

TODAY



UPCOMING EVENTS

Fall High School Play

OCTOBER 29-30

"That Was Then" an original one act play by Stanley Swartz, Director
easternmennonite.org/tickets

Christmas Concerts

DECEMBER 3, 10, 15, 17

Choral, EMES, MS Instrumental, HS Instrumental
easternmennonite.org/tickets

Family Visit Days

OCTOBER 23, NOVEMBER 3, DECEMBER 8

Do you know someone ready to start their journey with EMS?
easternmennonite.org/visit

LIVING THE VISION:

EMS ALUMNI IMPACTING THE WORLD

*with Paul Leaman,
EMS Head Of School*

Every healthy organization measures its progress toward what matters most. In the business world, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)—reveal whether an organization is moving toward its strategic goals. At Eastern Mennonite School, however, our truest measure of success reaches far beyond enrollment, test scores, or college acceptance rates.

Our vision is to embody the love of Jesus as a learning community where every student belongs, thrives, and joins God's work in the world. That vision serves as our compass, shaping every classroom, relationship, and opportunity we provide.

Ultimately, our greatest hope is not simply what students *accomplish* during their years at EMS, but who they *become* after they leave our campus.

↑ We Serve Club receives the AFP (Association of Fundraising Professionals) Award for Youth Philanthropy

This issue of *Today* celebrates alumni whose lives reflect that vision. Their stories remind us that an EMS education is not an end in itself—it is preparation for a lifetime of faithful service as ambassadors of Christ in communities around the world.

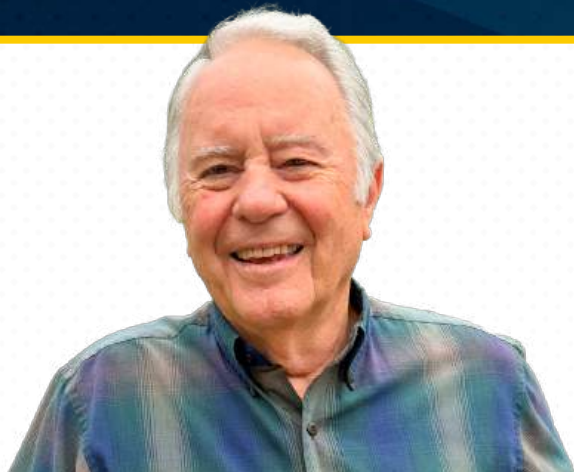
Having the privilege of walking alongside students and families for the past 24 years, including many multi-generational EMS families, has given me a unique perspective on the enduring impact of this community. I have watched students discover their gifts while serving others: leading worship in their congregations, joining Mennonite Disaster Service projects, packaging thousands of meals through Rise Against Hunger, encouraging teammates, mentoring children in After School Care, and participating in monthly We Serve Club projects alongside members of a local Rotary Club. Even while they are growing and finding their own paths, our students

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CELEBRATING A LIFE OF SERVICE

DR. SAM SHOWALTER '61

*Journey from EMHS
to 57 Years in Family Medicine*



As Eastern Mennonite High School (EMHS) celebrates its 65th class reunion for the Class of 1961, few alumni embody a life of service and faith quite like Dr. Sam Showalter. Over 83 years of life and 57 years in family medicine, Sam has combined medicine, leadership, and community service in ways that have touched countless lives.

From a young age, Sam's path was guided by curiosity and conviction. He recalls that 5th grade sparked his love of science, and by the time he attended EMHS from 9th through 12th grade, he knew he wanted to be a scientist—eventually focusing on medicine. At EMHS, Sam thrived in both academics and the arts. Music played a central role in his high school years; music teacher Ms. Shank allowed him to serve as assistant conductor of a high school chorus and he sang with the boys' octet, performing during spring holidays. Equally memorable were his Latin classes with teacher Dorothy Kemrer, where he formed lifelong friendships with a group he fondly calls the "Latin kids."

High school was also where Sam met Jan, his lifelong partner. Introduced through her grandmother's recommendation, the pair began dating at 14 and have been together ever since. "I like to say she chased me until I caught her," Sam jokes. Jan became a nurse, and together they lived the classic story of a doctor and nurse whose lives intertwined both personally and professionally.

Sam's medical career began after graduating from the Medical College of Virginia, now VCU, as part of

its first class, earning his license in 1969. His early practice years were shaped by the Vietnam era, when he chose conscientious objector service based on his Mennonite faith and anti-war convictions. He and Jan moved to Wise County, Virginia, where he served for six years at an Appalachian Regional Hospital—an experience that built his resilience and deepened his commitment to rural and community healthcare.

His years in Appalachia were marked by challenges and growth. As president of the local medical group, Sam navigated a nurses' strike, negotiated with union representatives from Chicago, and even received threats from a dissatisfied patient. But the work was also deeply rewarding. He became a trusted advocate for coal miners, helping them secure benefits through the Federal Black Lung Program—life-changing support for families in the region.

Over the course of a career spanning more than five decades, Sam's approach to medicine evolved. Initially reluctant to work with patients struggling with alcohol and tobacco, he ultimately devoted a significant part of his career to addiction treatment, admitting roughly 1,000 patients into a hospital-based program over ten years. Through this work, he witnessed the transformative power of recovery. One patient, after receiving Sam's brief talk on alcoholism during a routine physical, returned two years later to express gratitude—he had quit drinking that very day, rebuilt his life, and wanted Sam to know he had made a difference.

Even in retirement from active clinical practice in 2020, Sam continues to serve. He has led the Harmonia Sacra Society since 2012, preserving sacred music traditions, and chaired the board of Gemeinschaft Home, supporting the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. His life reflects a balance of medical service and faith and he does it all with a mega-watt smile on his face!

Sam's connection to EMHS remains strong through his grandchildren, whose performances and achievements he celebrates with pride. His hope for EMS is that it continues...



↑ Sam sings with the
EMHS Octet.

Scan the
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read the
full article



LIVING ON THE EDGE

HEATHER SHOWALTER '91 RODRIGUES

*Journey of Bravery, Grace,
and Standing with the Margins*



Heather Rodrigues '91, preacher, prophet, and peace-and-justice worker, opens the door to her next chapter as she leaves a twelve-year tenure at Duke Memorial United Methodist Church in Durham, North Carolina. We caught up with her this summer, surrounded by boxes and artifacts. She is now unboxing physically and emotionally - inspired by what has been and how God has provided. She now reflects on the cost and beauty of living her faith at the edge of the church—embracing the in-between as an empty nester, and a newly single person preparing to join a new congregation eager to grow.

From her earliest days at Eastern Mennonite High School, Heather felt both connected and liminal. Raised on the edge of conservative Mennonite circles, Heather often felt both drawn to and uncertain about the theological underpinnings of her high school experience. EMS Chapel services changed her, centering her each day in **who** she was, and **whose** she was. Invited speakers like Tony Campolo and memorable lines such as “Old bread is not hard; having no bread, that is hard” planted seeds that grew into a call to ministry—even if she jokes that she first misheard God’s call as “teacher” instead of “preacher.” Her classmates saw it clearly; their senior predictions named her future as a youth minister long before she embraced pastoral ministry.

Heather’s story is threaded with bravery and

discernment—being mentored by female teachers at EMS but leaving Harrisonburg to attend Elizabethtown College, and navigating her growing identity as a Mennonite who was not invited to lead from the front because she was a woman. That edge sharpened her sense of justice. After a mission year in Barcelona and a winding road through early adulthood, Heather met the Methodist Church, where her call was affirmed. Rev. Richard Stone, the senior pastor at Kitty Hawk United Methodist, became the voice she needed to hear: “You can do this. This is your call.”

Her ministry has consistently sought proximity to those on the margins. In Raleigh, during her first appointment as an associate pastor at Millbrook UMC, she befriended Dana, a man who had been unsheltered for over two decades. His voice and experience became a living gospel for her, shaping how she led the church into deeper justice. At Duke Memorial, she guided a courageous multi-year journey toward LGBTQ+ inclusion, ultimately officiating the church’s first gay wedding in 2020. The cost was high—members left, finances tightened, and she faced the loss of her ordination orders—but new life emerged in a congregation that embraced diversity, braver conversations, and visible grace.

Balancing the roles of pastor and prophet has been Heather’s lifelong discernment. She listens for the Spirit’s “gas and brake”—when to challenge systems, when to care tenderly for her flock. Her ministry insists that following Jesus often means standing at the edge, holding tension, breaking unjust rules, and trusting God’s sustaining presence.

Now, Heather steps into a new horizon: her third appointment as Lead Pastor to a church in Raleigh and a new season of life as a single, midlife, empty-nest pastor. She carries with her the bravery of living on the fringe, the grace of creating braver spaces, and the wisdom of a heart formed by those the world often overlooks.

Her hope for Eastern Mennonite School echoes her own journey: that it will always be a place where students belong, thrive, and live God’s call—not through easy answers, but in the brave, sacred space of honest questions and the mystery of God’s grace.



↑ Heather beams with pride as the mom of two graduates.

EXCELLENCE IN MUSIC

NATHAN MAY '01

Educator, global volunteer, and professional



Nathan May sits down for an interview in the blue Adirondack chairs under the e tree outside EMS, a place that holds a special place in his heart. With a twinkle in his eye, he points wistfully to the tree where he and his wife Melodie first began dating, recalling his time at EMS as a student with fondness and nostalgia.

Nathan attended EMS for only three years in 8th, 9th, and 12th grades, but its impact on his life was a lasting one. His family moved from Harrisonburg after his freshman year. However, the pull of the music program was too strong to resist, and he returned for his senior year, staying with family and friends to complete his education. He fondly describes his senior year as his “freshman year of college,” experiencing a new sense of independence and forming deep connections through music.

Music was a central part of Nathan’s life at EMS and it remains so. As a musician, he joined every ensemble he could, including the senior choir, touring choir, chamber choir, orchestra, and band classes. He also participated in a men’s quartet, singing in hallways with friends and anywhere they could find with good acoustics. The music program at EMS was unparalleled, and Nathan credits it with providing a powerful way for students to express themselves and feel understood.

Nathan’s time at EMS was marked by a sense of

belonging and community. Despite the presence of cliques, the small student body fostered connections that transcended groups. He remains friends with people outside his original “group” to this day. While he played sports like baseball and basketball, Nathan was more likely to win a Sportsmanship Award than be a starter for each team, embodying the spirit of teamwork and camaraderie. Being with him, you can see how he exudes joy - he genuinely loves his people and places.

Influential teachers, like Jay Hartzler, played a significant role in Nathan’s development personally and musically. Hartzler pushed his students to better their own musicianship and connect with their music as an act of worship. Despite being a straight-B student who struggled with tests, Nathan’s passion for music and the support of his teachers helped him succeed.

After EMS, Nathan pursued a degree in music from Messiah College (now Messiah University) and taught choir and music for 18 years. He built strong music programs at Central and Spotswood High School. While teaching, Nathan began DJing weddings as “DJ Fit,” leveraging his music and public speaking skills. In 2023 Nathan resigned from teaching and began Audio Umbrella, LLC to help schools and churches with sound systems and continue to serve more clients as his company grew to four DJs in 2026. He also enjoys working with EMS to improve sound systems throughout the upper and lower campus!

Nathan’s career reflects his belief in the power of music and the importance of trust. He emphasizes that success is not about money or status but about leaving a lasting positive mark. As a parent and entrepreneur, he hopes EMS continues to support students, challenge them to grow, and prepare them for life beyond college.

For Nathan, the deepest sense of belonging comes from being with people he loves—family, friends, and musical peers. He hopes EMS will maintain its strong music program and offer experiences like internships to help students thrive. His advice to today’s students is simple: remember that whoever you are is enough. Build your confidence in who you are, trust yourself, and focus on the impact you can make on others.



↑ Nathan's passion for music lights up the room as he conducts, infusing the students with his electric energy!

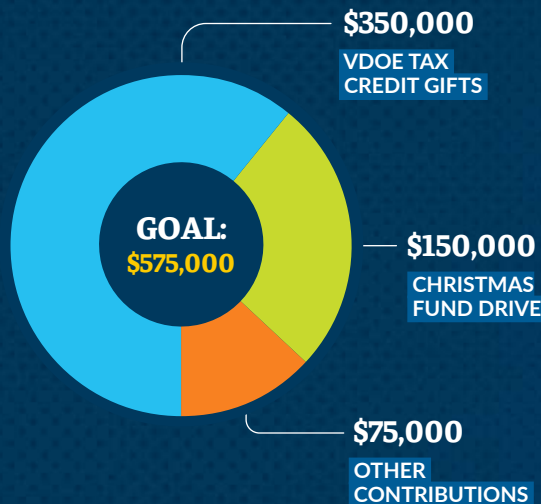
ADVANCEMENT

FAITHFUL SUPPORT FOR EVERY FLAME

The flames fund powers our learning community, and we hope for another strong year of your support!

Whether you give monthly or through the programs on the right, you help:

- equip teachers
- expand student aid
- keep our campus thriving
- achieve our mission



A WALL OF GRATITUDE: NEW MILESTONES

With the unveiling of our new Donor Recognition Wall, we celebrate the successful completion of the elementary campaigns - Let the Children Come and We Gather. We are deeply grateful to every donor and family who stepped forward to bring these spaces and classrooms to life.



↓ CONTINUED

are already making a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

After graduation, many alumni continue their spirit of service in various fields like healthcare, education, and entrepreneurship, united by a desire to live with courage and purpose. At EMS, welcoming alumni back as colleagues is a joy, as they return as teachers and staff, passing on faith and encouragement. Each Homecoming, alumni nominate classmates for their faithful service, and this issue honors three individuals whose lives reflect the school's vision. Their stories inspire students to use their gifts for

"Ultimately, our greatest hope is not simply what students accomplish during their years at EMS, but who they become after they leave our campus."

others' good. Scripture reminds us of "so great a cloud of witnesses," and we are grateful for alumni who encourage students to follow Christ with humility and courage. Thank you for being part of Eastern Mennonite School's story of sharing God's love and hope.

STANDING ON FIRM FOUNDATIONS

With gratitude for the foundations laid before us by generous supporters, we remain committed to wise stewardship of our resources—ensuring EMS thrives into the future.



Deb King
Board Chair



Trisha Blosser '95
Director of Advancement

2026-2027 GOVERNING BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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← "Seeing our family's name on the donor wall was a wonderful moment. I served on the board when these elementary projects were first envisioned, so to see them fully realized is a powerful reminder of what our community can accomplish when we give together!"
-Matt Weaver '92

Today is written by Abigail Cook, communication specialist, and designed by At Ease Design. All photos by EMS staff or archives unless otherwise noted. Editorial support from Trisha Blosser, director of advancement, and Paul Leaman, head of school.

SEND FEEDBACK TO
today@easternmennonite.org

FIND PAST ISSUES AT
easternmennonite.org/today

In admissions processes, Eastern Mennonite School does not discriminate on the basis of any race, color, handicap, national or ethnic origin, or religion, and admits students to all rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school.

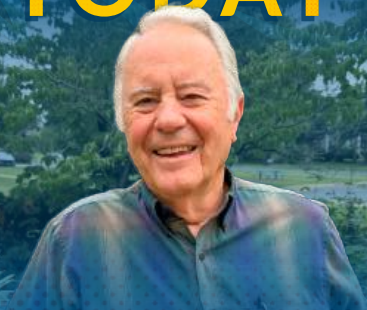
The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the school's non-discrimination policies, including its Title IX policy: Debbie Katz, high school counselor, 540-236-6022. For assistance related to Title IX or other civil rights laws, please contact OCR at OCR@ed.gov or 800-421-3481, TDD 800-877-8339.

KNOW A FUTURE FLAME?

Scan the QR
code to start
the journey
at EMS!



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easternmennonite.org

FOLLOW US:



VIEW UPCOMING EVENTS FOR THE 2026-27 SCHOOL YEAR AT
easternmennonite.org/calendar

COME TO CONNECT!

Homecoming 2026



OCTOBER 16 & 17

Open to all! Strengthen life-long connections that gain value with each passing year.

- Friday picnic supper
- Reunions for classes ending '1 and '6
- Homecoming breakfast with Alumni story celebrations
- Concerts, volleyball, and soccer
- Tours of upper building
- And more!

**REGISTER
NOW!**
*IT'S NOT
TOO LATE!*



WELCOME TO OUR NEW STAFF!

The school year has begun with great momentum, and we are thrilled to have these exceptionally talented individuals as part of the EMS family!

Front: Rebekah Kingsley: High School Math Teacher / Georgia Metz: Bible 10 Teacher (Adjunct) / Sarah Shuler: Kindergarten Educator, Peacebuilding Teacher / Marcella O'Brien: Second Grade Teacher / Caitlin Weaver '19: First Grade Teacher // **Back:** Jordan Litwiller: Sixth Grade Teacher (Math & Science) / Ryan Eshleman-Robles '09: English Teacher / Travis Nyce '09: Admissions Counselor / Jesse Blosser '98: (New Role) Director of Business Affairs // **Not Pictured:** Perry Shank '94: AP Computer Science Principles Teacher (Adjunct)