

Mennonites address child abuse

Collaborative launches resources for Child Abuse Prevention Month

April is “Child Abuse Prevention Month,” a sober reminder that while childhood is often viewed as the springtime of life—a time for exuberance, growth and joy—many children experience pain, shame and terror instead. It is especially tragic that much of this abuse is done by those who should be nurturing and protecting the child.

According to U.S. government sources, in 2007 more than 1,700 children died as a result of abuse or neglect—more than four children every day.

Over 75 percent were under 4 years of age, and in almost 70 percent of these cases, one or both parents were involved. In addition, 794,000 children were victims of maltreatment or neglect—more than 1 percent of all children in the United States. Unfortunately, many believe these figures are low due to underreporting and varying definitions of abuse.

In light of these realities, a new effort is being launched called the Dove’s Nest Collaborative.

Dedicated to “empowering and equipping Mennonites to keep children safe in their homes, churches and communities,” the goals are as follows:

1. Educate Mennonites about child abuse and neglect.
2. Provide Mennonite churches with resources for worship, education and outreach on how to keep children safe.
3. Empower and equip Mennonites to protect children within their own churches.
4. Empower and equip Mennonites to protect children within their communities.

A primary tool is a new Web site from Dove’s Nest Collaborative at <http://www.dovesnest.net/>. Among other features, the site includes the following:

Sample child protection policies: These documents include a short policy by Jeanette Harder, a more thorough one prepared by Julie Prey-Harbaugh in partnership with the child protection leadership team of Franconia Mennonite Conference and one on mentoring by Marlene Bogard, minister of Christian nurture for Western District Conference.

A list of speakers and trainers: This list includes several who are certified trainers with Faith Trust Institute and Darkness to Light.

Data from the Mennonite Church USA 2006 Church Member Profile: This survey indicates that 20 percent of women in Mennonite Church USA congregations have experienced sexual abuse or violation as children or teens. For men, the incidence is 5.5 percent.

Worship resources: These resources include a bulletin insert for raising awareness during Child Abuse Preven-

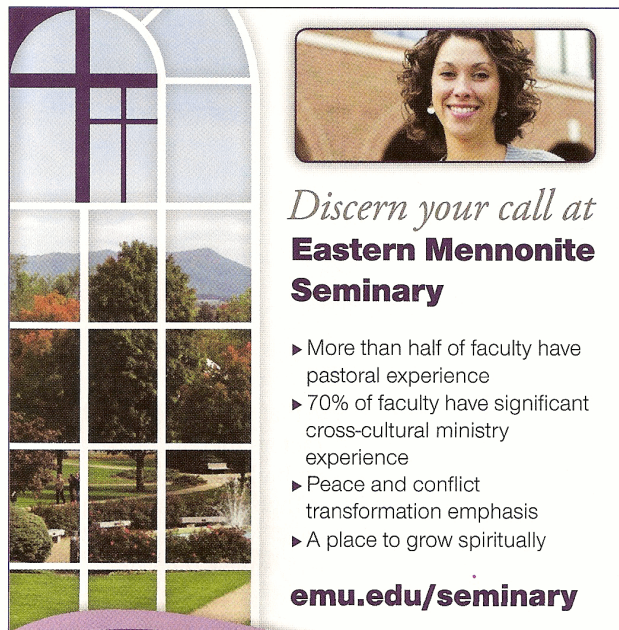
tion Month and “Take Heart, Your Faith Has Made You Well,” “A Service of Lament, Healing and Hope for Survivors of Abuse” and “Those Who Support Them” by Prey-Harbaugh.

A list of other resources includes: *Let the Children Come: Preparing Our Faith Communities to End Child*

In 2007, more than 1,700 children died as a result of abuse or neglect.—Linda Gehman Peachey

Abuse and Neglect by Jeanette Harder (Herald Press, forthcoming this fall) and *Making Your Sanctuary Safe: Resources for Developing Congregational Abuse Prevention Policies Packet* (Mennonite Central Committee, 2007).

To learn more about this movement or join these efforts, please visit the Dove’s Nest Collaborative at www.dovesnest.net or write to info@dovesnest.net.
—Linda Gehman Peachey of Mennonite Central Committee U.S.



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