

Vision Discernment Team Report
MWC Peace Council
Guatemala City
July 17-19, 2000

The Mennonite World Conference Peace Council met in Guatemala City in July, 2000, as a part of the meeting of the MWC General Council, to reflect on our calling to follow Jesus in the way of peace. During our time together we discussed the Biblical basis for peace, noted some peace issues in our various cultural contexts, and talked about practices the churches might engage to strengthen our peace witness. We recognize and celebrate the many ways in which churches of the global Anabaptist family are working for peace. We also acknowledge that our words are not always followed by actions. We share the following summary with the churches, as a record of our discussions together.

Peace and God:

We recognize that God, the creator of the universe and all that is therein, is the God of peace, Shalom and Eirene. God cares about the total well-being of all humankind. From the beginning of creation, God desired peace for all creation. Jesus is the Prince of Peace; its owner and giver. Jesus modeled peace with self, God and neighbor, as demonstrated in His teaching, ministry, and life. We also recognize, in his death and resurrection, the cost, hope and joy of living such a life of peace. We affirm that, ultimately, peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives, growing out of our relationship with God. Personal peace with God is foundational for peace in the world.

Peace and the Church:

We recognize also that peace is central to the integrated life of the church, in our personal lives as Christians and in our corporate life. Specifically, we have expressed that peace, especially in its biblical expression of Shalom, which includes justice, is an integral element of the church's mission. Also we have said that our church communities should embody such peace before the world which surrounds us, as a living expression of God's vision for His people. In affirming this as our mission, we at the same time affirm the importance of our Anabaptist peace heritage.

Peace and the World:

All of our churches exist in a situation of cultural violence. We see the destruction of family life, media violence, the proliferation of weapons, as well as conflict on national and international levels. The gospel stands against this culture of violence. At the same time, we recognize that our cultures also contain important elements that we should affirm and draw upon in our work for peace.

Peace and Church Practices:

Peace is not an abstract idea, but must be incarnated in concrete practices. In the church this will include action on several levels.

1. Solidarity

As the church, we identify with people in situations of injustice and violence. This solidarity can be expressed in intercessory prayer, communications, fraternal visits, advocacy, and ministries that meet

human need. As the church, we must not withdraw from situations of injustice and violence to pursue our own safety. Together we should develop a prophetic voice, acting against injustices such as international debt, the arms race, nationalism, the destructive impact of globalization, and racism and ethnic conflict, and reaching out to those who are marginalized in our societies. Such solidarity also means that we share this peace witness with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

2. Human Empowerment

As the church we must continue working to develop programs that will enhance and promote peace in families, among church members, as well as in the wider community. Such empowerment can take the form of training in conflict transformation skills, including peace theology and issues in the worship and curriculum of church educational materials as well as of theological institutions, and through clubs for youth.

3. Structural Empowerment

We should develop and strengthen church structures which promote peace such as denominational and congregational peace commissions, intervention teams, and regional networks for communication, connection and collective actions (such as the MesoAmerican Network for Justice and Peace, a peace council for Africa, an Asian peace center).

Recommendations:

In response to all that we have expressed, the Vision Discernment Team proposes the following recommendations:

1. That Mennonite World Conference adopt the recommendation brought in the Peace Council Report to the General Council, and strengthen the work of the Peace Council. (General Council doc. 3a)
2. That the Peace Council organizers develop channels through which we can share stories of peace witness with one another, especially from settings in which churches face difficult contexts (for example, Colombia, Indonesia, Congo).
3. That Mennonite World Conference continue the practice of sending delegations to churches suffering war or oppression, to express concretely the global church's solidarity with them (for example, the delegation to Colombia).
4. That Mennonite World Conference support the formation and strengthening of regional peace networks, peace councils or peace centers to resource the churches' peace witness.
5. That Mennonite World Conference strengthen the Global Anabaptist Peace and Justice Network by :
 - a) appointing a contact person or persons for each continent;
 - b) finding two volunteers to administer the communication links.
6. That Mennonite World Conference affirm the "Decade to Overcome Violence," a program of the World Council of Churches, and encourage its member churches to be involved with other Christian

bodies in working for peace.

7. That Mennonite World Conference continue the practice of sending, on behalf of the global Anabaptist family, letters of concern regarding situations of war or conflict that touch member churches, and that the MWC Executive explore the possibility of cooperation between MWC and Mennonite Central Committee's UN Liaison Office as a channel for sharing concerns with the United Nations.

Peace Council Vision Discernment Team:

Willi Hugo Perez (Guatemala)

Bishop Danisa Ndlovu (Zimbabwe)

Miriam Book (USA)

Atsuhiko Katano (Japan)

Hans Jakob Galle (Germany)

Daagya Dyck (co-opted staff)

adopted by MWC General Council,
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