EMU’s John Paul Lederach Appears on CBS

By Emily Benner
Staff Writer

The EMU community knows him as the founder of the Conflict Transformation Program. Those who attended the Mennonite convention in Atlanta remember his inspirational speech on conflict. The rest of the world knows John Paul Lederach as an expert in conflict transformation, and why is CBS featured him in their special on conflict transformation on Sunday, Oct. 12.

The CBS special, entitled "Peacemakers," focused on some of the world’s hot spots—Iraq, Sierra Leone, Nicaragua, and Croatia—and presented the creative approaches that four peacemakers took to each of the conflicts. Lederach was one of them.

First he told a story about two rival tribes in Ghana, one of which had a chief and the other of which had never had a chief. When the paramount chief arrived at a meeting of the two tribes he said, "I have no one to meet with here," because they were young and had no chief. One of the tribesmen stepped forward and said, "You are exactly right, Father. It is because we do not have a chief that young boys like me are sitting here addressing you Father." The paramount chief was ashamed that he had treated them so disrespectfully because the man did not resent him.

Lederach also briefly discussed his experience in Nicaragua in the 1980s, as he tried to bring peace among the Sandanistas, the Nicaraguan government, and the various ethnic groups that kept up armed resistance. Through training with mediation and peacebuilding, the Moravian church leaders of the area constructed peace accords and agreements. The process took almost three years, but it prevented war from breaking out in Nicaragua.

The CBS special introduced three other peacemakers as well. Rev. Patricia Ackerman, who works with Fellowship of Reconciliation, has set up a center in Iraq to monitor the U.S. forces. The Occupation Watch Center not only focuses on military action, but also works at building relationships with the Iraqi people and empowering them with a voice in their country.

Masankho Banda performs his peacebuilding ministry through song and dance. This vice president of Pathways to Peace traveled to war-torn Croatia to meet with the same children year after year, to hear their stories of violence, and to lead workshops and songs about forgiveness. He has also traveled to Sierra Leone, where children have been drugged and abducted into the army. Sometimes, after the children had been forced to perform acts of hatred against their own people, the army released the children back to their homes. Not only did they return with immense emotional scars, but many children returned with amputated hands as well. In response to this brutality, the community held a party with music and dancing, welcoming the children back home.

Dr. William F. Vendley, the Secretary General of the World Conference of Religion for Peace, described how a handful of women in Kenya and Somalia brought people together to talk. In doing so, they stopped the war between the two countries.

Thirteen years ago Lederach joined EMU as a sociology professor, and in four years he had formulated an idea for the CTP. In 1995, it became a reality. Today the CTP gives peacebuilding instruction and opportunities for service including disaster response, humanitarian relief, restorative justice, and socio-economic development. Lederach currently instructs a class in the CTP graduate program at EMU, but he also teaches in the Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. After writing and editing twelve books and manuals on conflict, Lederach is still writing at his home in Colorado.

Campus an Obstacle Course for Handicapped Students

By Kevin Ressler
Staff Writer

Handicapped student Jill Parker says that at EMU she has “to drive to all of my classes.” EMU’s placement on a hill obviously poses an automatic problem to any handicapped student. Unfortunately the options for aiding with this problem are very limited. Some problems may be easier to deal with in order to better accommodate the students on campus who are wheelchair bound than others.

Asking her about the obstacles and what she thought EMU could do for handicapped students Jill replied, “Actually EMU has done a lot for me. They even got me a remote for all the doors...I don’t think there is much else they could do.”

EMU students have a variety of buildings where classes are held or activities take place. For handicapped students some of these buildings pose problems when it comes to actual access.

One of the major problems is that there is no handicap access to the music department on the bottom floor of Lehman Auditorium. This poses a problem for any handicapped student who desires to take music classes. Even without interest in music classroom access, there is also the problem of the bathrooms, which also can be found on the same floor.

Aside from Lehman, there are other areas that pose difficult problems for some handicapped students. The Hillside Suites building has an elevator. This elevator, though, does not descend all the way to the basement. In order to reach the ground level, a student would need to go outside and around the building to get to the door to enter the basement.

In the Science Center, unlike Hillside, there simply is no elevator. Parker has all of her classes in the Science Center and must leave the building to go up a level or down a level.

This past Friday, the Disabilities Coalition and the Mental Health Coalition of Harrisonburg and Rockingham Co. sponsored a workshop on dealing with “Disability Awareness: Removing the Biases, Stereotypes, and Myths.” Though lightly attended, the morning workshop still provided those present with useful information.

Outlined in the invitation were three goals of the workshop: increase knowledge of the abilities of persons with disabilities for employment, low or no cost modifications to support individuals with disabilities in employment, and increase knowledge and utilization of tax credits for accessibility and employment of persons with disabilities.

“We wish that we could find out what effect we’re having on people’s lives,” said Munro. “More testimonials are always better. That way the donors can know what they’re donating to.”

Persons interested in volunteering can contact Valley Voice by e-mailing valleyvoice@jmu.edu. “We can explore options,” said Munro. More information can be found at www.valleyvoice.org.