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**On whose
side is
God?**

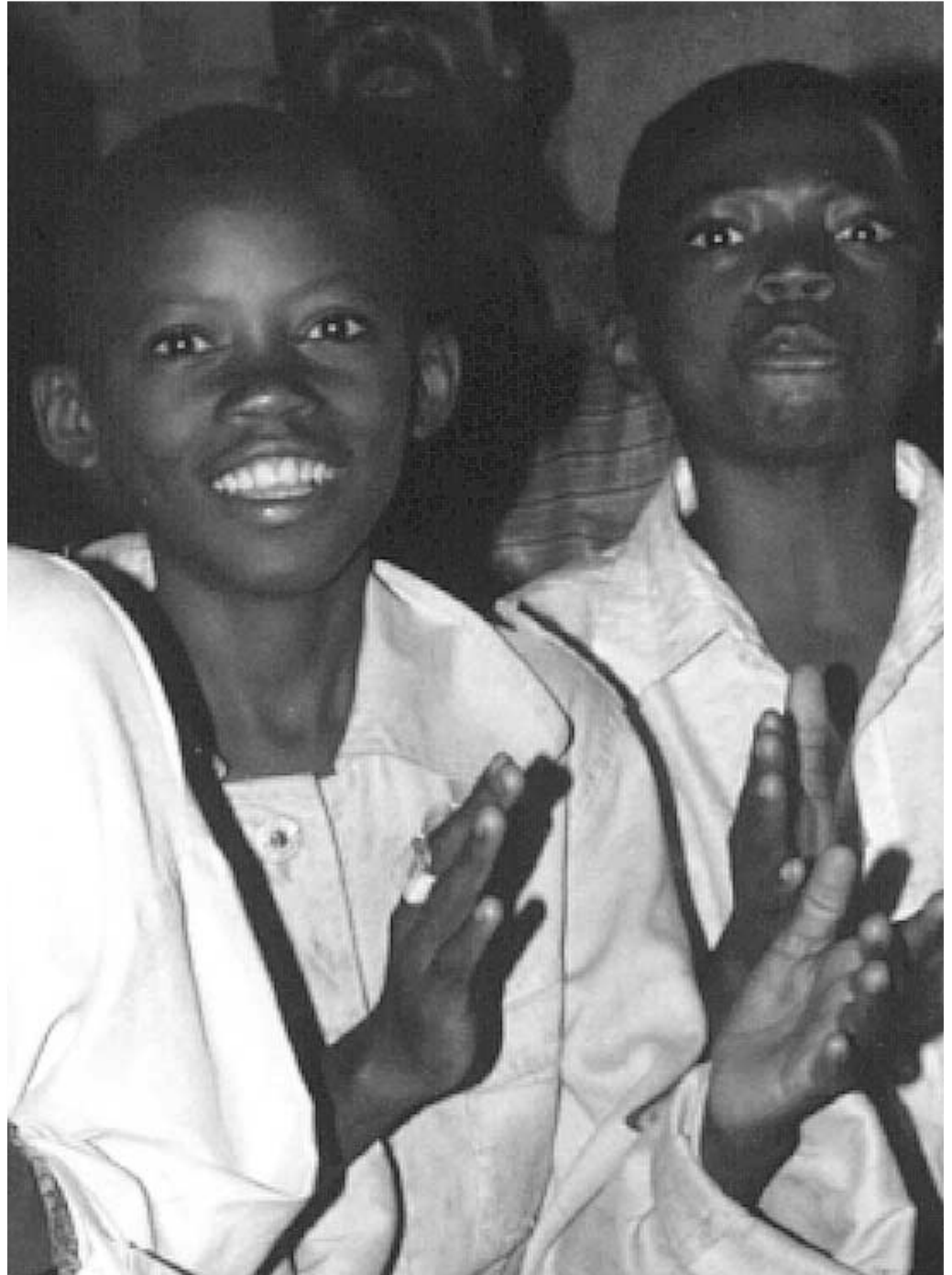
page 3

**Singing
along
with
everyone
else**

page 8

**Ethiopian
Christians
receive
apology**

page 13



page
4

SING A NEW SONG TO THE LORD

Contents



9

3 On whose side is God?
Mario Higueros

4 Sing a new song to the Lord
Ferne Burkhardt

11 Who says there are 'haves'
and 'have-nots'?
Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind

12



12 Korean congregations call
for global prayers for peace

13 Confession for wrongs against women
key event at Southern Cone Congress

13



5



Contributions welcome

Courier welcomes news, feature stories and ideas, and photographs about Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowships. Send manuscripts, ideas, and photographs to the regional editor listed below. Submissions may be by regular mail or via email.

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Mennonite world calendar

2003

July 31-August 3	Holy Spirit in Mission Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
August 2-4	Réseau Francophone, Kinshasa, Congo
August 6-18	Africa 2003, MWC 14th Assembly, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
August 6	MWC Executive Committee
August 7-9	MWC General Council
August 8-10	Global Youth Summit
August 10-11, 18	Global Mission Fellowship
August 11-17	MWC Assembly Gathered
	MWC Councils: Faith & Life; Peace
	Assembly Scattered before and after Assembly Gathered in various locations

Cover: *Two Congolese boys join in congregational singing. Music plays a significant role in every culture and at most every gathering in that culture. It is an important part of African society (page 8) and will be the centerpiece of MWC's 14th Assembly in Bulawayo (page 4).*

Cover photo by Eleanor Miller

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When nation rises up against nation:

On whose side is God?

by Mario Higueros

God intervenes in human history primarily through the faith of his people who do his will by creating peace.

Much of human reality we describe with words. There is no doubt that this ability contributes toward building family groups, empires, and societies. It can also destroy them. Many times words are used to misinform or to justify abuses of power. Governments, like parents and preachers, use words to direct and to govern.

Many national leaders of today, as of yesterday, use the force of words to twist the truth. They glory in being masters of information. In this representation, they present tragedy as a heroic and saving undertaking.

Leaders bless in the name of God while their speeches are permeated with lies and falsehoods. The speeches of Bush (USA), Blair (England), Aznar (Spain), and Hussein have something in common: they present their own perspective of reality as if it were the truth.

How can one speak in the name of peace and at the same time make plans for war? How can one speak of giving life and make plans to kill? The powerful criticize other dictators, but too often their democracies are not real, and they hide truly autocratic empires behind their veil of apparent citizen participation.

How can one speak of disarmament when those who require it of others are armed to the teeth? How can one speak of others using terrorists while at the same time training and using terrorists? How can one speak of being pacifist while testing new atomic bombs that destroy only human beings and all that has life but leave intact the infrastructure?

Jesus said to his disciples, "Among you this should not be so." In the kingdom of God, what is the use of power like? How is the word used among those who follow Jesus, the center of the kingdom?

God, the Lord of Christian believers, does not move in the same way as the pantheon of the Greek gods, taking the side of his favorites in Sparta or Athens. He moves among the mothers that suffer for their children sent to a war that is not theirs. He moves among those who have gone North to search for a new life and now have to pay by fighting in a war. He moves among the thousands of Afro-Americans and Latinos who are sent to the front lines for racial reasons alone. And God moves in the anguish of many Iraqi mothers who seek shelter, water, and a secure place.

God is especially not with the super powers who supply the arms. He is not in any war, however just it may be. He could not be in the midst of destruction. The one who loves life and created life continues to give it since the beginning of time.

Why do the good die and not those who do evil? Why do evildoers triumph while those who are good suffer? These questions humans have always asked; they are at the heart of the book of Job. This type of question follows the popular and fickle idea that humans lose their freedom and autonomy because of the sovereignty of God who created them.

How does God act in the world? How does he intervene without violating the freedom that he himself has given to human beings?

One needs to reread the Scriptures to find the characteristics of God's interaction in the history of humanity. This rereading has to be done carefully and objectively, interpreting the Bible with

global vision and in light of all of Scripture.

It is enough to look at the lives of the great men and women of Scripture, lives recorded with both lights and shadows. God does not hide the faults of his children in whom his grace, pardon, and respectful attitude toward their decisions can be found.

We humans are architects of our own destiny. We define our future in the world. Here we make sure of our salvation or our perdition according to our attitudes toward others. God intervenes in human history primarily through the faith of his people who do his will by creating peace.

On which side is God? Every nation claims that God is on its side in war and in battle.

Athletes do the same, some even making the sign of the cross before a soccer game in front of the other team they consider the enemy. The same thing happened in Israel, where God's chosen waged so-called holy wars for their purposes. Yet when they wrote their history, they found that the result of their disobedience by the shedding of blood was never the will of God.

God does not manipulate nonbelievers simply according to his designs, but God extends his abundant saving love and grace to all. Let us not be deceived; God is not in any war. This was true historically, and it is true today. May we, the members of the kingdom of God, use words well in these times in which our world needs peace, justice, and reconciliation.

Mario Higueros, academic dean at Seminario Anabautista Latinoamericano (SEMILLA) in Guatemala, also teaches psychology and theology.



Sing a new song to the Lord

by Ferne Burkhardt



Is anything more African than making music? Or more Anabaptist? It should be no surprise that music is receiving so much attention for the first Mennonite World Conference gathering on African soil when Assembly 14 meets in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, this August.

“Congregational singing is ... what people talk about when they go home,” says Ken Nafziger, who served as co-chair of the Music Committee for Africa 2003 Assembly Gathered until May 2003, when he resigned for personal reasons. To help make that singing worshipful and memorable in Bulawayo, an international choir will lead the congregation in its singing.

This approach to music leading

When Mennonites and Brethren in Christ gather in Zimbabwe this August, music—with a strong African flavour—will be a distinguishing feature of the activities of MWC’s Assembly 14.

means that 20 people—representing each region of the world Anabaptist communion—will gather in Zimbabwe 10 days before Assembly 14 for intensive rehearsing and to become a dynamic, cohesive choir. This idea is based on the premise that, although we are culturally diverse, we can sing each other’s music.

It was with that premise that Ken proposed this new approach to assembly worship music to the MWC Executive Committee in 2000. The committee accepted his idea and named him co-chair, along with Eunice Khanye from Zimbabwe.

From the beginning Ken wondered how people from the West could help this event happen in a non-Western place. “We think differently ... but it’s not right for us to take over,” Ken says. “A major task is to find respectful working arrangements.”

Performing groups representing the diverse gifts and styles of the global family have always enriched MWC assemblies, but worship space needs to

Members of a Congo Mennonite choir: “The Anabaptist faith community will be strengthened by the pulses and rhythms that move among us in response to God.”

be more than a stage. Congregational singing must be central.

“The international choir [idea] is so exciting, so wonderfully symbolic,” says Marilyn Houser Hamm, North American representative on the Music Committee. “The Anabaptist faith community will be strengthened by the pulses and rhythms that move among us in response to God.”

Marilyn stresses that the choir will not perform but will lead the congregation. “Every continental region will be represented [in the music] by dress, ceremony, and sound—a ‘globalized’ sound.”

Another huge task for the Music Committee is compiling an international songbook. Other assemblies have had songbooks with music from various cultures, but this time the committee faces

a new tension in compiling the songbook and deciding what music to use at Assembly Gathered.

According to Marilyn, the committee is “coming face to face with globalized Western popular sound. It is being owned by the church in other continents and being given the flavour of that culture, with text in the local language.”

Missionaries took with them their hymns and gospel songs to the African continent, and these are still sung and valued by the churches. The Brethren in Christ congregations in Bulawayo, for example, where MWC staff worshiped last August, sang mostly western hymns in four-part harmony, though there was also music with a definite African style and rhythm.

There is some fear that the edges of uniqueness may disappear as other cultures adopt the contemporary style sweeping through many Christian churches in the West. This could result in the possible loss of the richness of diversity with music ending up a non-descript gray sound.

The challenge of keeping alive cultural differences was dramatic when the Music Committee gathered in Canada last November. To build a list from which songs could be selected for the assembly book, all members were asked to bring music important in their continental region’s worship. Ironically, from Africa came hymns in four-part harmony taught decades ago by missionaries. Repetitive choruses popular in some Western churches came from Indonesia. Meanwhile, the North American representative put on the table many African and native American songs from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

According to Marilyn, until recently, some national churches in southern Africa restricted the kinds of musical sounds allowed for worship. While some churches permit Western drums, others accept drum sounds produced on an electronic keyboard but not the traditional drums.

Marilyn, who is doing the major editing work on the songbook, antici-

pates using a variety of music, including new music with traditional, indigenous sounds. Three songs will come from Zimbabwe.

For the first time, the assembly songbook will be organized by theme. Hymns of lament, of security in God, and of assurance of God’s grace will be important, given the political and economic climate of the Zimbabwean hosts. But songs of joy have to be there, too, along with songs of solidarity with brothers and sisters, says Marilyn.

Songs for this time can be simple, she adds, but they must move us to the core; we must feel them in our bones.

The committee plans to have 5,000 songbooks printed in the three MWC languages: English, French and Spanish. There will also be a fourth in the local Ndebele language. Plans call

for all songs to be printed in the original language of the group from which they come. Musician Jim Clemens from Chicago (USA) and numerous volunteers are doing the translation and technical work.

Organizers hope that CDs and tapes can be produced for sale so Africa 2003 registrants can buy a recording of the music they have experienced.

Plans for music at Africa 2003 are ambitious, and the committee faces a host of challenges, but music is a way of expressing our commonality and can touch us no matter what our culture is.

And we can be sure of one thing. Music—with a strong African flavour—will be a distinguishing feature of Africa 2003.

Ferne Burkhardt, Petersburg, Ontario, Canada, serves as news editor for Mennonite World Conference.



Praising God with new songs may occasionally require improvisation. Without a drum readily available, this Congolese uses a turned-over dishpan.



Directing the new

When Mennonites and Brethren in Christ gather in Zimbabwe this August, singing during the worship services will be led by an international choir of 20 persons representing all of the continental regions in which MWC has constituent conferences. A committee of five has the task of choosing these persons and the songs they will lead during the six days of Assembly Gathered. Profiles of the five who make up this Music Committee follow:

EUNICE KHANYE, co-chair of the Music Committee and the representative from Africa, will be at home at MWC's Assembly Gathered; Eunice is from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Why did she say "yes" to the task of the Music Committee? "I love music!" she says. But Eunice admits she "didn't know what she was getting into" when she accepted the invitation from Dothan Moyo, national coordinator for Africa 2003.

Eunice is a primary school teacher, where she leads the student choir. She also conducts the choir at the Lobengula Brethren in Christ church, the largest BIC congregation in Zimbabwe. And she trains a 40-voice a cappella choir from six churches that sings for special events in the city, such as baptisms and revival meetings.

Eunice says she is both "frightened and excited" to be on the music team. Her novice air travel experiences may have heightened both emotions. The committee's initial meeting in Strasbourg, France, put Eunice on a plane for the first time. Her second flight—to Canada last November—had an unexpected lay-over, delaying her arrival in Canada for 24 hours. Her

luggage, with all the music copies she had so carefully prepared before leaving home, didn't arrive until the meeting had ended.

Yet getting to know other committee members has been a joy to Eunice. Meeting Marilyn for the first time was especially a joy—"it was like we had known each other for a long time."

In her role on the committee, Eunice will help select hymns significant among her people for the assembly. She will also help choose voices for the choir to lead worship at assembly services, including, she anticipates, at least one from her church choir.

"The conference coming to Zimbabwe is a blessing because, to me, God has a plan," Eunice says. She is waiting to see that plan fulfilled.

Eunice has a 29-year-old son and a 1-year-old granddaughter.

JAN MARTEN DE VRIES got an introduction to Mennonite World Conference in 2000 when Dutch women invited African Mennonite women to visit the Netherlands. His pastor, who is president of the Dutch Mennonite Mission Board, asked Jan Marten to work with music for worship during the visit. That work led to an invitation to be a member of the Music Committee for Africa 2003.

A graduate of the Conservatory of Rotterdam, Jan Marten is a pianist and choir director at the Haarlem Mennonite Church, and he works in the area of music with several other Mennonite churches in Amsterdam. He also conducts a male choir that performs songs of the sea.

As a composer of liturgical music, Jan Marten likes to improvise and write

in different styles. "But I always begin with the biblical text," he says.

One of Jan Marten's current projects, in addition to the MWC work, is helping to compile *Menno's Global Songbook*, an international book with songs in their original languages as well as in Dutch. Gathering material for the book has already taken him to Africa. Its release is projected for 2005, with workshops in Dutch congregations to follow.

Among Jan Marten's goals for an assembly songbook which participants will take home are selecting international songs that are authentic and inclusive.

Jan Marten lives with his wife and three sons in Oegslgust near Leiden, Netherlands.

MARILYN HOUSER HAMM, North American representative on the MWC Music Committee, says, "God's compassion for the world must be released through the church. If we are to come to any understanding of worship and the gath-

The Africa 2003 Music Committee



Eunice Khanye

song to the Lord

ered community, we must come with a holistic view.”

Marilyn brings much experience and wisdom to the Music Committee, both in leading music at large worship gatherings and in compiling music books. She chaired the music committee that produced *Hymnal: A Worship Book* in North America and continues to work with *Hymnal Subscription Service*, a hymnal resource.

Marilyn worked on the songbook for the MWC assembly in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in 1990, where she also led singing. Her enthusiasm in leading singing has engaged thousands of worshippers at assemblies throughout the North American Mennonite world.

Marilyn is an American, a graduate of Goshen College in Indiana, USA, with connections to both Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada. Until recently, she worked for the latter as director of worship and spirituality. She has also directed peace

and justice ministries and has worked with Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Music ministry within the church is her calling and passion. She leads a busy life conducting, performing, composing, and arranging music in addition to other work for the church. Besides music and gardening, her great loves include “sparkling mountain streams, the prairie skyline, the grandeur of the universe.”

She is a member of the Altona Mennonite Church, south of Winnipeg, where she has been a co-pastor with her husband Ray. Two of their three children live at home.

AGUS SETIANTO, from Semarang, Indonesia, represents Asia on the Music Committee. He is one of 200 members of Gloria Patri congregation, where he is the leader of the church council and the choir conductor. Gloria Patri belongs to the Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) conference.

Agus, with little formal musical

training but a great deal of natural ability, sings and plays piano and guitar. He prepares his church's choir to sing at Sunday worship once a month and at special services.

“Music is a universal language that can bind us together,” he says. “Wherever you come from, you can worship God together through music.”

Agus' first international experience was attending the 1990 MWC assembly in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He was also able to be at the 1997 assembly in Calcutta, India.

After the Winnipeg assembly, Agus was part of a performing group that travelled across western Canada. After Calcutta, he and a 16-member “cultural team” of musicians and dancers from Indonesia were invited to spend a month in North America in 1998 raising money for Mennonite Central Committee.

On that trip, Agus was surprised to

(continued on page 8)



Jan Marten de Vries



Marilyn Houser Hamm



Agus Setianto



Mauricio Benavides

Ken Nafziger, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, served as co-chair of the Africa 2003 Music Committee until he resigned for personal reasons in May 2003.

The stories on the Music Committee and Mary K.Oyer were written by Ferne Burkhardt, MWC news editor.

Directing

the new song

to the Lord

(continued from page 7)

discover that North Americans think all Indonesians are poor. He is a businessman who works with his uncle exporting a special kind of birds' nests used both for gourmet food and for medicines. Agus also runs a pure water production business called "Moses."

Agus hopes to complete a masters in marketing management by the time Africa 2003 takes place. He is the father of three children.

MAURICIO MEDINA BENAVIDES will bring the music and rhythms of Latin American to Assembly Gathered in Bulawayo. A singer and percussionist from Bogotá, Colombia, he is a member of the Conference Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia (Mennonite Brethren). He has more than 10 years experience working with musical ensembles.

Since his conversion to Christianity a few years ago, Mauricio has continued his musical training, but he has committed his talents to his Lord and the church. He conducts both vocal and instrumental music groups in an MB church in Bogotá and he plays several instruments.

Mauricio will make a significant contribution to worship at Bulawayo because of his faith as well as his music.

Jan Marten, Agus, and Mauricio with a diatonic concertina during a meeting of the Africa 2003 Music Committee.



Right: Mary leads the choir at Assembly 13 in Calcutta, India. Far right: Mary as people know her—hymnal in hand, leading the congregation in singing.

At India 97, Mary Oyer was on the platform leading the congregation in singing. In Africa, this 80-year-old musician will be sitting in the audience:



Singing along w

Sitting in the audience at MWC's Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, this August will be an enthusiastic octogenarian from Goshen, Indiana, USA.

But things will be different for Mary K. Oyer, a church music specialist, this time round. Instead of being responsible to lead the congregational singing—as she did at Assembly 13 in Calcutta, India, in 1997—Mary will join others in singing hymns led by an international choir during the worship sessions in Zimbabwe.

This will not be Mary's first trip to that country. As a musician who has studied international music for decades and has played a key role in broadening worship music repertoire to include songs from around the world, Mary has been to Zimbabwe several times to learn about African music. Those trips were "so instructive to me," she says.

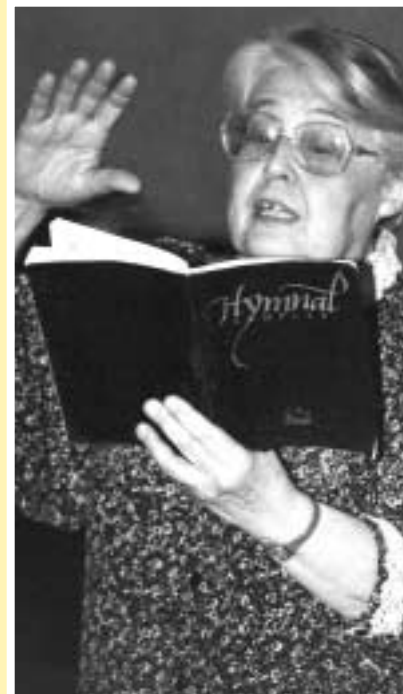
There is no wavering in Mary's resolve to go back this year for Africa 2003 in support of the Zimbabwean people. "It is important to go to give us [Westerners] some feel for what they live with," she says about MWC's plans for Assembly 14.

African music is aural, explains Oyer. It's full of symbolism and complex rhythms that call the body to move. One experiences so much more when the entire body is involved than "in learning from a book that is deaf and dumb," she quips.

"It's not evil to move a little," says Mary, who confesses that she used to have rigid ideas about what music was appropriate for worship. "I'm not so absolute anymore. Studying African music enlarged greatly my understanding, ... and it opened new ideas about worship. We can't judge what is right or wrong. It's a matter of personal taste." If others find different music meaningful, she adds, we need to find out why.

Mary has studied African music for more than 30 years, and she has lived on that continent for five years. Her sojourn there began in 1969 when she received a grant from a California, USA, university to study visual arts and music in Africa. Since then, she has spent time in 12 different African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Congo, Uganda, Malawi, and Zambia.

Every country has its own kind of



Canadian Mennonite

with everyone else

music as well as its own instruments—from the drums of West Africa and the Congo to the mbira of the Shona tribe in Zimbabwe, Mary notes. She's learned to produce the mbira's unique sound by snapping up to 22 metal strips held by a bridge over a flat piece of wood.

In some places, traditional African sounds and rhythms are being reclaimed and encouraged after decades of "trying to get [worship music] right," as taught by Western missionaries.

"Everything about African music tells about the people," says Mary. "There is improvisation in music and in life. Small patterns go round and round [like Taizé music] with no concept of prescribed length. 'How do I know when to stop?' is a Western question," she explains.

"[African music] reflects a different sense of time without any sense of urgency." For Africans, she adds, the present is strong, the past is rich, and there is no future tense beyond a month or so.

The music of Africa is energetic. The AIC (African Initiated Churches), especially, see the body and spirit as one, and many believe the Holy Spirit comes when the body is in motion, Mary says.

Asian music, which Mary has also studied, is much more cerebral, reflective, and introspective. Asians find moving the body hard. Westerners, who focus on harmony, tension, and resolution—with less emphasis on rhythm—are somewhere in between the African and the Asian, she says.

We [Westerners] have imposed our way as right," Mary chides. "We should try to be learners. But we have to find out what the people are like before we can understand their music."

Mary will help some 40 North Americans in that quest by co-leading a 26-day African tour in July and August of 2003 with Zenebe Abebe, a Goshen College, Indiana, USA, professor who grew up in Ethiopia. The tour, an immersion in African music, art, culture and history, will include Ethiopia and Kenya and MWC's Assembly Gathered in Zimbabwe.

But first Mary celebrated her 80th birthday in April and will have led a music workshop at Indiana's Anderson University and Seminary, one of many seminars that continue to take her to Mennonite and other institutions across North America. In September she will return to Taiwan to teach for a

semester at Taiwan Theological College and Seminary, something she has done the past four years.

"I am very grateful for good health," Mary says as she reflects on the opportunity she still has to teach music.

Mary "retired" in 1987 after a 42-year career as a music professor at Goshen College, where she also taught visual arts. She then taught at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary from 1989-1998.

Mary played key roles in preparing the *Mennonite Hymnal* (1969) and several other songbooks for special events, including international books for MWC assemblies. From 1987-89, she managed the project that produced *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

Anabaptists around the world have been inspired by Oyer's enthusiastic song leading at many large gatherings. From her broad international experience, she has helped participants learn each other's songs, many of which will be sung at Africa 2003.

Singing along with everyone else in Bulawayo in August will be an experience Mary Oyer, now 80, says she doesn't want to miss.

A Sentry in the Sahel

by Siaka Traoré

Myriam Hege



Abdias and Cécile Coulibaly. Abdias is a pastor and president of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso.

The name “Burkina Faso” (Upper Volta until 1984) means “country of honest people.” Located in the centre of West Africa, Burkina Faso is part of the Sahelian region. Here there are two seasons: one rainy and the other dry. The population of Burkina Faso is estimated at about 12 million, with an additional three million Burkina citizens living in neighboring Ivory Coast. Approximately sixty ethnic groups and as many languages can be found in the country.

There are diverse statistics regarding the religious makeup of the population. According to 1999 figures, 44.8% of the people practice traditional religions, 43% are Muslim, and 12% are Christian. Of the Christian population, 9.8% are Catholic and 2.4% Protestant. However, the latest statistics of the Evangelical (Protestant) Federation of Missions and Churches of Burkina Faso indicate 700,000 members, or about 6% of the national population.

Mennonite beginnings: From 1970 to 1975, the countries of the Sahel experienced a severe drought, which decimated livestock herds and caused a massive migration of the population from the driest areas to less affected regions. It was during this period that the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) decided to begin a development program in a francophone country of West Africa, and Burkina Faso was chosen.

While primarily focused on responding to the physical needs of the population, MCC recognized that there was also a spiritual need in the country. This opportunity was shared with Mennonite mission agencies and a variety of other groups. The Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission (AIMM) was interested in responding, and in 1978 two missionary families settled in the province of Kéné Dougou. This area was part of the Christian Missionary Alliance mission field. (During colonial times, Protestant mission agencies had divided the country to avoid competition.)

Kéné Dougou Province, with Orodara as its capital, is one of the more prosperous provinces of Burkina Faso due to its natural resources. The population is composed of five major ethnic groups: Bolon, Samogho, Senoufo, Siamou, and Toussian. A partnership has been established between AIMM and the French Mennonite Mission Committee (CMMF) for work among the Samogho people.

Church and mission collaboration: From the beginning AIMM envisioned creating a single structure uniting mission and church. In 1980 the Mennonite Mission and Church came into being, made up of a handful of Burkinabé Christians living in Orodara. The organization—made up of North American missionaries and Burkinabé—reflected the desire of the mission to be an integral part of the church.

This marriage only lasted a decade.

Over that period different evangelization strategies and methodologies emerged. Eventually the church—made up of Burkinabé—developed a constitution and became the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso (EEM BF). It was recognized as a national church by the government in June 1991.

The church today: While the mission and the church use different strategies to promote the kingdom of God, they collaborate closely with each other. The mission approach is to settle among a particular ethnic group, study language, translate parts of the Bible and Bible stories, and record them chronologically on cassettes. Village leaders then listen to the cassettes. This strategy takes into account the authority structures of the society in order to minimize persecution of persons choosing to follow Christianity.

The evangelistic method used by the church involves approaching individuals as well as holding public meetings. The church also has a radio program in which the Bible is presented to Muslims.

The AIDS pandemic is one of the major social problems of African society today, and the Mennonite church is committed to participating in the fight against this disease. EEM BF focuses its efforts in the rural areas of the country, where there is a lack of information about AIDS and where, as a result, people continue to spread the disease to others through irresponsible actions.

The Mennonite church witnesses to God's love through public education and assistance to AIDS victims. Thus the church and AIMM, aware of their common mission, work together in a complementary way.

Siaka Traoré is vice-president of the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso and coordinator of the Mennonite Central Committee peace program in West Africa.

Who says there are 'haves' and 'have-nots'?

by Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind

Why does God wish us to share our gifts? In a sense the answer is simple. God's purpose for sharing gifts is the fulfillment or redemption of all creation through abundant life. This is clear in Paul's words to Timothy: "For in doing this you will save both yourselves and your hearers."

But what is the nature of this abundant life?

1. The sharing of gifts creates the oneness of the church. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul talks about oneness and gifts. Paul says that there are many varieties of gifts, but only one source. "It is the same God who activates all of them in everyone."

Gifts are given to each person "for the common good"; not for the lifting up of the gifted person, not for that person's comfort or glory, but for the good of all.

Acts 4:32-37 demonstrates the living out of this philosophy in practical

terms. The author tells how the members of the church in Jerusalem "were of one heart and soul" and shared all of their possessions.

2. The sharing of gifts is intended to further God's plan for an interconnected, interrelated universe of justice and peace. Again, this comes about through the sharing of gifts. We can see this clearly in the laws of the year of Jubilee, set out in Leviticus 25. Here God makes provision for gifts which have been accumulated over time, which had been taken out of circulation, to be shared in order that those who have needs—slaves, widows, orphans, the poor, the disenfranchised—can be put back on an equal footing with others.

If we truly believe that all gifts come from God, and if we believe that it is God's plan that all gifts be shared with all creation, then it becomes clear that sharing gifts is not primarily a matter of being nice and doing good works. It is essential to our being faithful to God. It

is just. Peace comes when we joyfully turn away from the desire to hold gifts for ourselves and release them to the good of all.

Pakisa Tshimika, Fresno, California, USA, is Associate Executive Secretary for Networks & Projects for MWC. Tim Lind, Three Rivers, Michigan, USA, is MWC's Global Gifts Sharing Coordinator.

These excerpts are taken from a new book, Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church's Experiment, which Pakisa and Tim have written. The book is the 2003 Selection for MWC's Global Anabaptist Shelf of Literature (see page 15). Copyright © 2003 by Good Books (www.goodbks.com). Used by permission.

Ixperienced two world views of gifts and gift sharing during Christmastime when I was a child in Africa. On Christmas Eve our church would organize a pageant in which the whole Christmas story would be told. I remember that at the end of the pageant, missionaries passed out soap and salt to all the people. I don't remember people giving anything to the missionaries, however. I learned that there were two categories of people—those who gave and those who received.

However, the story did not end

there. Soon after the church program on Christmas day, people would get together to share meals. Two or three families would bring food together and share what they had with each other.

I learned the other lesson—we all have something to contribute in a relationship, and the principle of the "haves" and the "have-nots" does not always hold. I grew up living with this tension of the two world views throughout my childhood and adolescent and college years.

—Pakisa Tshimika

There is nothing quite like watching people discover their gifts. I remember in one church we visited there was a young woman who had just graduated from Bible school. We asked her to play a leadership role in organizing a gathering of women with theological training. At first she was reluctant, but when we encouraged her to reconsider, she wrote, "If you still want me, I am willing to help. At first I thought it is hard, but when I read your encouragement I said I will try my best to be myself."

Her subsequent organizing work showed great creativity and competency. As she began to understand what she was capable of doing she became markedly more self-confident.—Tim Lind

Korean congregations call for global prayers for peace

Strasbourg, France—As the government of North Korea threatens to resume the production of nuclear weapons, the churches of Korea are asking Mennonite and Christian brothers and sisters around the world to pray for peace.

Koreans Dong-kyu Ahn, Sung-do Cha and Sang-uhk Nahm—along with Erwin and Marian Wiens, Mennonite Church Canada mission workers—have issued an open letter to Mennonite churches around the world. On behalf of the Jesus Village Church, Chun Chon, Gangwon Do, Republic of Korea, they say:

“As an Anabaptist church, living in the

midst of this Korean tension, we are appealing to Anabaptist-Mennonite churches around the world to join us in prayer for peace and reconciliation. We invite you to pray for presidents Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea and Kim Jong Il of North Korea and other world leaders who may influence this situation for peace. Pray for Jesus Village Church and all the churches of Korea that God would use us to help bring about his will in a highly militarized context.

“We join you in praying, ‘Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’”

MWC booklet now available in German

Strasbourg, France — *From Anabaptist Seed* by Arnold Snyder, a book commissioned by Mennonite World Conference, was released in Weisenheim am Berg, Germany, in March 2003.

First released in English in 1999, *From Anabaptist Seed* presents basic Anabaptist doctrines and principles of identity and faith. In addition to German and English, it is also available in Spanish, French, Dutch, Korean, and Indonesian with translations in Chinese, Japanese, and Hindi in process.

This translation, titled *Täuferische Saat—Weltweites Wachstum*, makes the book available to the many German-speaking Anabaptists around the world. This includes those who live in Europe, Paraguay, Mexico and Western Canada.

From Anabaptist Seed was the 2002 selection for the “Global Anabaptist / Mennonite Shelf of Literature,” an MWC project that encourages Anabaptist-related fellowships in 62 countries to translate the annual selection into their own languages.

Football part of vision for peace and friendship in Angola

Luanda, Angola—After living with civil war for more than 30 years in their country, Mennonites in Angola are experiencing a vision for fostering friendship, peace, and love among their young people.

Youth representatives from the three Mennonite groups in Angola—Community Mennonite Church of Angola, Evangelical Mennonite Church of the Mennonite Brethren of Angola, and the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Angola—have together formed a new organization, which they call the Association of Mennonite Youth in Angola (AJOMA).

For many years, the socio-political situation of Angola did not permit youth to develop their own activities. When they turned 18, young people were required by law to join the Armed Forces.

Many who did so left their homes and churches never to return.

The signing of a peace accord in April 2002 changed all that for Angolan youth. In response to the new situation and new freedom, AJOMA was born.

Since its organization, AJOMA has sponsored two assemblies. According to Manuel Lemons, general secretary of AJOMA, these assemblies aim “to bring together Mennonite youth, especially students and young people so recently disarmed by the war, to have a new view of peace and better perspectives for the future.

“This is an opportunity

for us in Angola to rediscover peace and reconciliation,” Lemons continues. “This will encourage young Mennonites toward the future of our church.”

The most recent assembly in late 2002 featured a football (soccer) tournament between teams from all the conferences in Angola. Equipment and uniforms for all the teams were donated by Mennonite Central Committee.

AJOMA also hopes to help young people in their professional development. It currently works with two youth who are teaching English to more than 150 students.—*Gomes Miranda*

The football team from the Evangelical Church of Mennonite Brethren in Angola, one of six teams participating in a recent tournament sponsored by AJOMA, Angola’s newly formed youth organization.



Gomes Miranda



Antonio Carlos de Faría

The delegation of youth from Chile joins other Southern Cone Congress participants on a tour of the Rio Tigre.

Confession for wrongs against women key event at Southern Cone Congress

Buenos Aires, Argentina—“I will never forget what happened yesterday,” said one of the participants in the 11th Southern Cone Mennonite-Anabaptist Congress, held at the Kairós Community Center in the Province of Buenos Aires, February 20-23, 2003. She referred to a moment when men stood to express their regret for suffering inflicted upon women.

Directly or by silent complicity, the men said, they had discriminated against women in the southern churches. The women responded by standing to express forgiveness.

This service of confession and forgiveness came at the recommendation of a findings committee, following a

session in which several women shared their hurts regarding restrictions in using their ministerial gifts in church.

Guest speaker for the congress was historian Arnold Snyder of Canada, who is also author of the book, *From Anabaptist Seed*. Snyder developed the theme of the church in three sessions: (a) becoming part of Christ’s body; (b) becoming the body of Christ; (c) the body of Christ in the world.

“The early Anabaptists paved the road we are traveling today,” Snyder said. “It is fit, therefore, that we seek to understand what motivated them. The Scriptures, which they memorized extensively, were the source

of their faith. Once they understood what the Bible said, they lived or died for it.”

During morning worship hour on the third day, Sara Buhlman of Argentina, one of the organizers of the congress, shared her life pilgrimage. Before the study session started, the meeting took an unexpected direction when Snyder was asked to share his own testimony.

“We in North America are not used to talking about our own faith pilgrimages, so this does not come naturally for me,” said Snyder. But the vivid and honest testimony he shared led directly to the women sharing their hurts after the session on women and Anabaptism.

Sunday morning’s presentation was by C. René Padilla, an Anabaptist-Baptist who helped to found the Kairós Community. He presented an essay on “Theological Perspectives of Anabaptism,” emphasizing discipleship as the focus of the life and mission of the church.

Representatives to the congress came from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay—usual participant in the Southern Cone congresses. The Mennonite churches in Colombia sent a fraternal delegate to this session. Persons from the United States and Mexico also attended, and there was a delegation of young people from Chile for the first time.

Southern Cone countries take turns hosting these biennial gatherings. The first was also held in Argentina 23 years ago. The next is scheduled to take place in Brazil in 2005.

Ethiopian government apologizes to Christians; orders safety for freedom of worship and beliefs

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—In a dramatic turn of events, evangelical churches in Ethiopia have been assured they will have the freedom to worship as they choose. Local governments have ordered the protection of Christians in areas where attacks occurred against evangelicals in recent months, including Meserete Kristos (Mennonite) churches.

Early this year, local government officials apologized to evangelical leaders for the violence against churches on December 29, 2002. Radio broadcasts warned the public similar incidents will not be tolerated in the future, says Desta Gebrearegawi, a student evangelist from the Mekele MKC.

“It is for the first time that I hear of such a radical move from officials,” says Bedru Hussein, vice-president of Mennonite World Conference and a Bible teacher in Addis Ababa. These unprecedented actions came in response to the evangelical churches’ appeal for safety to local governments.

The December attacks occurred after a crowd gathered around the stadium in Mekele where evangelicals were concluding a three-day conference. Police were not able to control the stone-throwing mob. Several churches had doors and windows smashed. The canvas cover of an MKC’s main meeting area was burned along with Bibles, hymnbooks, choir gowns, and electronic equipment. Since

then, the congregation continues to worship in the same place under a new canvas.

Muslims did not start the December riot, say the Christian and country officials. Rather, a fanatical group within the Coptic Orthodox Church was responsible.

Reports from MKC say Negussie Alula, the Mekele member who was beaten in the December clash, is “limping and serving the Lord again.” Another victim, Ababayehu Dessalegne, the Maichew leader falsely accused of killing someone and imprisoned last April, was expected to be released; witnesses have now said a police officer was responsible for the murder.



Zimbabwe church continues strong invitation:

Woza! God has something here for you!

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe— Despite political unrest, food shortages, and a deteriorating economy, Brethren in Christ churches in Zimbabwe continue to issue “a firm, broad, and deep” invitation for MWC to hold its 14th assembly in their country.

“The BIC churches “are putting together appropriate solutions to the problems,” said Larry Miller following a visit to Zimbabwe. “These solutions will not take away resources from Zimbabweans but will provide support for Zimbabwean conference participants.”

Ray Brubacher, Africa 2003 coordinator, says, “The Africa 2003 theme calls for us to ‘share gifts in suffering and in joy.’ Reasons to think that Bulawayo is the most appropriate place to do precisely that are increasing, not diminishing.”

Zimbabwe church and civic leaders have encouraged MWC to develop contingency plans should it become necessary to change the Africa 2003 venue. In response MWC has reserved facilities near Johannesburg, South Africa, if the assembly needs to be moved.

But the churches in Zimbabwe hope that won't happen. They continue with

vigorous planning and a solid conviction that they will be able to host the first MWC assembly ever held on the African continent.

Zimbabwe: land of sunshine, beauty

From the Zambezi River and Victoria Falls in the North to the Vumba Mountains and the Highlands in the East, Zimbabwe is a land of sunshine and beauty.

Most fascinating, however, are the people, a diverse mixture of the majority indigenous blacks and a small minority of whites and Asians. While the races have mixed after more than 100 years of colonization and 23

years of independence since 1980, in many respects, each ethnic group remains distinct and separate.

The black majority ranges from the simple traditional people living in rural settings to the sophisticated and in many respects westernized city dwellers.

While a significant number of Zimbabweans profess to be Christians, it is not uncommon for a professing Christian family to consult a traditional diviner or healer in times of stress such as illness or a marital breakdown.

Zimbabwe enjoys tropical weather, which basically means two main seasons: cold and dry, hot and wet. In a normal year the rainy season stretches from mid-October to the end of April, but recent years have not been normal. The widespread food shortages that have resulted have increased tensions already present between various groups.

Even with these problems, we who live here love Zimbabwe. It is easily one of the most beautiful countries in Africa.—
Doris Dube, C/C/C Africa editor.

Africa 2003 Assembly Gathered program:

Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy

With 1 Corinthians 12 as a backdrop, each day at Africa 2003's Assembly Gathered will be planned by a different continental region with its own sub-theme, Bible study leader, and preacher.

Monday, August 11, opening:
sermon by Mesach Krisetya (Indonesia),
outgoing MWC president

Tuesday, August 12: Asia
“Celebrating life amidst suffering
and violence”
Ecclesiastes 2:1-11, 24-26, Philippians
3:10-16
Bible study: Shant Kunjam (India)
Sermon: Ambrocio Porcincula (Philippines)

Wednesday, August 13: Europe
“Living God's will?”
Isaiah 5:1-7, John 15:1-17
Bible study: Claude Baecher (France)
Sermon: Fernando Enns (Germany)

Thursday, August 14: Latin America
“In Christ we suffer with hope
and celebrate with joy”
Romans 12:9-21, Luke 24:13-15
Bible study: Antonio Carlos de Faria
(Brazil)

Sermon: Ofelia Garcia (Mexico)

Friday, August 15: North America
“Through sharing we experience
unity in diversity”
Bible study: Lindsey Robinson (USA)
Sermon: Mary Anne Isaak (Canada / USA)

Saturday, August 16: Africa
“What we have we give”
Romans 5:1-5
Bible study: Danisa Ndlovu (Zimbabwe)
Sermon: Siaka Traore (Burkina Faso)

Sunday, August 17, closing:
sermon by Nancy Heisey (USA),
incoming MWC president

A call to prayer

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful?
They should sing songs of praise.—James 5:13

- Pray for people around the world wounded by recent war. Pray that practical ways can be found to help bring healing. Pray that the powers of this world be tempered, so that our hurting world may have respite.
- Give thanks for an increasing awareness of nonviolence as a way to address conflict, an awareness being manifest in cities and towns around the world. Pray and give thanks for Christian Peacemaker Teams, who endure difficulties in dangerous locations. Pray also that our churches will cultivate the call to become peacemakers at home and far away.
- Pray for Ray Dirks, coordinator of the *Our Family / Notre Famille / Unsere Familie / Nuestra Familia* project, now in its final phase of shipping art to Zimbabwe and assembling it there. This exhibit uses text and photo panels to show daily life in participating countries.
- As Africa 2003 comes near, pray with organizers and participants that all preparations to host the assembly, to travel, and to celebrate with people from East and West, North and South, will yield an unforgettable, enriching time.
- Thank God, who acts beyond our expectations, for 50 Mennonite students along with 11 from other denominations in the Pampa area of Argentina who enrolled last April in the inaugural Pastoral Ministries and Spirituality diploma course, *Currents of Spirituality*. This course is offered by the Facultad Internacional de Estudios Teológicos (FIET) with instructors holding at least a masters degree.
After two years, the program moves to a different area in Argentina, far from the nation's capital city where most seminaries are located. Pray for David Dutra, coordinator, Raúl García, zonal adviser, instructors, and students in this program.

'Sharing Gifts' named 2003 Global Shelf book

Strasbourg, France—The 2003 selection for MWC's Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature has just been released. *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church's Experiment* by Pakisa K. Tshimika and Timothy Lind comes from the dozens of visits the two authors made to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches throughout Africa,

Latin America, and Asia.

Dispatched on behalf of MWC, Tshimika and Lind planned to produce "a worldwide inventory of diverse gifts which could be shared among churches." Along the way, they became convinced that gifts, like manna, will rot if they are not shared. They came to believe that unless gifts are both claimed and shared, the church can-

not be whole.

This book is an exploration of how gifts and needs bind congregations around the world together. It debunks common myths about who is rich and who is poor. It makes bold suggestions, such as why not have a "declaration of gifts we are committed to sharing" be a part of the service of baptism for new members and of holy communion for continuing members?

Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith covers new ground for congregations who want to be faithful members of God's worldwide family. It is provocative reading for Christians who are gratefully aware of their gifts and humbly conscious of their needs (see excerpts on page 11).



The 124-page book is published by Good Books in Pennsylvania, USA, in cooperation with MWC.

The Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature was launched last year to develop an international shelf of common literature among the Anabaptist-related fellowships in 62 countries around the world. Publishers in various countries are encouraged to make the annual selection available in the languages of their people.

Pakisa K. Tshimika (left) is MWC's Associate Executive Secretary for Networks & Projects. Tim Lind is Global Gifts Sharing Coordinator for MWC.



Merle Good

Perspective:

Assembly is a counterpoint to war

by Timothy C. Lind

The creation account of Genesis 1 has a repeated theme. No less than seven times in that brief chapter we are told, “And God saw that it was good.” The seventh occasion is comprehensive: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

Reading through this opening chapter of the Bible gives us a scene of fertility and abundance, of overflowing life, of the earth and the skies and the seas “bringing forth” swarming life in all its diversity. I count at least 20 uses of “every” in this chapter: every kind; everything; every plant; every beast. “And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” I can think of no more emphatic assertion of the goodness of diversity and difference.

I write these lines in the context of two contrasting preoccupations. One is war. Many of the members of our worldwide family have lived with war for many years. Many have suffered and are suffering directly and indirectly due to war. Many are engaged in programs and activities of service to and solidarity with those who are suffering from war.

While as followers of Jesus we must reject war of any kind, I find the war against Iraq initiated by the United States particularly reprehensible because the United States’ overwhelming influence, destructive power, and arrogance threaten peace everywhere in the world. As an African friend wrote recently: “With the effect of the American-Iraqi war on politics in Nigeria, we truly need the special grace from God to handle the negative stresses that we may face in Nigeria.”

War is the ultimate rejection of diversity; it is the refusal to accept difference. War is the attempt to eliminate it through violence. In rejecting the way of peace, we are saying, “Your difference from me is intolerable.” War labels God a liar, disdainfully dismissing God’s claim in Genesis 1: “And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

My second preoccupation as I write is the preparations for Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. At this time we do not know how many Brethren

in Christ and Mennonites, from how many churches and countries around the world, will gather in Bulawayo in August of this year. We do not know for sure whether the multiplicity of difficulties that the people of Zimbabwe are currently facing will allow the assembly and all related activities to take place as planned. Nevertheless, throughout the world, individuals, agencies, institutions, and churches are looking forward to and preparing for this event.

A Latin American colleague, in response to an invitation to participate in the Assembly, wrote: “Thank you for being the bearer of such wonderful news. I received it like a blessing from God, and I feel very privileged to be given the honor to meet with other brothers and sisters from throughout the world. ... We are a part of a large family.”

It may be an overstatement to say that Assembly 14 is a response, a counterpoint, to war. But at least in one respect the comparison seems justified. What the assembly represents to our family of churches is not merely a celebration of diversity and difference. It is a commitment to both.

It is no secret that among Mennonites and Brethren in Christ globally there are many differences: theology, language, culture, history, worship style, social practice, and more. We come together not in spite of these differences but because of them. Diversity is a gift from God to us. That we go to such considerable effort—and expense—to gather together every six or seven years with people who are different from us is a strong affirmation of Genesis 1: “And God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

Timothy C. Lind, Three Rivers, Michigan, USA, is the Global Gifts Sharing Coordinator for Mennonite World Conference.



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