

2004 Quarter 2

# *courier*

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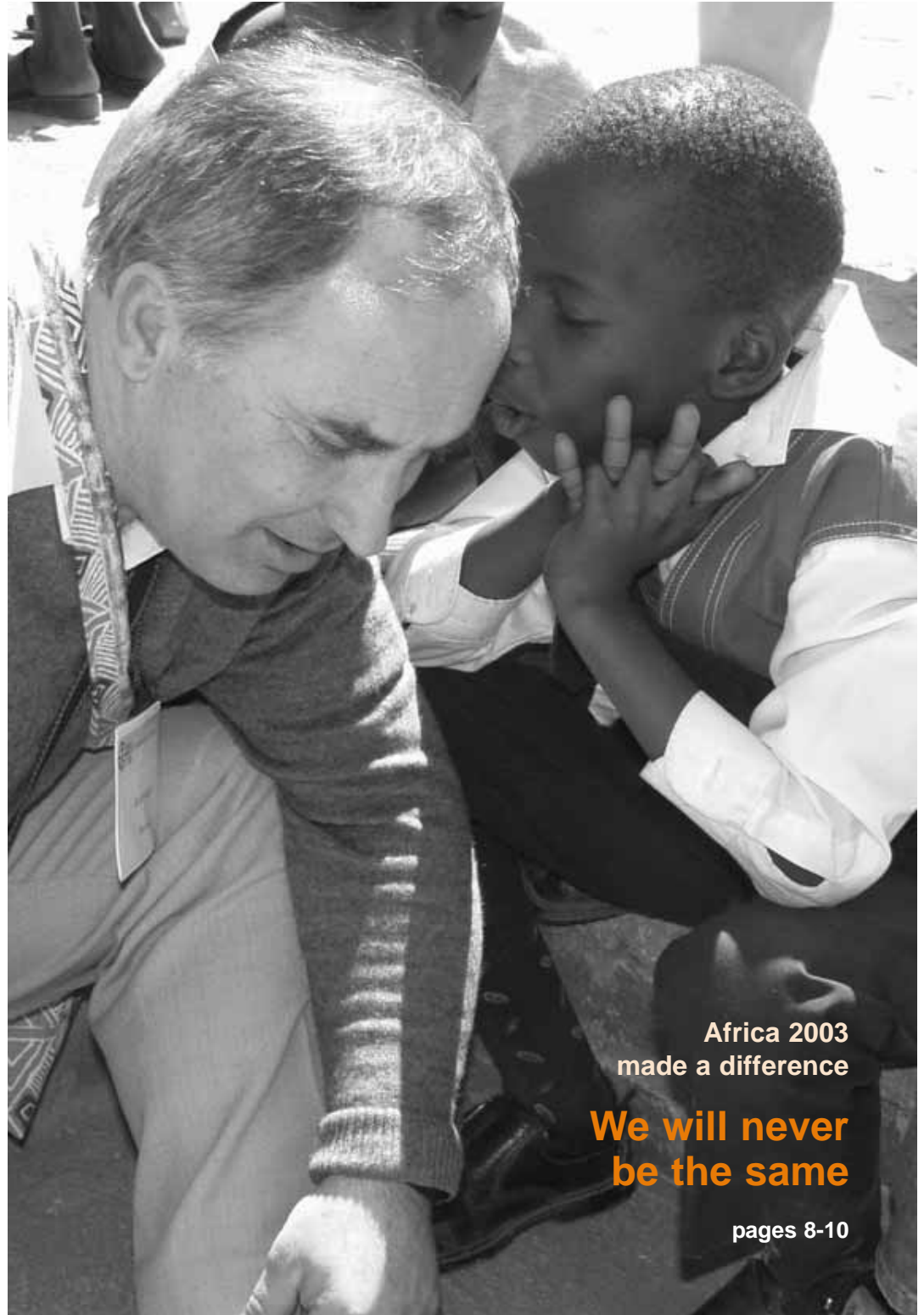
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# *Koinonia in the future*

by Larry Miller

*I dream that we will be a true koinonia of Anabaptist-related churches, linked globally in fellowship, worship, service, and witness—while remembering that we are but one member of the universal body of Christ.*

MWC's future began in Zimbabwe—but not in 2003. Reflections on the shape of things to come for Mennonite World Conference started in 1993, quietly, at a General Council meeting in Bulawayo. Issuing a statement on “Being Anabaptist Christians Today,” the council placed “interdependence” at the heart of its dream for the decades ahead.

“The goal of interdependence is mutual relationships worldwide based on confidence, trust, accountability,” the statement read. “Interdependence happens when people learn to give as well as to receive, to receive as well as to give. Interdependence means change (*metanoia*), but in what ways is yet unclear.”

By the time the General Council met again in Bulawayo, during Africa 2003, this dream had sharpened significantly, even though the language had shifted slightly. The Assembly theme spoke of “Sharing Gifts in Suffering and in Joy.” The Africa Day sub-theme focused the point powerfully: “What we have we give.” Preacher Siaka Traoré of Burkina Faso—a star of the whole conference with his “accept our African chicken with gratitude” exhortation—put it this way: “Sharing is an act that goes to the heart of God. Sharing establishes a rela-

tionship; it creates a communion. God, our God, is a God of relationship, of communion.”<sup>1</sup>

Several days prior to that memorable speech, but in the same words and Spirit, the General Council had approved new MWC vision and mission statements.

The vision: “Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (*Koinonia*) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness.”

The mission: Mennonite World Conference exists (1) to be a global community of faith in the Anabaptist tradition, (2) to facilitate community between Anabaptist-related churches worldwide, and (3) to relate to other Christian world communions and organizations.

This koinonia vision and mission (see box on page 3) are rooted in convictions and experiences of MWC member churches. Throughout 2001 and 2002, the International Planning Commission (IPC) asked MWC mem-

bers questions about their understanding of the church and hopes for the organization's future. The IPC summarized the responses (see “What MWC churches say about the future” on page 4) and formulated this conclusion:

“Most member churches want to continue to draw together more closely and to become more mutually accountable. The IPC therefore concludes that the churches are expressing a desire to move towards fuller community and communion.”

Communion as “community” has always been at the heart of the Anabaptist-Mennonite church. Early sixteenth century “Anabaptist doctrines led to a vision of the church as a community of disciples, born again by the Spirit of God, discerning God's will together” and expected to share economically.<sup>2</sup>

In 1960, while president of MWC, Harold S. Bender renewed this vision of the church by going to the Bible: “The most expressive New Testament term for the common life in the Body of

Everett J. Thomas



*Helmut Harder, Canada (left), and Ferdinand Friesen-Bartel, Paraguay, at MWC's Bulawayo assembly: “Sharing is an act that goes to the heart of God.”*

# of MWC

Christ is the Greek word *koinonia*, which is best translated 'fellowship.' 'Community' is the term to designate the group which has fellowship. ... It is significant to note that approximately half of the New Testament occurrences of *koinonia* refer to spiritual sharing, and half to sharing material goods. ... The root idea in *koinonia* is 'participation in something in which others also participate,' that is, conscious sharing with someone else in joint possession, usually on a continuing basis."<sup>3</sup>

More recently, the wider Christian church—Evangelical, Protestant, and Catholic—has rediscovered *koinonia* at the heart of the New Testament and made it the centre of broadening inter-church agreement on the fundamental nature and mission of the church.

Most recently, in Bulawayo, MWC not only approved new *koinonia*-shaped vision and mission statements but also a declaration of "Shared

Convictions" for study in the churches—convictions in which the church as community figures prominently and pervasively.<sup>4</sup>

If community has always been at the core of our convictions about the church, what is especially noteworthy in MWC's newly articulated vision and mission? Three points merit mention.

1. While community is essential in our theology and practice of the local church, it has not been a goal at the global level. Now it is, at least for MWC members.

No longer do we say only that the "local assembly is the primary place where people participate in the life of the church." We confess also a call to build up communion in which we are "linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith."

2. While we know that Christian community means sharing materially and spiritually, we have sometimes conceived the purpose and scope of such

sharing narrowly, especially at the international level. Now, however, we declare our commitment to global linkage in a way that covers the entire spectrum of church life. The aim is to live as a worldwide community in "fellowship, worship, service, and witness"—not in only one or two of these indispensable components of life as church.

3. While we never claim that our community constitutes the entire body of Christ, we have seldom pursued relationships with other Christian churches intentionally and systematically. The new mission statement names relationships with other "Christian world communions and organizations" as one of the three purposes of MWC's existence today.

**M**any barriers stand in the way of moving from a vision of global *koinonia* to the reality of world community. Why is it still so difficult to connect and relate within the church universal in spite of

## Mennonite World Conference

### *A community of Anabaptist-related churches*

**Vision:** Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (*Koinonia*) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness.

**Mission:** Mennonite World Conference exists (1) to be a global community of faith in the Anabaptist tradition, (2) to facilitate community between Anabaptist-related churches worldwide, and (3) to relate to other Christian world communions and organizations.

**Activity:** Mennonite World Conference fulfills its mission through programs including, but not limited to: the global assembly; councils and fellowships; networks, exchanges and visits; global gift sharing; reflection, studies, and publications; facilitation or sponsorship of common projects and joint ventures by member churches or related organizations; World Fellowship Sunday; communication and conversation with other Christian world communions; news and information sharing with the churches.

**Participation:** Churches may participate in Mennonite World Conference as "members" or as churches "in association" with MWC. Member churches join in the whole life and work of the community. Churches in association with MWC take part in specific events or activities as agreed with MWC.

**Authority:** Mennonite World Conference may take action in all matters within the mandates given to it by the member churches together. It may also take action on behalf of one or several member churches in additional matters committed to it by those churches.

**Decision making:** Consensus, a method of arriving at decisions without voting, builds community and therefore will be the normal mode of decision making.

**Name:** This global community will be known as "Mennonite World Conference: a community of Anabaptist-related churches."



Author Larry Miller (left), pictured above talking with Ron Mathies of Mennonite Central Committee, serves as executive secretary of Mennonite World Conference.

unprecedented possibilities of communication with virtually anyone, anywhere?

In their book, *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith*, Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind name some of the more important of these obstacles: economic differences, lack of administrative capacity, centralized decision making, lack of broad vision, fear of differences, a view that some gifts are more valuable than others, greed.<sup>5</sup>

But the vision of global koinonia will find a way over, around, or through these hurdles. Little by little, flesh will be put on the bones of world communion through assemblies, councils, and fellowships; networks, exchanges, and visits; global gift sharing; shared practices and disciplines<sup>6</sup>; facilitation of joint ventures by member churches or related organizations; sponsorship of common projects; reflection, studies, and publications; news and information sharing with the churches; World Fellowship Sunday; communication and conversation with other Christian world com-

**Cover:** Juan Sieber of Argentina listens to the opinions of a young person at the Lobengula Brethren in Christ Church in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Juan and other MWC General Council members worshiped with the Lobengula congregation on the Sunday prior to Assembly 14.

Cover photo by Laurie Oswald

## What MWC churches say about the future

*As the International Planning Commission worked on the future, it talked with member churches about what they saw MWC becoming. Some of what the IPC heard follows.—Editor*

- Local assembly is the primary place where people participate in the life of “the church” (fellowship, worship, service, witness); local can mean congregation, area conference, or national church body.
- The church is also global (worldwide) and regional (more than one country); people desire more relationships and identity at global and regional levels.
- Relationships (solidarity) are perceived as essential for effective witness and development (growth, survival) of the Anabaptist Christian community at local and international levels.
- Churches desire a more comprehensive role for MWC (more than assemblies).
- Churches in the South generally desire more services and programmes in order to respond to opportunities and needs.
- Churches around the world see themselves as linked in equality and reciprocity, no longer as parent-child.
- An organization (MWC) accountable to the global family of BIC / Mennonite churches may be better adapted to providing the relationships churches want with one another than can the present agency to church (North-South) structures.
- Churches recognize and usually appreciate the cultural diversity embodied in the worldwide MWC family.
- Some members fear that theological differences among members will not be taken seriously and others fear the differences will be divisive.
- The scope of authority of MWC should not supersede the autonomy of any member church.

munities—and who knows what else!

Yet at least as important as all of these activities in overcoming the obstacles to world community is the way we seek God’s will and make decisions together. The adversarial debate and majority rule systems inherited from Western democratic societies are inadequate when the goal is multicultural global communion. For the IPC and the General Council, consensus—a method of arriving at decisions without voting—builds community and “therefore will be the normal mode of decision making.”

**H**owever we name and shape the process, the key will be to recognize continually that all have gifts from God and that we need each other to function effectively in the church—and to demonstrate permanently the willingness to risk an unexpected outcome, if that is the discernment of the Spirit’s leading.

Twenty-one years from now, in

2025, we will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the first Anabaptist baptism and the 100th anniversary of MWC. My dream is that we will be able to do so as a true koinonia of Anabaptist-related churches, linked globally in fellowship, worship, service, and witness—while remembering with gratitude that we are but one member of the universal body of Christ.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Courier / Correo / Courier*, 2004 / number 1, page 2.

<sup>2</sup> C.A. Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed: the Historical Core of Anabaptist-Related Identity*, Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, 1999, pages 21 and 40.

<sup>3</sup> Harold S. Bender, *These Are My People: the Nature of the Church and Its Discipleship According to the New Testament*, Herald Press, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, USA, 1962, pages 45 and 46.

<sup>4</sup> See *Courier / Correo / Courier*, 2003, numbers 3 & 4, page 24.

<sup>5</sup> Pakisa K. Tshimika, Tim Lind, *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church’s Experiment*, Good Books, Intercourse, Pennsylvania, USA, 2003, page 74.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the Peace Council statement on “Practices that form Christians as peacemakers,” in the Peace Council Report to the General Council, 17 August 2003, at [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org). The report will appear also in the next issue of *C/C/C*.

# *Koinonia from a peace church perspective*

by Fernando Enns

*Editor's note: This article is based on a 2003 presentation by Fernando Enns to the International Planning Commission as it was working on what MWC should be and how its churches might relate to each other in the future.*

To understand who we are called to be as global Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, we must first of all understand the nature and mission of the church, how the church lives out community in our world, and how we as members of a peace church shape our relationships with each other and with our neighbors.

**What is the church?** When we look at the New Testament, we have at least three major metaphors that provide us with an understanding of the church as God intends it to be:

*1. The church is the chosen*

*people of God.* Peter puts this quite succinctly in his first book when he quotes from the book of Hosea: "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10).

To be "chosen" is not an end in itself. Rather, being chosen aims at something beyond the church. The church is the messenger of the kingdom of God, proclaiming God's justice and peace for all creation.

The church that lives in the world is in itself a sign of a new world. From the very beginning, the church was called to be a community in which the kingdom of God was the determining reality.

*2. The church is the body of Christ.* The church today is Christ's presence in the world. This is true because the church has God's word. Indeed, the church is found-

ed on the self-giving word of God as proclaimed through Jesus Christ—the incarnation. Therefore, the church partakes in the future of God's kingdom as revealed in Jesus.

This expression of the body of Christ (cf. Pauline typology in Colossians 1:18-24; 2:19; Ephesians 1:23; 4:16; 5:23-30) involves both the local and the universal. Who we are and how we function as a church must be shaped by the interdependence of the universal and the local: the universal church shapes the local congregation, and the local congregation is always part of the universal church.

*3. The church as the temple of the Holy Spirit.* Pentecost is generally interpreted as the birthday of the church. It was then that the Holy Spirit became the fountain of new life for the people of God, making the truth of the gospel a reality in the life of

the community.

The Holy Spirit continues to build the body of Christ, making individuals into members of a community. The Holy Spirit grants charismata (gifts) to the members for service in the community. In this way the

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members also partake of the Holy Spirit.

This relationship is described in the metaphors of the inhabited “temple” or “house.” It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that believers grow into one “holy temple” (Ephesians 2:21) or into a “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5). The members are to maintain “the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

### **The church as community.**

In the Greek New Testament, being united in the Holy Spirit and maintaining unity and peace through this bond is described as *koinonia*. *Koinonia* expresses everything that we have in common as a group of believers: sharing, participating, acting together, mutual accountability, community, congregation.

From the very beginning, *koinonia* was an important concept for the church. It brought about the reconciliation between Paul and Peter,

James, and John, as described in Galatians 2:9. Practicing *koinonia* was responsible for the offering for the poor (2 Corinthians 8:4) and for the witness that the church gave through having all things in common (Acts 2:42-45).

*Koinonia* focuses on the quality of relationships between members of a community in time and space. Through baptism we become a community with each other and with God. In listening to God’s Word and in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, we become his body (1 Corinthians 11:27).

This body is a “community of discipleship” which expresses itself in many different forms. These include common prayer, breaking of bread, engaging in witness, sharing—sufferings, joys, needs. In *koinonia* the body stands courageously for the truth. It serves one another, including giving both material and spiritual gifts. It cares for the harmony of all creation, knowing that it will also participate in the coming glory of Jesus Christ.

*Koinonia* is founded by the gift of faith in the triune God. It is granted by the Holy Spirit. Paul describes the relationship of the believers and their Lord as being “in Christ” and Jesus as the one who is in the believers through the Spirit (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Therefore, the community of believers is a gift of God, through which God draws humankind into the realm of his gracious, unselfish love.

**Different but interdependent.** The concept of *koinonia* expresses different but not independent levels in the community of believers. For example, there is *koinonia* with God, by which we as believers participate in the

divine trinity. There is *koinonia* within the local church and between the local church and the more universal expression of the people of God. *Koinonia* also functions with all of creation. Through *koinonia* we experience the richness of our communal life in Christ.

An understanding of *koinonia* is therefore also fundamental to our perspective as a peace church. We believe that the community of believers forms a visible unity as a reconciled diversity. This does not mean we are uniform but rather experience *koinonia* on the basis of our differences.

As a peace church, our primary experience of community is in worshiping together. It is here, particularly in the Lord’s Supper, that we are invited to transcend our boundaries and become a community.

This community has a distinct perspective in our world, one that lives as though all of creation will eventually be transformed. Nonviolence, therefore, becomes a regulative principle of the life and witness of the church.

Through *koinonia*, we also believe that the church is not defined once and for all. Rather, the church develops a self-understanding that tries to meet the continual need to do theological reflection in order to give renewed shape to the church, so that the world may believe.

*Fernando Enns (photo at left) is Director of Studies in the Ecumenical Institute of Heidelberg University in Germany. He is vice-chair of the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany and a delegate to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.*

# Mennonite-

by Phyllis Pellman Good

*As a “peace church,” honest and careful conversation with “adversaries” should be the normal thing for us to do.*

At first thought, a small group of Mennonites and a Vatican delegation seem to be unlikely conversation partners. But maybe not. Five-plus years after they first met for a formal dialogue, seven representatives from Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and seven from the Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity have issued a report of their conversations. Its title hints at the intention of the meetings as well as their tone—“Called Together to Be Peacemakers.”

But the conversations and the report are only one part of the process for MWC. Another part is just beginning. MWC is forwarding copies of the report to all its member churches for their study and reaction. The original document, in English, has been translated into French, and a Spanish translation is also underway.

“On the MWC side, we are now entering a broadening stage in the process,” explains MWC Executive Secretary Larry



# Catholic dialogue report going to churches

Miller, who was one of the participants in the conversations. "This report is not a kind of encyclical handed down from the MWC office. Instead, it is intended to be reviewed and explored by Mennonites and Brethren in Christ around the world—from the point of view of their own contexts and convictions."

This approach allows Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches to be full partners in the ongoing search "to overcome the consequences of almost five centuries of mutual isolation and hostility" (paragraph 2 of the report), attitudes which have often characterized relationships between Anabaptist-related and Catholic churches.

Recognizing that some MWC members "find themselves in difficult situations as a minority within predominantly Catholic societies," MWC thought it essential that its member churches join the effort toward greater understanding between Catholics and Anabaptist-Mennonites, both historically and going forward, according to Larry.

"At this point, on the MWC side, the report represents only the positions of the seven members of the MWC delegation to the conversations. It has not been received or approved or commented on by MWC," Larry says. "This approach is somewhat of an innovation, as far as I know. Instead of MWC simply issuing a report, or taking it first to its governing body to be formally accepted, we are taking a two- to three-year period during which member churches can

respond. The MWC General Council will review both the report and the responses from member churches when it meets next, in 2006.

"Furthermore, MWC welcomes member churches convening consultations to study the report from their own local perspectives, as well as examine Catholic-Mennonite relations in their own contexts. If desired, MWC will make one or more MWC delegation members available for these consultations. The Pontifical Council is also ready to make a Catholic delegation member available for several such consultations if we desire," Larry says. In addition, the Pontifical Council is ready to receive a delegation composed of MWC members who want to talk directly to the Vatican about the report or other concerns in Catholic-Mennonite relations in their own setting."

Should Mennonites and Brethren in Christ be concerned that MWC is softening defining differences with the Catholic Church or compromising key principles?

The report highlights six areas that ought to have further study by each group, in order to reach fairer appraisals of their own—and each other's—doctrines, practices, and attitudes.

Extensive space is given to listing Mennonites' and Catholics' "convergences" and "divergences" about three major topics: "The nature of the church," "sacraments and ordinances" (including baptism and the Lord's Supper), and "our commitment to peace."

MWC delegation member Neal Blough (a theologian

based in Paris) describes the five week-long exchanges as "nervous in the beginning but very quickly honest and forthcoming. I vividly remember the occasions when we were tense or angry with each other, and then went to a meal together and finished the day in prayer. Knowing each other allowed this kind of honesty. It wasn't always easy, but we may have found a model for how to speak when we have important disagreements."

Will the conversations really change anything?

"Major differences separate Catholics and Mennonites, but speaking of them, and trying to deal with them, can repair our relationships as divided Christians," Neal says. "In my own context in Paris, I have seen that consistently keeping in touch and in dialogue makes a positive difference. Catholics that we know here do not consider Mennonites to be a sect; they respect our peace witness and other aspects of our theology. But they do not expect Mennonites to become Catholics."

Larry points out that "Catholic delegation members asked 'forgiveness for any sins which were committed against Mennonites'

[paragraph 202]. Since the Catholic Church is a world church, the positions taken by the Pontifical Council delegation will be considered seriously by Catholic leaders both in Rome and around the world, and thus can be useful for Mennonites everywhere in improving relations with Catholics.

"As a 'peace church,' honest, careful conversation with 'adversaries' should be the normal thing for us to do," Larry says. "Yet we haven't done that with the Catholic Church at the international level since the beginning of the Anabaptist-Catholic conflict.

"In this context, Mennonite delegation members asked forgiveness for their frequent failure to demonstrate love towards Catholics and for thoughtlessly perpetuating hostile images or false stereotypes of them [paragraph 204]," Larry continues. "I hope that this exchange at the international level will be useful for Mennonites and Catholics who desire to build good relationships at the national and local levels. By God's grace, it will be."

*Phyllis Pellman Good, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, serves as an MWC communication consultant.*

"Called Together to be Peacemakers: Report of the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference (1998-2003)" has been published in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity Information Service, N. 113 (2003 / II / III). It is available in paper or electronic format from Mennonite World Conference at MWC, 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. Email: [Strasbourg@MWC-cmm.org](mailto:Strasbourg@MWC-cmm.org).



A Zambia BIC women's choir sings during Africa Day at Assembly 14. "It was important for the church to come," says BIC Bishop Danisa Ndlovu.

Africa 2003 remembered:

## 'We will never be the same'

by Betti Erb

Because they hosted Mennonite World Conference's 14th Assembly in August 2003, the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe will never be the same. That's the assessment of Danisa Ndlovu, BICC bishop in Zimbabwe and vice-president of MWC.

Danisa made his comments last February when he visited Ontario, Canada. He was a guest at a gathering of 130 people that included Assembly 14 participants, and he spoke to faculty at Conrad Grebel University College.

That the assembly even happened was a miracle, said Danisa. Many North Americans registered concern about the shortage of food in Zimbabwe. They were also concerned they would appear to be endorsing Robert Mugabe's government.

"It was important for the church to come," said Danisa. "It was a matter of

relationships." North Americans made a bold statement about peace. In a country with a history of racial tension, it was striking to see so many white people on the streets of Bulawayo.

How wonderful, said Danisa, that blacks and whites could mingle as friends without having to treat one another with "undue respect."

The conference helped to validate the church in Zimbabwe. The Brethren in Christ are only a small part of the Christian community there, Danisa said, and Christians from other groups said to him: "We had no idea that you were part of a worldwide body!"

It was marvellous to see laughter in the midst of suffering, to see people volunteer their time. Rural and urban, rich and poor, Zimbabwean Christians worked together, he said. Assembly 14 also gave Zimbabweans a chance to enjoy their own tourist attractions.

"I didn't know we had this facility in Bulawayo!" was an often-heard exclamation after a day at the Zimbabwe International Exhibition Centre, where the assembly was held.

Life since August 2003 hasn't been easy. The Zimbabwe economy has taken a nosedive, and inflation is running at 625 percent. Eighty percent of the population is unemployed. Many families can no longer afford to send their children to school. Danisa has observed people walking a daily round-trip of 30 kilo-

metres because they no longer have money to spend for transportation.

Politically, things are quieter, said Danisa, but there are still tensions. A by-election guarantees a display of violence. Government officials view meetings as subversive and dismiss them with tear gas. The churches—Catholic, Zimbabwe Council of Churches, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, of which the Brethren in Christ are a part—are trying to bring the ruling party and the opposition to the table for discussions.

The Brethren in Christ have established a new Peace and Justice Committee. It will need trainers, Danisa said, to help its members understand the risks they face. One risk, he said, is that government agents will follow them.

The meetings in Ontario included discussions about how Assembly 14 participants remain connected. Larry Miller, executive secretary of MWC, said that to have had an intimate relationship with the Zimbabwe church and



then nothing further feels like “a one-night stand.” What does “fellowship” mean, now that the assembly is over?” Larry asked.

“We are not structured,” he said, “to relate permanently and intimately with each national church, but we can monitor what’s happening, along with Mennonite Central Committee and various mission agencies.”

People-to-people links are happening through letters and other forms of communication, said Danisa. The most important links are person to person, congregation to congregation, one institution with another.

Danisa’s trip included visits to churches, agencies, and schools in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Ontario.

Danisa and his wife Treziah have three children: Thinkgrace, Trustworthy, and Devotion.

His hopes for Zimbabwe? That there will be peaceful change, that his country can avoid civil war. Although violence continues, he does not lose hope.

“God’s timing,” he says, “is different than ours.”

*Betti Erb is a staff writer for Canadian Mennonite, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, from which this article was adapted by permission.*

*Africa 2003 remembered:*

# ‘I was there!’

by Doris Dube

*What has been the impact on the local church of having hosted a successful global assembly?*

**T**hough Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly Gathered took place several months ago, two souvenirs remain, constantly reminding us who live in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, of that historical event.

First is the Africa 2003 T-shirt with the inscription, “Sharing Gifts in Suffering and in Joy.” You see it everywhere on the streets of Bulawayo. People wear the shirt with joy. It shouts, “I was there!”

So does the conference bag. Today that bag carries Bibles to church, books to schools, goods from shopping. People are also putting it to many other uses.

These two things—T-shirts and Africa 2003 bags—more than anything else have served as ways of helping Brethren in Christ (BICs) who did not know each other to get acquainted. They also speak to our neighbors, who ask, “Are you BIC?” Or “Were you at the assembly?”

But more important than these visible signs are the changes the conference brought about in many people’s lives. What has such an undertaking done for the Zimbabwe BIC Church? What has been the impact of having hosted such an assembly?”

Yes, we have heard the appreciation of the global church for hosting Africa 2003. But what has been the impact on ourselves? Here is what some of us who live, work, and worship in Zimbabwe have to say:

**I** was very surprised and challenged by the capability of the Zimbabwe BIC Church. It amazes me what

God did through us. At a time when our economy was so depressed and when, under natural conditions, we would have shied away from hosting guests, God enabled us to welcome into our presence all those people—and to minister to them. To me, that was a miracle!

—Mrs. Nellie Mlotshwa

**W**e have heard so many compliments from the people who attended Assembly 14 from other parts of the world. They have

*Below: Lines were long and crowds thick during tea breaks at Assembly 14 in Zimbabwe. Some—such as three-year-old Qedisile Khumalo of Bulawayo (far left)—found their own refreshment and ways to relax. For others, refreshment came through learning to know and interact with people from around the globe; in the center photo, Grace Brenneman, USA (left), talks with Febby Chisweta of Zambia.*





*Two of close to 7,000 Mennonites and Brethren in Christ who attended some part of MWC's Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.*

**I** consider it a privilege to attend this conference. Starting from now on, my wife and I are going to save for our transportation to the next MWC global assembly.—*Glen Ncube*

**I** did not know that I could enjoy worship and feel the joy of having been in communion with God from merely mingling with people from other parts of the world. It was very enriching for me to sit in the auditorium and worship, but it was better still to talk to my brothers and sisters. Sometimes language was a barrier, but still we had fellowship.—*Pastor Obed Ndlovu*

commended us for looking after them so well. To me, this says something: we could not all have been putting on a show for our guests. We were just living what we believe. Individually as well as collectively, we cared for our guests as best we could.

That first evening, we did not do so well in feeding or transporting conference attendees, but we learned fast. By the next day, we were on track.

We must not underestimate the vast wealth we represent in human resources. All the people who served in the various committees represent a storehouse of wealth.—*Rev. Albert Ndlovu*

**T**he cross-cultural fertilization that took place during Assembly 14 was very enriching and healthy for us all.—*Rev. Bruce Khumalo*

**H**aving all those workshops from which to choose was a very welcome change. I hope the BIC Church in Zimbabwe will learn from this and create space for workshops at future conferences. Participating in workshops and discussing relevant issues is one way of worshipping.—*Pastor Dickious Moyo*

**I**t does not matter where the next conference will be. What I do know is that I will be there!—*Sam Sibanda*

**G**od showed us his power. In the midst of financial crisis, God provided so bountifully for us. It was a

*Many were the new friendships that were formed at Assembly 14, such as Fiono Moyo, Zimbabwe (left), and Sarah Thompson, USA.*

wonder beyond our dreams.

On behalf of my brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe, I would like to say “thank you” to all who gave so much so that it was possible for many of us to attend the conference. They enabled me to eat so well, to be transported so comfortably, and to be blessed so abundantly by fellowshiping with so many people.

Language was no barrier. Many times we worshiped and ministered to each other in the Spirit.—*Pastor Absalom Sibanda*

**F**or me, the conference was an eye opener. It was also an intense time, with days starting early and ending late. But I cannot complain. I enjoyed every moment of it.—*Miss Emely Tshuma*

**I** appreciated worshipping in a relaxed way. There was variety in worship at the conference. Even the sermons with serious messages were conveyed in a relaxed manner. This really was a learning situation for me.—*Rev. Joel Ndlovu*

**W**hen something like this happens, we can not help but say, “It is good.” Everything was good: the fellowship, the worship,

the interaction. Hats off to the African church!—*Fuduka Moyo*

**O**ur committee still meets to pray for the various issues which were brought to the prayer committee during the conference and other concerns we have received since the assembly. Though we are separated by distance, there is nothing to prevent us from praying for each other.—*Pastor Charles Sibanda*

**T**he gathering helped us who make up the Zimbabwe BIC Church to awaken our potential to network more as brothers and sisters.—*Overseer Sinda Ngulube*

These are just a few of the many reactions that members of the Zimbabwe BIC Church have expressed in the months since Assembly 14. Many of us have also exchanged letters, emails, and telephone conversations as we continue to share our gifts in joy.

*Doris Dube, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, coordinated announcements and the daily newsheet at Assembly Gathered. Doris also serves as the regional editor for Africa for C/C/C.*



Everett J. Thomas

## Negotiating the wedding of two 'MWC children'

It was the similarities, not the differences of their cultures that led Bedru Hussein from Ethiopia and Shant and Esther Kunjam from India to schedule a quiet meeting in a room off to the side during Africa 2003 last August.

Bedru, Shant, and Esther got together to talk about the fact that their children had met each other, fallen in love, and planned to marry. Selam B. Hussein and Sarah Kunjam are students at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA. Selam is studying music and computer science and Sarah is a pre-medical student.

The two met partly because their fathers have both been involved in MWC—Bedru as vice-president, Shant as a member of the Peace Council. "They are conscious of being MWC children," Shant says.

Ethiopian and Indian cultures both have elders do the negotiating between families for a wedding. So when Bedru met with Shant and Esther in Bulawayo, they agreed they wanted to have "MWC elders" witness the meeting. Their agreed-upon choice: Mesach Krisetya,

MWC president, and John A. Lapp, MWC's history series editor.

The meeting, however, had very little negotiation but lots of laughter and goodwill. Both sets of parents told each other how pleased they were that their offspring was marrying a Christian—and from a family they knew through MWC.

"What about a dowry?" Mesach asked at one point.

Shant, with a laugh, replied: "With four daughters, if we still practiced dowry, I could have a dairy herd by now!"

Selam and Sarah have scheduled their wedding for 2005. The couple plans to be married in India but live in Ethiopia. —*J. Lorne Peachey*



Above: Bedru Hussein (front left) meets Esther and Shant Kunjam under the eyes of "MWC elders" Mesach Krisetya and John A. Lapp (back). Left: the engaged couple—Selam B. Hussein from Ethiopia and Sarah Kunjam from India.

### Around the edges

What many who were at MWC's 14th Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, last August will remember most are the informal encounters that came in addition to the official program. Rare is the participant who doesn't have a unique story to tell. Two are told on this page.

## How I learned to sing 'that song'

by Donna Mast

Like most who attended Africa 2003, I found the music to be one of the highlights. The variety of tunes and tones, combined with various rhythms and textures, made for an unforgettable experience.

Like most everyone else, I was particularly moved by the song, "Hakuna Akaita." When those who knew that song leapt to their feet to sing, clap, and move every time it was sung, how I wanted to join them. But while I had the melody in my head, I just couldn't decipher the words.

So one time when we began to sing "that song,"

I noticed a woman in the row ahead of me singing with gusto. I stepped beside her and asked her to sing so I could watch her face. She grinned, looked me full in the face, and articulated the words so I could learn them.

That helped, but it wasn't enough. After we sat down, I grabbed a pen and paper and asked her if she could write down the words for me. Of course she would, she replied. She would give them to me tomorrow.

I wondered how, in this sea of faces, I would ever find her again, so I pressed her. "Please, couldn't you just write the words for me right now?" "No," she said, "the words are Shona, and I speak Ndebele. I'll find someone who can write them for you and bring them to you."

Two days later, as my husband and I were relaxing on a side street, she found me. "Do you remember me?" she asked. Then, with a beautiful smile, she handed me a sheet of paper with the words to "Hakuna Akaita" carefully printed on it.

I never did get her name. But because of the words she gave me, I have taught "that song" to my congregation. And I continue to sing "Hakuna Akaita," remembering her beautiful smile and saying a prayer of thanks for the wonderful gift from my sister in Christ.

*Donna Mast is co-pastor of the Scottdale Mennonite Church, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, USA.*



The Paraguayan first family—President Nicanor Duarte Frutos and Maria Gloria Penayo de Frutos with their children: Hector, José Feernando, Betania, Martin, Santiago.

## Paraguay's first family finds home at Iglesia Raíces Hermanos Menonitas

*Asuncion, Paraguay*—Maria Gloria Penayo de Duarte Frutos, first lady of Paraguay, and her five children are a vital part of Iglesia Raíces Hermanos Menonitas (Roots Mennonite Brethren Church) in Paraguay. The president, Nicanor Duarte Frutos, attends whenever duties of state allow him to do so.

“From our church, we try everything to relate closely to these people so that they do not have to be alone,” says Victor Wall, one of the congregation’s pastors.

Maria Gloria, a former Roman Catholic, turned to the MB church through its evangelism efforts. She was among the second group of converts baptized at the Spanish church, founded seven years ago as an expansion of the German-speaking MB church in Asuncion. The new church has 163 members, but attendance spikes as high as 600 for special events like baptisms.

The first lady’s baptism followed discipleship training and her expressed commitment to the church and its Anabaptist theology. She is active in all church activities, but especially evangelism, says Victor.

The family’s eldest son, 18-year-old Jose Fernando, is also a baptized member. The four younger children participate regularly in Sunday school and youth activities.

Nicanor Duarte Frutos was installed as president of Paraguay on August 15, 2003. Victor says the president is a believer and identifies strongly with Iglesia Raíces.

“Politically, he pays a price for his commitment to Christ, [but] he shares his faith with his cabinet,” adds Victor.

“At our last baptism on November 30, the Secretary General of the Presidency was baptized.” That baptism made the news in Paraguay, which is 90 percent Catholic.

## MWC maintains strong ties with BIC church in Zimbabwe

*Strasbourg, France*—Mennonite World Conference will continue to stand in solidarity with the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Zimbabwe and to engage in “sharing gifts in suffering and in joy,” theme of Assembly 14.

This was a recommitment made by MWC officers and executive staff when they met in Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, in January. The group also reviewed events in that country since the assembly.

At the assembly, the MWC General Council issued a statement committing MWC to prayer and to join the BICC in monitoring social and political developments in the country.

Since then, the BICC has created a Peace and Justice Committee chaired by Danisa Ndlovu, bishop of the BICC in Zimbabwe and vice-president of MWC. This committee is establish-

ing networks with BIC churches and groups within Zimbabwe as well as connecting with the global church and with Mennonite Central Committee.

The Peace and Justice Committee is monitoring the impact of changes in Zimbabwe on daily lives, particularly of BIC people, as the country continues with a downward economic spiral and political uncertainty. The committee is considering how the global church might respond.

The BICC in Zimbabwe will collect information and MWC will implement mutually agreed upon action as requested. MWC and BIC officials will negotiate who signs documents that will be sent to government offices.

Ray Brubacher, international coordinator for Assembly 14, will serve as MWC’s contact person with the Zimbabwe BIC church.

## Africa 2003 assembly & travel funds show positive balances at end of 2003

*Kitchener, Ontario, Canada*—MWC’s assembly fund showed a positive balance of \$47,000 for last year. This despite lagging economies and the difficulties of holding a global assembly in a country where the value of currency was at an unprecedented low.

According to the Kitchener staff, which does the cost-accounting for MWC, European and North American registrations for the Bulawayo assembly were strong, a large factor in the positive balance, since these registrants were charged higher fees. Staff also noted contributions for Africa 2003 were strong, and costs

were carefully controlled.

The MWC travel fund for Africa 2003 also ended with a positive balance.

The assembly fund balance will be used to help finance future assemblies, including a feasibility study on the location of Assembly 15 in 2009. MWC has received invitations from member churches in Paraguay and in the United States to hold the next assembly in their countries.

Larry Miller and Ray Brubacher will do feasibility studies of both locations and bring a recommendation to the July 28-August 4, 2004, executive committee meetings in Strasbourg, France.



Ngonda Daniel (left) with the banner that saved his life. At right is Gilbert Ndunda, president of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Congo, who took the banner to Assembly 14.

## MWC banner saves life in Congo

*Kinshasa, Congo*—An MWC banner, intended for Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, saved the life of a Mennonite Brethren man last August.

Pascal T. Kulungu, director of the Mennonite Peace Center, asked Ngonda Daniel, a small business owner, to make a banner for the Congolese MB Church.

On August 6, several days before the assembly, Ngonda left his home to take the banner to Kulungu's office. He never arrived until the next day, when he showed up at Kulungu's office with bandages around his arm. He said, "Your banner saved me from being killed by gangsters."

Ngonda told his story: He was in a taxi when two men in the back seat with him pulled out guns. They told him not to say anything or they would kill him.

They took him outside Kinshasa and robbed him of everything he had: \$3, pens, peace materials, the banner.

One of them took a closer look at the banner and asked, "Are you a Christian?"

Ngonda said he was.

The man asked Ngonda more questions while others

beat him. One of the blows broke Ngonda's arm.

"Don't kill him," said the man with the banner. "He carries a Christian flag with Jesus' cross. He is from a church."

The attackers threw Ngonda into a bush and left. He walked to the main road, where a car stopped, and the driver asked why he was naked.

After Ngonda told what had happened, the driver took him to a hospital, where his family joined him.

"This is how Mr. Ngonda saw death coming to him," Kulungu says. "The banner with Jesus' cross saved him."—*reprinted by permission from Mennonite Weekly Review, USA.*

## Ricardo Esquivia says 'thank you'

Dear brothers and sisters: Greetings of friendship and hope.

Thank you for your opportune response to our call for help when confronted with the threat against my personal freedom and our developing peace work by various government officials.

Thanks to the immedi-

## Esquivia saved from arrest by international response

*Washington, D.C., USA*—Ricardo Esquivia, Colombia Mennonite leader and peace activist, attributes his protection from arrest in his country to the overwhelming response of the international community.

It is possible to create a wall of international protection, Ricardo told U.S. Congressional staff during a visit here with three other religious leaders from Colombia in March.

Last January, several sources had confirmed threats on Ricardo's life, presumably because of his work for peace and his opposition to the policies of the current Colombian government. False rumors were spreading that he was a member of a guerrilla group.

Because of the efforts of Justapaz, the peace arm of the Colombia Mennonite Church, and other groups, Colombia government officials received hundreds of letters, faxes, calls, and emails exposing the plan to arrest Ricardo. The messages came from within Colombia as well as from the international community, including the U.S., British, German, and Canadian embassies. Twelve members of the U. S.

Congress sent letters directly to Colombia President Alvaro Uribe.

While he remains in Bogotá, Ricardo is now relatively safe, but he plans to begin work soon in a highly-conflicted area in the coastal region, helping to distribute food for Church World Service. In this area, violence can be made to appear as common crime, and risk to persons like Ricardo is high.

While in Washington, the Colombian religious leaders urged the U.S. government to cut off military aid to Colombia. This aid, totaling more than \$3 billion since 2000, only adds to the unrest and insecurity in Colombia, the leaders said, and results in threats to lives of peacemakers such as Ricardo.—*from reports by Ferne Burkhardt (MWC) and Alexa Smith (PSUSA News).*

Ricardo Esquivia



authors of the threats to think more closely about the political consequences of their actions.

What we know for sure is that I still enjoy my freedom and I'm ready to continue with the work on Colombia's Caribbean Coast.

Your brother in Christ,  
Ricardo Esquivia

## Africa 2003

### Assembly 14 International Choir featured on recently released CD

*Kitchener, Ontario, Canada*—Music of the Africa 2003 International Choir is now available on a CD recently released by MWC.

The CD, titled “Songs from Africa 2003,” features many of the songs the choir used leading worship music at MWC’s 14th Assembly Gathered last August.

Opening and closing tracks of the CD are live recordings of the International Choir at the Lobengula Brethren in Christ Church. These were recorded at a concert on Friday prior to the assembly.

The remaining songs were recorded in a studio in Bulawayo, with the exception of the popular “Hakuna Akaita.” That recording comes from Hall 4 during the assembly.

The CD was produced by Bryan Moyer Suderman, choir member from Ontario, Canada.

“Songs from Africa 2003” is available for \$18 Canadian or \$14 U.S. (taxes included) plus shipping from Pandora Press, 33 Kent Ave., Kitchener ON N2G 3R1, Canada, [www.pandorapress.com](http://www.pandorapress.com), 1-866-696-1678 (toll free).



Mark and Mary Hurst (left) with host Debbie Armanious on Community Radio for a call-in program on conflict resolution.

## Down Under

### Mennonites and Coptics join forces for radio program on conflict resolution

*Sydney, Australia*—“Welcome to KIMI Radio on FM 98.5.” Thus begins a Saturday afternoon radio broadcast here by the Coptic Orthodox Church. On March 20, the show’s guests were Mark and Mary Hurst, Mennonite missionaries in Australia and New Zealand; the topic: conflict resolution.

The Hursts are pastoral workers for the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand (AAANZ). They serve as mediators, conference and workshop speakers, and facilitators with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and Help Increase the Peace Programme (HIPP).

Host Debbie Armanious directs the interview, assisted by a panel of young adults from her congregation. The entire hour-long program is put together by volunteers from St. Mark’s Coptic Church.

Over the years, the Hursts have passed on articles to Debbie about Mennonite Central Committee working with the Coptic Church in Egypt. As a result, she requested music and material on missions for the youth of her church and eventually invited the Hursts to be guests on her radio program.

Call-in questions that

morning were about anger and forgiveness. The Hursts shared stories from the Bible and from their own relationship to illustrate how conflict can be dealt with and how people can learn to live and work together in peace.

At the end of the hour, Debbie invited Mary and Mark back for another program, this one in June. The theme will be “forgiveness,” which grew out of many of the questions of the day.

Next day, Mary received a phone call from a listener, requesting help with a family problem.

Thus the witness of the gospel continues “down under,” Mennonites and Copts together.

#### Note from Zimbabwe:

In an email in late March, Brethren in Christ Bishop Danisa Ndlovu reported that thieves had broken into church offices in Bulawayo and stolen TVs, VCRs, and groceries intended for an upcoming youth camp. Over \$600,000Z was also stolen. “It could have been worse,” wrote Danisa. “All our computers in three offices were not stolen!”



**Church develops out of Assembly 14.** A new Mennonite community is taking shape as a house church in Málaga, Spain. The group (above) is composed of a Spanish family and several persons who came from Asunción, Paraguay, recently. The latter are members of a Mennonite church who migrated to Spain for better living conditions.

“MWC has had a lot to do with this,” says José Fernández Tabera, who is taking responsibility for teaching and pastoral leadership of the group. “At Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, pastors Máximo Abadie and Flavio Florentin of Paraguay learned about Mennonites in Spain through Dennis Byler of Burgos. For years we had been praying for a mission point in the south of Spain. This is an answer to our prayers.”

The Málaga group expects others from Paraguay to join them soon.

## Global youth plans take step forward

*Strasbourg, France*—Five young people will evaluate and consider action on plans proposed at the first Global Youth Summit (GYS), held last August with MWC's assembly in Zimbabwe.

In January, MWC executive officers authorized the formation of a Youth Continuation Committee (YCC) for this purpose. YCC will have one representative from each of five continental regions. Nominees must be members of a MWC member or associate member church and be approved by church and MWC leaders.

Already GYS participants are engaged in lively conversations via email, sharing stories of youth and church activities in their countries and prayer requests with each other. These activities will be part of the agenda for the new YCC.

## Vietnamese leaders beaten, imprisoned

*Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*—Local security forces in this city's District 2 beat and detained associates of Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, general secretary of the Mennonite Church in Vietnam, on March 2.

According to reports from a member of the congregation, the incident began when Quang and a pastoral assistant, Pham Ngoc Thach, took down the motorcycle license number of two undercover agents who had been watching them for several weeks. For self-protection, they reported this information to the local precinct.

Later, a large number of security and special armed police arrived and wrote up a complaint against various church members, accusing

2004 Quarter 2

# A call to prayer

Are any among you suffering? They should pray.

Are any cheerful? They should sing songs. —James 5:13

- "Please pray for Spain," Dennis Byler, Mennonite pastor and seminary professor in Burgos, asks following the March 11 acts of terrorism in Madrid. "We are praying for terrorists' hearts of stone to be changed into hearts of flesh by the power of the Spirit of God."
- Pray for the people of Iraq and Palestine, both of whom have deep resentment and anger toward occupying authorities. Resentment is breeding violent resistance in both countries. "I hear people crying for peace and freedom," says Art Gish in a Christian Peacemaker Teams report. Pray for peace with justice in both turbulent regions.
- "Please pray for the Zambia Church," Nchimunya Mwiinga asks in a Brethren in Christ Church newsletter. In February and March 2004, pastors and others attended workshops in psycho-social counselling, advocacy, and dealing with HIV/AIDS, Mwiinga reports. More of these workshops are planned.
- Pray for wisdom for all involved in making a decision about where to hold MWC Assembly 15 in 2009. MWC has received invitations from member churches in Paraguay and from eastern Pennsylvania in the United States. Larry Miller, MWC executive secretary, and Ray Brubacher, associate executive secretary, will do feasibility studies of both locations and bring a recommendation to the July 28-August 4, 2004, meeting of the Executive Committee in Strasbourg, France.
- Pray for 70 persons enrolled in a leadership training program at the Mennonite Study Center in Uruguay. Thank God for the growth in numbers at churches in Uruguay. Pray that the people who decide to join the church may find a spiritual home and receive love, companionship, guidance, understanding, health, wholeness, and a space to become instruments of God's kingdom.
- Thank God for the massive response from the Mennonite world and others on behalf of Ricardo Esquivia, who faced threats of arrest in Colombia on fabricated charges (see page 13). Ricardo is a member of the Mennonite Church of Teusaquillo and was director of Justapaz, the Mennonite Church ministry for nonviolence, justice, and peace.
- Also pray for protection for Bogotá pastors Jaime Meza and Islandes Lozada; Jose Rincon, worker with Justapaz; and Oscar Rodriguez, member of the Teusaquillo congregation. All have received threats, presumably from one of the armed groups that operate in Colombia. Pray that the church in that country will be faithful to Jesus Christ; that it will be preserved in unity; and that it will have the wisdom to know how to witness to the gospel.

them of "disturbing the peace." Security police ordered men in civilian clothes to beat up those who had documented their presence. Four men were arrested and, as of mid-April, still imprisoned.

In early April, 40 Mennonite Church leaders made an appeal to the government for the release of the four. They

also sent a "letter of protest," noting "the entrapment, arrest, interrogation, and vicious beating and imprisonment" of the four church leaders. The letter also protested the January 16 bulldozing of a pastor's house being used for church services in the central highland city of Kon Tum.

Observers believe that

recent actions against Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang's associates are really directed against him. As legal counsel to a larger cluster of house fellowship groups, he has represented church leaders and churches who have faced legal challenges in the Ho Chi Minh City area and elsewhere.—*adapted from reports by Vietnamese Ministries*

Perspective:

# Community is a gift of grace

by Milka Rindzinski

**M**ennonite World Conference's Assembly 14, held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in August 2003, was a genuine celebration of communion and community. The echoes of that assembly still vibrate in many of our memories.

At that assembly, General Council ratified a proposal that MWC become known as a global community of Anabaptist-related churches (see MWC's vision statement on page 3). In this issue, *Courier / Correo / Courrier* attempts to help clarify the implications of that decision.

This unpretentious publication seeks to build community and communion by connecting MWC member and associate member churches so that they may know, love, support, and be accountable to each other.

Those of us with some experience in intentional communities have learned that community is a gift of grace from God. If circumstances bring the community to an end, the vacuum is difficult to fill. One is left with a sense of abandonment and sadness. Not disillusionment, though, for as long as it lasted, the experience was valuable, allowing us to learn about ourselves and others.

Living as part of a community is an art, a lifestyle one learns and which one improves upon along the way. It is also

- Pray for the members of the MWC communication team, scattered in all continents, that they may discern what features and news will best inform and nurture our global community. Pray for wisdom as they make decisions about sensitive issues that should be transmitted to *Courier/Correo/Courrier* readers.—*Milka Rindzinski, editor*

essential that community touches all levels. No one is an island.

To become a community or a communion is also the goal and mission of the church. However, we do not depend on our own capacity to achieve that goal. Christ's Spirit impels, instructs, and enables us.

**T**he call to be in community is to everyone. To live in Christian communion should not be understood as an ideological demand but rather as a responsibility freely assumed. However, once the decision to live in community has been made, it is a serious matter requiring discipline along with enthusiasm.

Life as a communion has many requisites and consequences. It calls for coherence, perseverance, and realism. At the same time, it demands faith, hope, confidence, forgiveness, and nurture. Diverse expressions, concepts, and ideas must be brought together into a harmonious whole. There must also be enough humility to revise and rectify the details to make communion attainable.

The process needs to start at home, as we observe life in our local congregations. And we may expect that becoming part of a global communion—with all its implications and consequences—will contribute to the growth of our life and witness as local communities.

*Milka Rindzinski, Montevideo, Uruguay, serves as general editor of C/C/C and editor-translator of Correo.*



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