he was good friends with the artist and his sister, he never knew that the artist had brothers who lived in North Việt Nam and that one was a high level official there.

“When I returned to Việt Nam, I met the two brothers who survived. It was amazing to discover that, in addition to God protecting me, also my best friend’s brothers, who were on the other side, were active in protecting me while I was there.”

What can we learn: When the interviewer asked Doug what we can do in our contexts now, Doug said, “The primary task of a peacemaker is to break through the walls and stereotypes of the enemy. Whenever you get a chance to meet an enemy, welcome them into your home, eat with them, learn their experience, learn from their lives.

“Probably the most profound peacebuilding thing one can do is to build a human relationship with someone on the other side.”

More about Doug’s life: When Doug returned to the U.S. in 1969, he became active in the anti-Việt Nam war movement. He has spent his life working for peace in non-governmental peace organizations in Asia, the Middle East, Europe

Lifetime of peacemaking (continued)

and the U.S. He has taught at Goshen College and Northwestern University and has published widely on issues of war, nonviolence and peace.

More of Doug’s story is available online, including the intrigue of how he was able to get signatures on a peace treaty that included the U.S. National Student Association, the Sài Gòn Student Union, the Việt Nameese National Student Union in Hà Nội, and the South Việt Nam Liberation Student Union. Find more of Doug’s story with these resources:

- www.rememberingmccvietnam.net/the-making-of-a-peacemaker
- www.civilianpublicservice.org/storycontinues/vietnam/hostetter
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oA2yqRAmlu0> 

Financial report
October 31, 2020

Year-to-date contributed support .	\$84,168
Year-to-date plan	\$76,804
Difference between giving and plan	\$ 7,364
Year-to-date expenses	\$68,020
Year-to-date spending plan	\$79,296
Difference between expenses and plan	-\$11,276

After an initial trimester of activity the conference continues to have a very strong 2020-2021 financial year. This is reflected by year-to-date congregational contributions more than 15% above budget, coupled with total expenditure more than 15% below budget, in spite of the difficult challenge of the epidemic that is seriously affecting all of our lives and communities. We give thanks for the continued faithful giving of CDC congregations and for the commitment of our staff in their careful management of expenses.

Report provided by Timothy Lind, conference treasurer

CDC leaders sign call to repentance and transformation

The Membership Guidelines of Mennonite Church USA, established in 2001 at the time MC USA was formed, are currently under review. The guidelines present a more restrictive approach to questions of membership and marriage for people who identify as LGBTQIA than is affirmed and practiced in many CDC churches or supported by conference leaders.

The denomination’s Constituency Leadership Council spent time at their October meeting discussing a recommendation from the executive board to “retire” these guidelines. This would “bring the denomination’s polity and practices into alignment,” as stated in a news release from the meeting. (Read more about this meeting at www.mennoniteusa.org/news/clc-feedback-mg/)

In a corresponding effort, an organization called Inclusive Mennonite Pastors has shaped a “Resolution for Repentance and Transformation.” This document acknowledges how much harm has been caused by the guidelines. The opening paragraph states, “Current policies of Mennonite Church USA do violence to LGBTQIA people by failing to affirm their full, God-given identities and by restricting their full participation in the life, ministries and rituals of the broader church.”

After naming the ways in which current policies harm both the denomination and LGBTQIA people, it calls the church to confession and to take action to reshape denominational documents for greater inclusion.

The CDC Board of Directors and Ministerial Committee, along with several congregations and credentialed leaders and members in the conference, have signed it. This document will be presented to the Resolutions Committee to be brought to the delegates of the 2021 MC USA convention.

The document is available to read by visiting inclusivepastors.wordpress.com/resolution/. Information about how to sign are included at the end of the document. 

CDC's leaders work to root out racism

by Anna Yoder Schlabach, CDC president

About two years ago CDC's Missional Church Committee created a "racial, ethnic and religious reconciliation task group," and one of the concrete things that came out of this group was a document called "Taking Each Next Step: Anti-racism in Our Homes, Churches, and Conference." (See the August issue of *focus* to learn more about their work.) These provocations helped shape the agenda for the Leadership Council's Visioning Day in August. We spent our (virtual) time together telling stories about our own experiences of access and belonging. We had conversations about the culture of white superiority and the limitations and possibilities of corporate lament. We brainstormed about how to model the work that we want to encourage our congregations to do.

We recognized that our impulse to "do something and fix the problem" of racism too often leads to checking off the box of having done our work. Racism is insidious and the work is always ongoing, but we also recognized that committing to something concrete was important. We had already made the decision to participate individually and together in the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), and at our October Leadership Council meeting we'll meet with Darin Short to go over our collective results.

We also committed to participate in the Widerstand anti-racism training made available

through MC USA and hosted by Tobin Miller Shearer. The curriculum is billed as "self-paced, interactive and reflective, it focuses on practical action and implementation." Our plan is to work our way through the modules individually, and at each board meeting we will spend time discussing what we have learned and how God might be compelling our conference to do the hard work of examining and rooting out the racism that has made its way into each of the structures and habits of our conference and congregations.

One of the things I've appreciated about the Widerstand training is that I am required to slow down and think about what I have just heard. The modules don't allow you to move on until you've written "several thoughtful sentences about" This has forced me to take the time to really think about the ways that racism shows up in my church and church structures, rather than simply and passively taking in more information. It also includes short quizzes about the material that was just covered, which makes me feel like I'm in school again, which I love.

We encourage congregations to use the Widerstand anti-racism modules, and CDC is offering grants to congregations for whom the cost is prohibitive. Widerstand is also offering a free two-week subscription for two people from your congregation to try out these training materials. Learn more at widerstandconsulting.org/training-and-consultation.



Darin Short is a Qualified Administrator of the Intercultural Development Inventory, a tool for assessing intercultural competence. He led the IDI discussion at the October CDC Leadership Council meeting. This is part of the conference's commitment to undoing racism and modeling steps that congregations can take.



Acceptance of Difference

- ✓ Deep awareness of how culture has influenced one's self and the other
- ✓ Understanding that behaviors and values exist in and come from a particular context
- ✓ Deep understanding and appreciation of the history of race and racism, while viewing it as complex
- ✓ Feelings: non-evaluative curiosity

Yearning for ... a getaway?

Guest column by Jenna Liechty Martin, Executive Director, Camp Friedenswald

This year has required us to reconsider nearly every aspect of our lives; the same has been true for Camp Friedenswald.

In Camp Friedenswald's 50th anniversary history book, *Vision, Faith, Service (1950-2000)*, a conference leader from 1920s is quoted saying, while advocating for church-wide youth retreats, "The rising church (young people) wants something to do." Certainly the vision that birthed Camp Friedenswald was more than simply "something

to do"—but still, in light of the patterns in our lives today, I have to wonder: do the "young people" *still* want something to *do*? Or are they wanting—and needing—permission, a model, and a place that invites them to *stop the doing*? Are we all yearning for an invitation to pause and simply be?

Over the past year at Camp Friedenswald we have sought ways of providing retreat in the midst of a pandemic by offering weekend "Getaways"—an opportunity to spend time in the peaceful woods alone or with family. The Getaway includes a small fire ring, meals delivered to the doorstep, trails to explore and a lake to swim in or sit beside—all invitations to simply slow down, to reconnect with one's self, family, and God. In getting away, daily routines and habits are disrupted and the unstructured space and time open us up to the gifts of rest and reconnection.

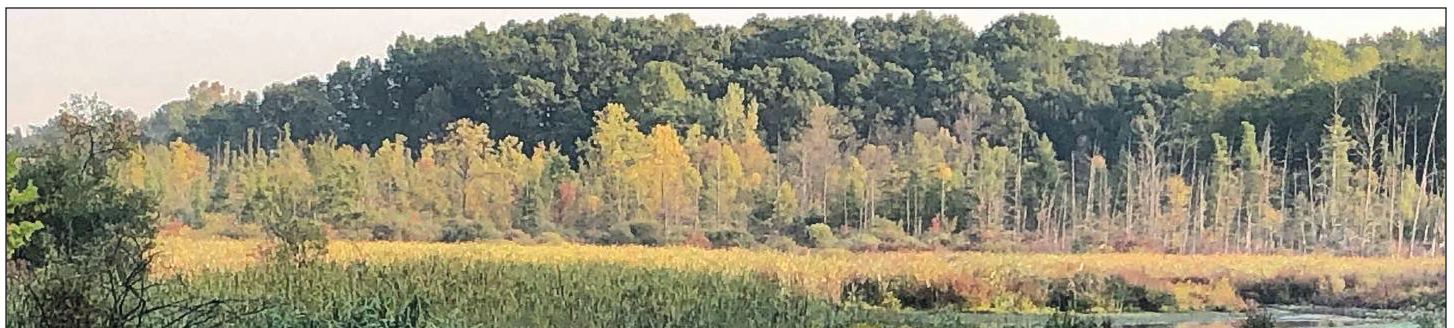
I'm not suggesting that we should do away

with structured programming that seeks to draw people together from across the conference, for there is much to be gained from gathering as a community; however, this moment has opened our eyes to a new way of imagining how we might continue to live into our mission. What if our "young people"—and all of us—long for a place to come to *stop all the doing*? What if we simply desire an invitation to slow down, wander through the woods, splash in the water, gaze into the fire, and to be reminded of the goodness of God's creation?

For it's only from a place of rest, renewal, and reconnection that we can ever hope to inspire the creativity and energy needed to be part of the change that helps foster churches, communities, and a world where black lives matter, where justice prevails, where the poor are fed, and where all creation is deemed worthy of our care.

In early October, CDC pastors were invited to participate in a "Getaway" at Camp Friedenswald. It was a weekend that held no expectation for doing anything. Pastors (and a spouse or friend) were simply invited to come and to be. As one pastor shared at the conclusion of the weekend, "I appreciated the quietness of Camp. I hadn't realized how totally zapped I had been. I really needed this time of quiet peace—the regenerative peace that comes only from being quiet with God in God's peaceful woods."

It's too early yet to say how the pandemic and the movement of change in our world will go on to shape the place we call Camp Friedenswald, but I certainly hope that we'll use this opportunity to pay attention to where the Spirit is leading. ☪

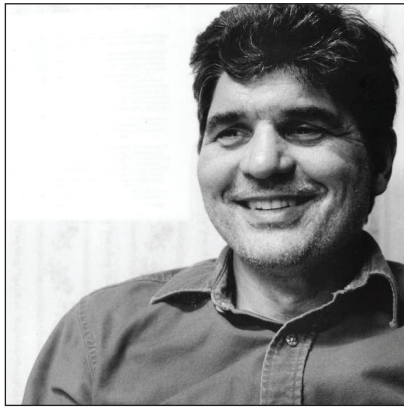


A view of the fen at Camp Friedenswald.

Installation and Licensing

Paul Brubaker was licensed for ministry and installed as pastor of Paoli Mennonite Fellowship, Paoli, Ind., on Oct. 11. He began full-time on Oct. 25.

The congregation collected cut-out handprints with words of blessing and support written on them. Search committee member Luke Mosemann presented these during the online service.



Julian Brubaker



Donna and Luke Mosemann share a blessing for Paul during the installation and licensing service.

Commissioning

Jeff Boehr was commissioned on October 1 as half-time Interim Pastor of Pastoral Care at First Mennonite Church, Bluffton, Ohio. Pictured with Jeff (center right) and Doug Luginbill, conference minister (center left) are Pastor Wanda Stopher (far left) and worship leader Kathy Dickson.

Jeff also serves Lima (Ohio) Mennonite Church as interim preaching pastor.



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