

# Courier Correo Courier

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Volume 32, Number 1



**Mennonite  
World Conference**  
A Community of Anabaptist  
related Churches

**Congreso  
Mundial Menonita**  
Una Comunidad de  
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence  
Mennonite Mondiale**  
Une Communauté  
d'Églises Anabaptistes

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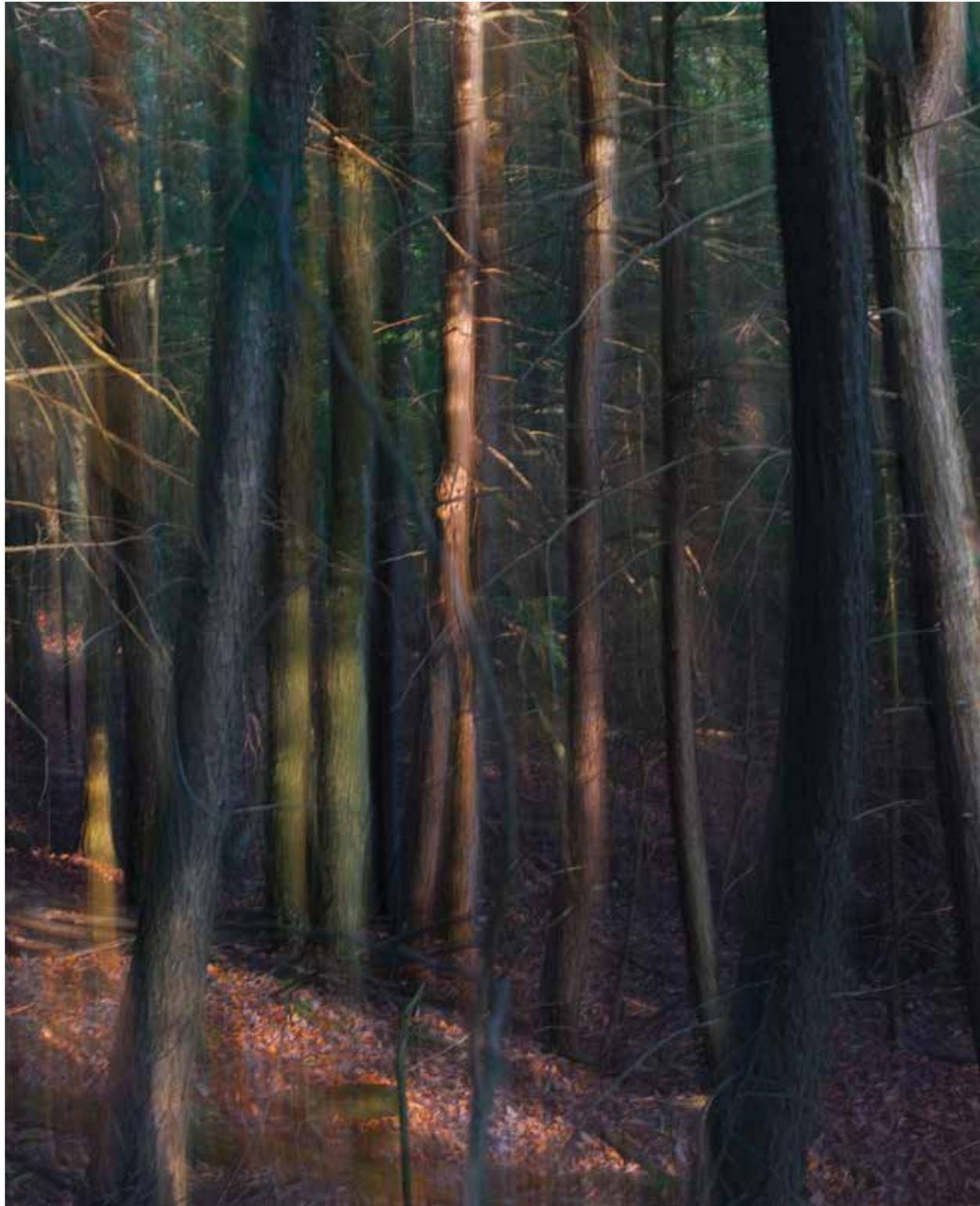
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Cover Photo:

### “Even in our Darkness”

**Despite what appears to be darkness, there is light, if we are observant. Look deeply into this scene, which appears dark and somewhat sinister, and see all the light in the details. Sometimes you have to risk it and break through to the next layer, encouraged by the hints of light.**

Photo: Ed Lehming, Community Mennonite Church, Stouffville, Ontario, Canada

**CORRECTION:** in “Joyous hope and faith: Mennonite churches in Eastern Africa” the October 2016 issue, youth leader Daniel Mtoka’s name was misspelled.

## Courier Correo Courier



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## Word from the editor



### Remembering in sickness, health and celebration

If you’ve ever heard MWC Peace Commission chair and Coffee for Peace founder Joji Pantoja speak, you’ve probably heard her fourfold mission of peacemaking:

- relational harmony with the creator (spiritual transformation),
- relational harmony with others (sociopolitical transformation),
- relational harmony with the creation (economic-ecological transformation),
- relational harmony with self (psycho-social transformation).

We pursue peace not only with God, but also with each other, with our physical environments, and also within ourselves.

Just as we experience disruptions in our experience of creation and in our relationships with other people, we also experience disruptions in our harmony with ourselves. Our bodies get sick – and so do our minds. Our health can be affected physically, spiritually and emotionally.

When we are sick with stomach ailments or broken bones, we seek healing through prayer, the aid of a doctor and the support of our community of family and church. For our mental health, we also need the help of not only spiritual sources but also medical professionals and the love and care of our community of faith.

Writers in this issue of *Courier* share how mental health affects our flourishing and how we need to employ a variety of strategies to restore us to better health.

In this issue, we also mark the beginning of the Faith and Life Commission’s decade of reflection on the Reformation. It was in 1517 that Martin Luther famously nailed 99 theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany, a decisive statement about the church that is taken as the beginning of the Reformation.

It would be several more years before our own spiritual forebears rebaptized each other as a statement of their understanding of what it means to be church, beginning what we call the Radical Reformation, 21 January 1525. This is the date around which we organize World Fellowship Sunday (see page 16).

The Faith and Life Commission is organizing a decade of remembrance, called Renewal 2027, which began February 2017 with the first event in Augsburg, Germany (see page 17).

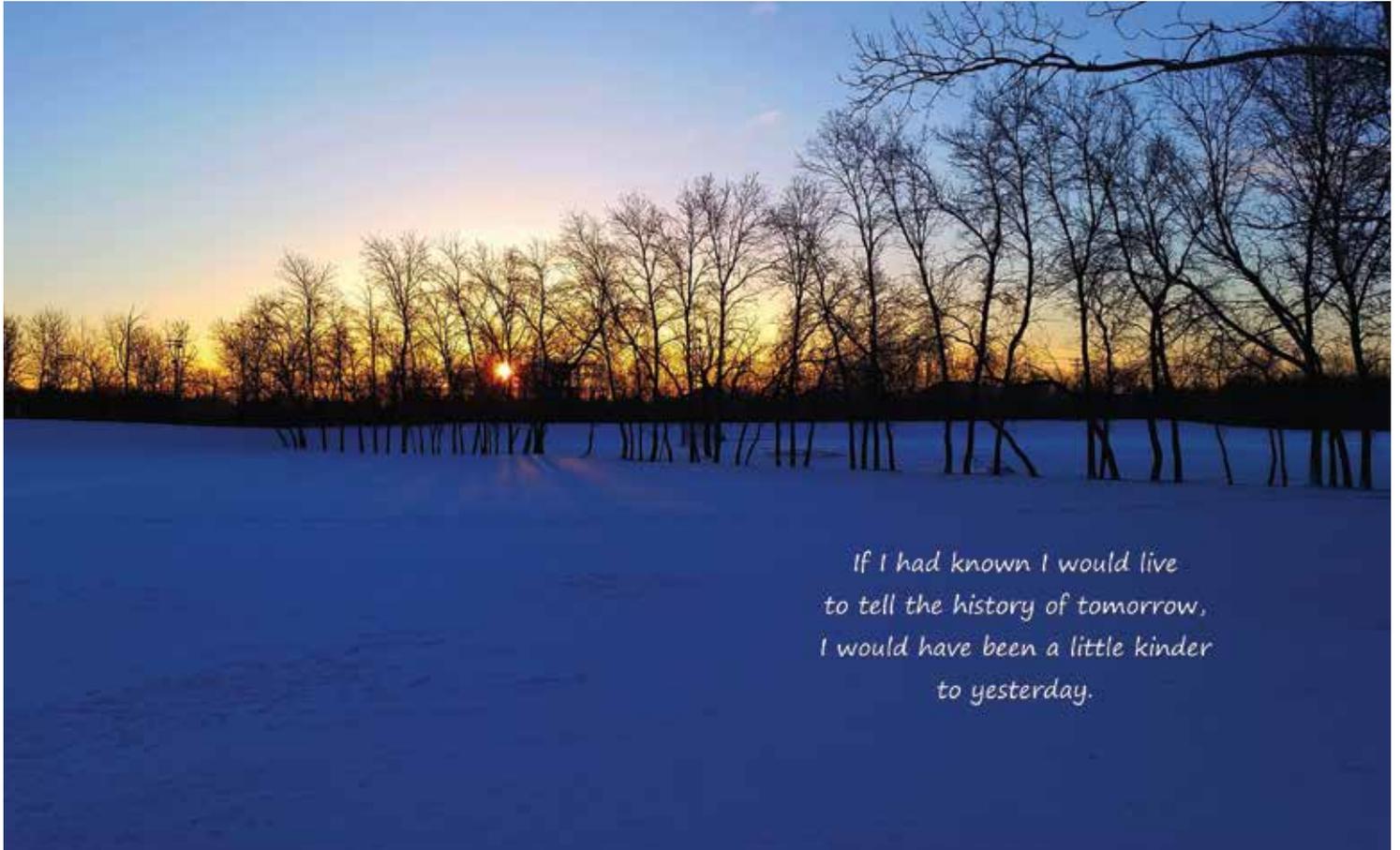
“Scripture frequently admonishes the people of God to *remember* – to step back from the ordinary events of daily life to recall ‘the mighty works of God’ in their past,” writes Faith and Life Commission secretary John Roth in *The Mennonite*. But, reminding us our movement was born out of church division, he challenges us to consider *how* we remember.

“What from the sixteenth-century beginnings of the Anabaptist movement should be retrieved? What should be confessed and released? What new expressions of faithfulness will emerge out of encounters among the churches in the Global South? How will the churches in the North experience the mystery of *ecclesia semper reformanda* – the church always being reformed?”

There are many challenges facing our family of Anabaptist churches in the world today: the health of individuals and the health of our institutions, the task being people of peace in a world filled with violence, the call to be God’s witnesses in rapidly changing societies. May our fellowship with one another in person, in prayer – and in print, here in the pages of *Courier* – encourage us on the mission of being God’s people in the world.

**Karla Braun is editor of *Courier* and writer for Mennonite World Conference. She lives in Winnipeg, Canada.**

# When mental health affects the church



by Joanne Klassen

**B**en's parents were mystified and deeply concerned. They had received a call that their 22-year-old son was being taken for a psychiatric exam at the hospital.

He had been a regular kid who was bright, creative, fun-loving and caring. Now he was acting in ways that were unusual for him – making wild accusations, seeming paranoid and going without sleep for days at a time.

Ben had complained about school pressures and his grades had suffered this past term; he wasn't keeping up with his friends because he was working on a secret project.

The hospital waiting room was filled with people, and there was Ben, sitting handcuffed between two police officers. He had a wild look in his eyes, but his body was slumped in defeat.

He glared at his parents and accused them of trying to get him arrested. Ben's parents were shocked that their son would say and think such things.

They were mortified, since they knew many of the families sitting in their small-town emergency room. Ben has bipolar disorder.

## What is bipolar disorder?

Bipolar disorder has two components: depressive episodes and manic episodes. There are several types of bipolar disorder,

## “Kinder tomorrow”

*One of my approaches to achieving good mental health is self-reflection, contemplation and meditation in creation.*

Dan Dyck, Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

**When the church seeks to be a compassionate light to the world, how does it do so with individuals or families affected by a decline in mental health?**

with different expressions of the depressive and manic episodes.

A depressive episode includes symptoms, such as a depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure in what used to be enjoyable, irritability, dramatic changes in weight or appetite, insomnia, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or shame, difficulty concentrating, and recurring thoughts of death or suicide.

During a manic episode, a person feels larger than life, needs little sleep, is more talkative than usual, has racing thoughts, and is physically agitated and impulsive, doing things that may have painful consequences (spending sprees, sexual indiscretions, gambling, driving recklessly).

Sometimes a person with bipolar disorder will also have psychosis – hearing or seeing what the rest of us don’t, or having bizarre or unusual ideas. Usually these symptoms are disturbing enough that a person can’t function or may require hospitalization.

**The church’s response**

When the church seeks to be a compassionate light to the world, how does it do so with individuals or families affected by a

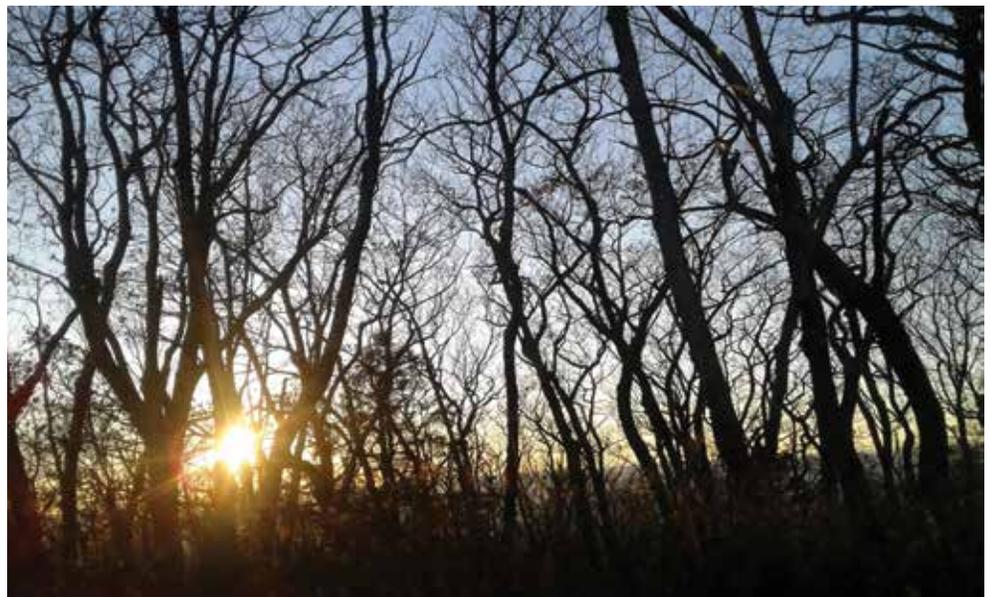
decline in mental health? A church community begins by acknowledging and identifying with a person’s suffering. It works to include people in all states of health, physical or mental, in the congregation.

The Bible urges us to care for those who have less (e.g., Philippians 2:1–8, James 1:22–27, 1 John 3:16–18, Deuteronomy 15:7–11, Matthew 25:34–46). Many who are homeless have mental illness. Many with bipolar disorder are not able to work, and even with government support can only access substandard (or even dangerous) housing and not have enough money to care for all their needs.

People who have a higher level of functioning may need supports to finish schooling, return to work, or find suitable work. Could the church find ways to help people help themselves?

In Canada, Eden Health Care Services, a Mennonite Church-owned organization based in Manitoba, has integrated affordable or transitional housing and vocational services in several communities. So much more could be, and needs to be, done in caring.

The list of fundamental Christian values could go on: love, forgiveness, restoration, inclusion, and not judging. Their



**“Tranquility and peace with myself, others and nature”**

Edith Johanna Muñoz, Iglesia Menonita de Ciudad Berna, Bogotá, Colombia



### **“Moving Day”**

*I want to believe that we who are tangled  
can find a way through the mess  
that chaos and order can learn to live together  
in peace*

*I want to believe that unloading and loading  
the mess that is life  
is a group effort  
is what friendship is all about  
as we all search for that residence  
of greater health and wholeness*

Ruth Harder, Rainbow Mennonite Church,  
Kansas City, Kansas, USA

application to people struggling with bipolar disorder and other mental illnesses are endless. As the larger church we're limited only by our imagination and determination.

#### **Valuing gifts**

If we take seriously the image of the church as a body, we must ask what each person has to offer the community. “In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary...So God has put the body together such that extra honour and care are given to those parts that have less dignity” (1 Corinthians 12: 22, 24, NLT).

Often, we think of those with bipolar disorder as a burden to the church. However, each and every person has gifts: enthusiasm, drama, honesty about vulnerability, experience with the mental health system and more.

One of the best ways for a person to feel a sense of belonging is to be a participant, to have something to offer others. The body is made up of many parts, and when we are open to diversity we're enriched!

#### **Judge not**

As previously mentioned, bipolar disorder can cause thought disturbances that lead a person to act impulsively or destructively. In the church, we often have a no-nonsense approach to undesirable or sinful behaviour: We tell the person to stop sinning. The complexity of bipolar disorder challenges such a basic approach to behaviour change and raises tough questions.

When, if ever, is a person not responsible for their behaviour? What role do physical factors play with emotions and relationships – how much do our brains affect our relationships? What about choice and tolerance – if a person chooses a behaviour that we have trouble with, can we tolerate it in order to remain in relationship?

There are natural and sometimes legal consequences for behaviours that fall outside the norm. How might we take to heart Jesus' words, “Judge not lest you be judged”? Might we advocate for a person in the health care system, the judicial system, with an employer, at a store, with family members?

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offer others.**

## How liberating might it be to hear Scriptures, prayers, songs and sermons that take mental illness as seriously as physical illness?

### Mental health in worship

A very damaging aspect of a mental health diagnosis is the stigma that comes with it. Society and church sometimes perpetuate that marginalization out of fear and/or misunderstanding.

How liberating might it be to hear Scriptures, prayers, songs and sermons that take mental illness as seriously as physical illness? What if mental health issues were spoken of using “us” language rather than “them” language?

When we have the courage to speak about mental health compassionately, intelligently and publicly, we begin to make our congregations safe places for people whose lives aren’t all in order (all of us!).

When things are spoken aloud they become less secretive, less shameful, less binding; they have less ability to produce fear and fearful reactions.

Many Bible passages speak comforting words to those in distress. Some mental health organizations have lists of resources that can be used in worship.

### Preventing burnout/fatigue

While everyone has abilities to offer the church, there are some who require much care and support. In small churches or towns, it may seem as though the same person (or the same few people) are available for crisis or support help. After a time, these people may become exhausted from their efforts.

There are ways to prevent fatigue. They take effort to establish, but eventually make the quality of caregiving and of the caregiver’s personal life go up.

First, find a group of people to support a high-needs individual. If one person isn’t available at a certain time, another can be called. People may have specific abilities and roles: offering practical aid, social contact or spiritual care.

Second, set personal boundaries. If Saturday is your family day, set a limit on caregiving activities. Being direct is helpful, since it provides clarity in the relationship.

Third, know your limits. These limits may include time (I can’t spend more than two hours per week), comfort factors (I can bring food, but I’m not a great listener), and awareness of your own well-being (I have been struggling with depression myself lately and don’t have the same emotional resources I used to).

The church is made up of human beings in all our diversity, uniqueness, abilities and difficulties. It’s a place where we can come together to explore our common humanity and grow together into people who express our greatest potential.

This is a journey we take together as we encounter a world that’s often challenging and often delightful. Let us delight in our relationships with one another!



**Joanne Klassen, MA (marriage and family therapy), MA (theology), has worked with Eden Health Care Services in Manitoba and now works in private practice and with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority as a shared care mental health clinician.**

*This piece was originally written for Meetinghouse, an association of Anabaptist editors in Canada and the USA.*



**“Tranquility and peace with myself, others and nature”**

***Mental illness is when I can't find an answer because I only see one part of the trouble and don't see through to the situation.***

Edith Johanna Muñoz, Iglesia Menonita de Ciudad Berna, Bogotá, Colombia

# How should the church think about mental health?

**Our mental state is connected to body and spirit, and, like them, can be in a state of unhealthiness. In this perspectives section, leaders and health practitioners from Anabaptist-related congregations around the world address how their church has a role in caring for the mental health of their congregants.**

## Japan

# Stress management for mental health

by **Miwako Katanois**

**S**tress is a major problem in Japan. When someone becomes mentally or physically ill in Japan, we often say that it is because of stress. We feel stress most in interpersonal interactions: with work colleagues, family members or even among church members. When we feel stress in relationship, we lose inner peace. In this sense, “stress management” is important. We need to learn how to manage our stress to create inner peace.

Stress causes not only mental illness, but also physical illness because our bodies and minds are related to each other. Similarly, if we are physically ill, our mental state may also become weak.

### Mind and body are connected

So when we think about mental health, it is important to remember that body and mind are not separated. Though stress is often understood as something we feel mentally, it is our bodies that first react to stress.

Imagine that you feel stress. Muscles of some parts of your body feel tension and get stiff. We need to know how to relax. I would like to take a look at “emotions” and “boundaries with relationship” to release stress by two approaches of body and mind.

First, the key issue is “feeling,” that is, emotions, especially negative ones. When we have a conflict in relationship, we likely feel stress with negative feelings toward other people. When we have negative feelings, we feel bad or even guilty, because we are supposed to be kind, nice, gentle and so on, especially as Christians. We lose inner peace.

We need to control or renounce those negative feelings somehow. It is difficult and may take a long time, but first we need

to be aware of and admit to having those negative feelings as human beings. Then we need to learn to how to deal with them.

Meditation and moving our bodies – exercising, dancing, walking and so on – are ways to release our feelings. My husband and I practice Aiki. This Japanese martial art was made for self defence; however, we practice it for our mental training. It is easier for me to meditate while moving my body, like doing Aiki or walking. And as a chiropractor, I believe it is useful to care our bodies physically. When our body is relaxed, our mind is also relaxed. Body influences mind.

### Power of confession

A challenge for Christians to take care of negative feelings is probably that we find it difficult to admit to having them. Because it means we do not have peace in ourselves or with the others. If we have spiritual friends to meet periodically to share and pray together, that would be a wonderful way to work through these feelings and reduce stress.

As a Christian community, we need to create a safe place to confess our negative feelings to uplift them to the light of God. I would like to have a silent retreat for my congregation to look inside ourselves carefully, then share and pray.

Another key issue is boundaries in relationship. We need to learn to have healthy boundaries. Japanese people are not good at saying “No.” That is a stress. Because we want to keep peace or harmony with others, we often hesitate to say “No.” I see the troubles caused by unhealthy boundaries in churches.

I have a group that is learning about boundaries together. We use the book *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to*

**As a Christian community, we need to create a safe place to confess our negative feelings to uplift them to the light of God.**

*Say No To Take Control of Your Life* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. It is helpful to know that God has boundaries in the Bible. As a group, we are looking at some stories in the Bible with the aspect of boundaries.

I find Aiki is also a way to learn boundaries. *Maai*, space and timing with others is important in Japanese martial arts. We get the sense of *maai* in practicing. And *ai* of aiki means timing and connection; *ki* is a kind of energy in our body. We need to connect with the opponent through *ki*. The opponent is not an enemy but becomes a part of myself. Unless we are connected and become one, we cannot throw our opponent. This sense of timing, space and connectedness can be practical for our relationship with others.

I think that it is helpful to learn how to deal with stress to create inner peace for mental health. I found meditation and moving body to deal with negative feeling, and learning boundaries in relationship are useful.



**Miwako Katanois** is a member of the Mennonite church in Sapporo, Japan.

France

# Churches and psychiatry: “it’s complicated”

by Alexina Yoder

One of the things that surprises me the most in my work in psychiatry is the high number of people of faith hospitalized under our services. More precisely, the number of Christians.

“Of course, the patients speak about their beliefs and hopes more than in the other specialities.” But if one uses an objective marker, such as the presence of a Bible at the patient’s bedside, the impression seems to be confirmed: psychiatric services are overrun with Christians. Word has it that even Mennonites have been hospitalized.

## Fear of loss of control

It is difficult to accept that a Christian would suffer from a psychiatric illness. We understand that people suffer from Alzheimers or that mental confusion can follow an illness because we have an explanation for these events. On the other hand, psychiatric troubles are not explicable from a direct cause. This frightens us because it suggests we are not immune. If the reason is unknown, why couldn’t it happen to me? And who knows what I might say in a moment of delirium? Even the most nonviolent Anabaptist could become threatening if he or she were subjected to a feeling of intense persecution. We feel overwhelmed and we look for answers.

Therefore, we ask: “Don’t you think that the mentally ill are often/sometimes/usually possessed?” It is difficult to accept that psychiatric diseases are often a consequence of the Fall. The person must have done something bad to have lost control of his or her thoughts, words and actions. We try to reassure ourselves by assigning responsibility for the illness to the one who is suffering.

According to a 2013 study by the l’Association Française Fédérative des Etudiants en Psychiatrie (French federal association of psychiatry students), the number of believers interning in psychiatry is significantly smaller than in other specialties. And yet, our patients speak of their faith more than in other service areas of the hospital.

**The work of the church is to be a place of safe and healthy relationships, where each one finds a place to belong, where the members are ready to welcome and walk alongside.**

Our patients pray. Our patients go to mass. And the doctors ask: are these vulnerable people not at risk of being drawn into abusive cults? Do we need to protect them, and, if so, how? Where is the line between faith and mystical delirium?

## Faith amid illness

When a person enters the psychiatric hospital where I work, he or she will quickly notice the chapel. It’s not a simple room converted into a chapel, but a real church that holds religious services and staffed by chaplains. Recently, a psychoanalyst said to the interns that priests excel in diagnosing mystical deliriums precisely because faith experiences offer another perspective.

Do churches have a role to play for people who are mentally ill? Well, why shouldn’t they? All churches are already home to people with schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, chronic depression, etc. I daresay that if a church welcomes more than a hundred people and none of your members has mental health challenges, the church either doesn’t know its members very well or should question its hospitality.

The church is involved whether it knows it or not. An estimated .8% of the population suffers from schizophrenia; that’s around 600,000 people in France. Do the math: how many people with schizophrenia should be in your church? How many are actually? This is not to cast blame on churches for not accommodating these people. In the majority of cases, the progress of the disease results in withdrawal from social

contact and resistance to other’s overtures.

What a challenge for our churches!

And then there is anxiety, a common denominator among mental health disorders. The church offers a reassuring framework that can contribute to anchoring people in reality: the regularity and liturgy of worship, re-encountering resource people each week, participating in a family that does not give up.

As a psychiatrist in a secular country, my work consists of helping people to feel better, to be able to communicate with others, to be present in the world and to lead “a normal life.”

The work of the church regarding people who struggle with mental health is to be a place of safe and healthy relationships, where each one finds a place to belong, where the members are ready to welcome and walk alongside. Our role is to view those who are mentally ill as people who are created, loved, and capable of receive grace through faith in Christ. Don’t underestimate the impact of expressing compassionate concern for others devoid of fear. Effectively integrating people with mental health challenges into the church is both possible and extraordinary. I am convinced this exactly the kind of people among whom we would have found Christ when he was on earth. And so, church: to work!



Alexina Yoder, originally from *église de Delle in Belfort-Montbéliard*, is a member of *l’église mennonite de Strasbourg, France*, and a psychiatry intern.

## Colombia

# Churches as healing communities

by Nathan Toews and Paul Stucky

Since the mid-1960s, Colombia has been engaged in an armed conflict with approximately 7 million men, women and children forced from their homes, more than 60,000 people disappeared and nearly 600,000 civilians killed. When people fled to the large cities, some came to our churches. They came with all the strengths and resources that life had given them, but also with the load of sadness, loss of community, questions about how a loving God could have allowed this to happen to them; a longing for justice; and the fear – often justified – that the threat they were fleeing would resurface in the city.

Anabaptist churches and organizations in Colombia identified the importance of addressing the spiritual, psychological and social needs of the people that came to us. Together with MCC, we began to consider how to proceed, receiving valuable training from Eastern Mennonite University's STAR program, and from MCC's Stress and Trauma Healing material.

Identifying the local congregation as the focus of our efforts, we saw the potential of faith communities as a place of healing. We joined efforts as Brethren in Christ, Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite churches in an initiative called Church Coordination for Psychosocial Action (CEAS): a resource for local congregations in their response to the victims who were arriving.

### How to be a place of healing

In 2012, CEAS embarked on an interview project with those living in forced displacement and actively participating in an Anabaptist church. The interviews aimed to understand what qualities churches have that allow people to experience healing (spiritual, psychological, social and even physical) in the midst of forced displacement and what more churches could be doing.

People's responses illustrated the amazing simplicity of ways in which the local congregation is an avenue for healing. Members open possibilities for the presence of God to minister to traumatized people and to find meaning by welcoming and expressing sincere interest in those who come to the church, providing a place of safety, listening

to sorrow and pain, providing opportunities for serving others, and offering encouragement to rebuild their lives. The congregation becomes the body through which people meet Christ and can strengthen their relationship to God.

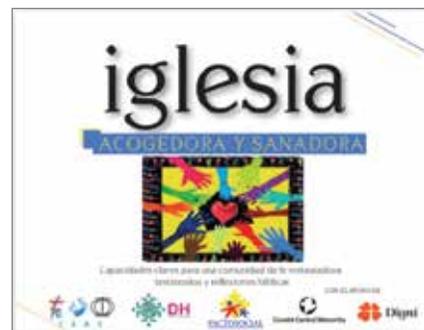
People's testimonies reflected what has been identified by psychiatrist Judith Herman and therapist Carolyn Yoder of STAR, who emphasize the importance of safety, recognition for what has happened and social reconnection as key elements in a healing process. When a person's sense of meaning has been shaken, rebuilding an understanding of life in the presence of an accepting faith community helps move toward recovery.

Reading the Bible from a lens of trauma and resilience, we see the anguish and longing for God when the Israelites are driven from their home (Lamentations 3, Psalms 79, 137) and when Job has lost everything (Job 2, 19), the faith and resilience in the Psalms (Psalms 23, 91), the hope in the messages of the prophets (Micah 4:1–4) and Jesus coming to incarnate God's love (John 1:1–14, Ephesians 2:17–19) and charge us, as the church, to carry on the work of love and reconciliation (Ephesians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

### Dignity transforms

As one who suffered, Andres (not real name) came to the Teusaquillo Mennonite Church in Bogota with an angry and fearful heart, sensing that at any moment those who killed his brother and father would appear on the streets of Bogota. By feeling welcomed and recognized for who he was, Andres began to open himself up to the church community. With opportunity to explore new understandings, he let go of hate and found dignity in rebuilding his own life. Andres' testimony demonstrates the importance of a welcoming church willing to listen to people's stories and provide a place to grow in community and in faith.

A final product of the interview project is a study guide for a healing church to be used by local congregations. It is beginning to be used by Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren churches in different parts of Colombia. The booklet is proving useful not only for victims of trauma, but for everyone who has experienced pain, rejection and loss that



Study guide for a healing church.

need to be transformed into fullness of life. The testimonies, the biblical texts and the exercises of the booklet are applicable to all.

Colombia is beginning the implementation of peace accords. Local communities now face the challenge of reintegrating former combatants and moving towards reconciliation. Victims seek truth and justice. New forms of armed violence are emerging. In this context, local churches as healing communities can contribute significantly to peacebuilding. Providing conditions for forgiveness and repentance can help break the cycle of violence. Trauma healing can end the internalized harm and victimization. Acceptance can promote social connection and help build community.

Local congregations have long been places of healing and hope with a message of salvation. This project documents specific church experiences, identifying learnings that serve as teaching tools for congregations to strengthen their capacity to foster community and healing.



Nathan Toews and Paul Stucky worked together with MCC-funded Church Coordination for Psychosocial Action (CEAS) in Colombia. Nathan currently serves with MCC in Latin America and Paul is coordinating CEAS as well as serving as MWC Andean Regional Representative.

USA

# Health of a whole person

by David Bruce Rose

**M**any believers think that emotional or psychological problems indicate a lack of faith. This is not the case. On the one hand, it is clear that faith in Jesus improves the emotional element of our life, just as it does all the other elements of our life. On the other hand, I have worked with many people who have amazingly deep and strong faith and still suffer from severe emotional disorders.

It is hard to know how to respond when emotional problems occur, but implying that the problems are only due to a lack of faith can actually increase those problems.

## The biblical description of humanity

To understand emotional problems, we need to understand people. Throughout Scripture, we find humans described as a unity.

In the creation story in Genesis 2, we see that God made Adam from the dust (physical elements) and filled him with God's own breath or spirit of life (spiritual elements). Adam thinks (for example, he names the animals) and feels (for example, joy when he sees the woman). It is also clear that he was made for relationship with other people and, most importantly, for relationship with God.

Adam is described as a whole person who includes an interconnected mind, body and spirit. This interconnectedness implies that, just as physical problems such as chronic pain can (but do not have to) block spiritual growth, psychological problems such as depression can (but do not have to) block spiritual growth. It also implies

**When it is needed, it is poor stewardship to not use all that God has provided to reach his goals.**

that spiritual growth can help physical and emotional growth.

The story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 is an excellent illustration of this.

## Elijah's depression

1 Kings 19 begins with Elijah emotionally drained. After the excitement of his victory at Mount Carmel, he experiences a normal emotional letdown. In addition, he is physically exhausted after running alongside the king's chariot on the return to Jezreel. To top it off, instead of being praised as a spiritual hero, he returns to the news that the queen has ordered his death!

Scripture describes Elijah as showing symptoms of the psychological disorder called major depression. He is fearful and sad, and withdraws from interaction with other people. He sees no hope and wants to die. His thinking is confused. His belief that he is the only one who still follows God is inaccurate and may reflect a thought disorder. His depression also affects his faith, as can be seen by his lack of trust in God to protect him.

Elijah knows God is his only hope; therefore, he goes to the desert to seek God. Even though Elijah is discouraged, depressed and weak in faith, God responds with grace and love.

It is important to notice that God's response provides for Elijah's whole person. God cares for Elijah physically, emotionally, cognitively, relationally and spiritually. God does not immediately speak to Elijah. He knows what Elijah needs and so, before he provides for Elijah spiritually and emotionally, God provides for Elijah physically. He sends an angel to feed Elijah and help him sleep. Then God sends Elijah on a walk to Mt. Horeb. It is not until Elijah arrives at Horeb rested, nourished and physically strengthened that God speaks to him.

When God finally speaks to Elijah, he directly confronts Elijah's behaviours and thoughts which had contributed to his depression. He confronts Elijah's isolation by ordering him to join with other faithful

believers (Elisha, and Jehu), and he confronts Elijah's inaccurate belief that he is the only one who still served the Lord, stating, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal." And, by his presence, God restores Elijah's faith.

## What we can do

So what can be done to help with emotional or relational problems we face, such as depression, anxiety attacks, eating disorders or a marriage crisis? There are a number of practical steps a Christian can take:

- Pray. Jesus is Lord and the source of all healing.
- Read Scripture: it has much to say regarding many issues.
- Seek support and encouragement from friends.
- Ask for advice from your pastor, elders or other mature believers.
- Read good books that offer solid information.
- And, God can use counselling to bring healing and growth.

When it is needed, it is poor stewardship to not use all that God has provided to reach his goals.

It is a mistake to explain away all emotional and relationship problems as the result of disobedience to God. It is also a mistake for us to tell God how he will help us cope with those problems. As a professor explained to me years ago, "Jesus does not keep us from the same problems that everyone else in the world faces. What he does do is help us cope with those problems when they come."



David Bruce Rose is a professor of marriage and family studies at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary, a Mennonite Brethren university. A version of this article first appeared in the *MB Herald*.

# Life from a graveyard

## Intermingled Anabaptist expressions bloom in hard soil of Thailand

by Carol Tobin

“**T**hailand: The graveyard of mission.” This descriptor has echoed in the ears of Thailand-bound missionaries for decades; thankfully, God has a different story. That different story is finally emerging – and Anabaptists have a place in it!

### Seeds of the church

It was 201 years ago that Anne Judson (wife of American missionary Adoniram Judson) learned the language well enough to share the gospel with Siamese (Thai) captives in Burma. Twelve years later, in 1828, the first Protestant missionaries arrived in Thailand – 260 years after the first resident Catholic priests.

For Catholics and Protestants alike, the 1800s tell a story of incredible dedication and perseverance. The missionaries came up against factors that are still definitive today: an almost impenetrable social cohesion built upon an alloy of Buddhism and Brahminism, as well as deep roots of animism which add yet another reason to fear change. Just as Thai people have demonstrated an unsurpassed capacity to resist colonization through flawlessly smooth diplomacy, so they have proven to be staunchly committed to their de facto identity statement: “To be Thai is to be Buddhist.”



**Khmu believers celebrate baptism in a local river.**

Photo: Edd Russell

In 1880, God again used the foundation laid in Burma to bless Thailand. Three evangelists from the Karen tribe were led from Burma by a veteran missionary to a village in Thailand where they met a man who had had a dream the night before that three teachers would be bringing the Word of God. He had been waiting all day. Five hundred Karen repented and believed.

The 1900s brought new challenges of liberalism on one side and a truncated gospel on the other. Church structures emerged, most notable of which was the Church of Christ Thailand (CCT), fruit of a century of work by the Presbyterians. Missionaries established educational institutions. The prevailing social climate continued to be resistant to gospel witness. The latter half of the 1900s brought some fresh energy and holistic vision: An influx of OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) workers expelled from China

enabled Northern Thailand to emerge as a new centre for fruitful work among the “hill tribes.” Next, Pentecostal influences began to make their way to Thailand. The 1980s brought central Thai people their first example of a rapidly growing indigenous church movement.

### Early Anabaptist witness

The first Anabaptist witness came when MCC began a modest connection with Thailand in 1960. Over the next 15 years, MCC was able to place some PAX workers (American conscientious objectors on alternative foreign service) and buy handicrafts for sale in the USA.

MCC commitments in the region grew significantly during what the Vietnamese call “The American War.” In 1975, in partnership with the Church of Christ Thailand, MCC began to provide refugee assistance, explore opportunities for placing teachers and



**Youth retreats are an opportunity to sing and eat and play together while learning to be disciples of Jesus.**

Photos: Edd Russell

engage in agricultural development. It was hoped that MCC might be able to help the CCT to discern the role of the church in Thai society in regard to human rights advocacy, as this had not been a strong point of the church. The MCC presence in Thailand continued sporadically over the next few years. Though massive genocide was occurring in Cambodia, a 1977 MCC field report indicated only that “what is going on....is not always ascertainable.” By 1979, the horror was revealed, and there was a dramatic increase in the number of refugees pouring into Thailand. MCC took on a key role at the camps and in resettlement processes for Laotian, Hmong, Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees.

According to one veteran worker from that era, these were years of revival. “Word and work” went hand in the hand, and God added his wonders. Many of today’s Thai leaders caught their passion for holistic

witness in those camps. This refugee work, in addition to peace education and human rights advocacy related to events in Burma, continued until MCC closed its office in 1995.

By then, other Anabaptist mission entities had begun to form vision for church planting in Thailand. Brethren in Christ World Missions personnel made an exploratory trip in 1986, followed by the commissioning of a missionary couple in 1987. They were able to secure employment at a technical institute on the outskirts of Bangkok. Their mandate within this self-support model was to pursue cross-cultural relationships through which to share the gospel and encourage the development of indigenous leaders through discipleship.

In 1990, Eastern Mennonite Mission assigned a worker to begin exploratory work. A church planting team came together

in 1992 as the Tobins made a 10-year commitment. By 1995, they were ready to position themselves among Lao-speaking Isaan in one of the least-reached provinces in rural Thailand. The highly contextualized Life Enrichment Church, with its small worshipping groups and fully empowered local leaders, emerged and continues to spread into new villages and districts.

Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services International (now MB Mission) similarly made an exploratory trip in 1991. The pioneer workers they sent shortly after this trip made the decision to move to Nan Province in Northern Thailand to work with the Khmu. The Schmidts and their teammates developed a ministry focussed on village evangelism, education and agricultural development. Ongoing connections have put them in a position to see a sweeping movement of people coming to Christ among the Khmu along the Thai-Lao border.

### Work takes root

None of these new Anabaptist entities ended up working under the CCT, despite the good relationship that MCC had nurtured over the years. Each agency forged its own way forward with new partners and visa platforms. The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand emerged as an ally and a voice encouraging church planting across the country. Eastern Mennonite Missions Global Ministries director David Shenk encouraged EMM workers to prioritize relationships with fellow Anabaptists as an expression of the value on “community.” Thus, the team leaders made many trips to meet together for prayer and encouragement. A pattern of getting together for retreats was established, making way for the welcome of new workers.

In 1998, the General Conference Mennonite Church (COM) sent a Canadian/Lao couple to work with the EMM team. After one term, they launched their own church planting work in another location in Isaan under MC Canada Witness.

In January 2001, Team 2000 arrived. With a commitment to work with each other for 10 years, these three Mennonite Brethren couples launched an orphanage and church plant south of Bangkok and have since gone on to cast vision for the 28 workers who now relate with multiple local leaders and emerging church communities in several parts of the country.

Around the same time, the Myers, new leaders for the BIC work, arrived. At EMM’s invitation and encouragement, they launched a work in Ubon Ratchathani’s provincial capital city, only 50 kilometers from the EMM team. In addition to developing highly compatible visions for ministry, the proximity proved providential, enabling the teams to support one another through times of tragic loss.

Meanwhile, Mennonite Mission Network sent workers to another location in Isaan and Rosedale Mennonite Mission is strengthening their presence in Bangkok with second-generation leaders from Central America who are emerging from RMM’s long-time commitments there. Virginia Mennonite Missions has also



**The Changed Life Centre in northern Thailand is a place for leadership and discipleship training.**

Photo: Edd Russell

recently engaged as partners with the Life Enrichment Church to see a missional outpost formed among the Isaan in Bangkok. A group of conservative Anabaptists has built up an Anabaptist mission training school – the Institute of Global Opportunities (IGo) – in Chiang Mai. Thus, at least in Chiang Mai, Anabaptists are known for their head coverings and large families, not to mention zeal for the gospel.

All of these groups have a strong focus on discipleship; all are gaining a wealth of experience in what it is to see the Holy Spirit’s presence and power demonstrated in healing and deliverance from demonic oppression.

### Relational connection

Though discussions about a joint Anabaptist registry periodically arise, the decision was made to not be bound to a structure that might feel bulky or artificial. Instead, there has been a commitment shared by most of the groups to simply connect relationally.

Besides an endeavour among team leaders to meet twice a year as an Anabaptist

Reference Council, there have been three vibrant gatherings bringing together Thai and Lao Anabaptist believers. It has been exciting to see an eager rapport being built across both long-standing cultural and socio-economic divides as well as differences in Mennonite/Anabaptist “church culture” across generations. These gatherings have sparked the translation of Anabaptist resources into Thai: the Mennonite Confession of Faith, Palmer Becker’s “What is an Anabaptist Christian?” The International Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) Confession of Faith has also been translated into Thai. Most recently, a book by Richard Showalter with stories of early mission initiatives into Asia as well as stories of the early Anabaptist martyrs has been made available in Thai.

In a context where a consumerist prosperity gospel is gaining appeal, this understanding of Anabaptist faith is of high value.

### Anabaptist identity

Healthy long-term relationships and resources are important in nurturing Anabaptist identity; however, there is a stamp of identity

## Thailand

### **Hmong 7th District of the Church of Christ in Thailand\***

Members	1,733
Congregations	23
Presiding officer	Pornchai Banchasawan

### **Khmu Mission**

Members	39,250
Congregations	430
Presiding officer	Phone Keo Keovilay

### **Life Enrichment Church**

Members	199
Congregations	16
Presiding officer	Pastor Somchai Phanta

### **Thailand Mennonite Brethren Foundation**

Members	1,600
Congregations	20
Presiding officer	Ricky Sanchez

\*The Executive Committee voted to accept into membership at the February 2017 meetings. Figures from MWC directory map, 6 February 2017.

Source: MWC directory 2015



**Truman Hertzler conveys an Isaan style “welcome into fellowship” to the man responsible for his son’s untimely death.** Photo: Carol Tobin

that simply comes through experience.

When the Life Enrichment Church in southern Ubon Ratchathani was reeling from the accident that took the life of EMM team leader John Hertzler, the church was led to walk out a significant story of forgiveness. They spent months sharing the gospel and discipling the driver whose recklessness had caused the accident. The climax came when John’s parents were present on the day of this man’s baptism. The church watched as these stalwart believers graciously welcomed this man into the family of faith.

Later, the church gathered to hear Truman Hertzler teach about Anabaptist history. He told stories of failure in which his forefathers had lost missional opportunities due to legalism and lethargy. Yet, he emphasized, perseverance through hardship and commitment to the one foundation Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11) is always the path to renewed vision and obedience to God’s call. One by one, the believers in the room stood up: “This is who we are too! No matter how much we have to suffer or how often we falter and fail, if this is what it is to be Anabaptist, then we are Anabaptists.” From

this grave came life!

Besides the communities that are emerging through onsite mission workers, another stream informing the emergence of indigenous Anabaptist witness in Thailand is that of former Hmong refugees who settled in the USA. Many became affiliated with MC USA. They formed their own Hmong Mennonite Churches Mission and have eagerly envisioned the day when the Hmong whose villages dot the mountainous landscape of Northwest Thailand might claim Anabaptist identity.

Beginning in 2005, this impulse was undergirded by a number of teaching visits from North American pastors and Mennonite Mission Network workers and construction projects. Thus, these Hmong Christians, who have long been a part of the CCT, have begun to sense that their own theology has strong affinities to Anabaptism. 2016 proved to be a significant year as a newly consolidated “Hmong District 20,” as a CCT district has now joined MWC. They have sought this affiliation because, in Nelson Kraybill’s words, “They want to explicitly claim and promote

Anabaptist understandings of the church, including nonviolence.”

Those who have observed these churches note the variety of practices that make their presence within MWC a gift: peace-making as part of evangelism, hospitality, financial stewardship, generosity, passionate Bible teaching and the development of leaders. Both MWC and MMN representatives will be present in Thailand when the welcome is made official in April 2017.

Though Christians still comprise a slim 1.2 percent of the population in Thailand, we anticipate blessing as these various streams of Anabaptist witness intermingle and nourish each other in the years to come and God continues to allow his beauty and resurrection life to emerge from this “graveyard!”



**Carol Tobin and her husband Skip served in Thailand from 1989–2009 in both church planting and regional administration under EMM. Now based in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, Carol continues to carry a close connection with Thailand as Asia regional director with Virginia Mennonite Missions.**



## Songs, sermons and saucers

Music from other cultures, Scripture readings on a common theme, shared food and special offerings characterize World Fellowship Sunday, a celebration of Anabaptist family in Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches around the world 22 January 2017.

The theme of 2017 was “My cry is heard,” reflecting on God’s faithfulness amid hardships in the global displacement crisis and personal challenges in life (Psalm 40:1-10, Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-18). The worship resources package downloadable at [mwc-cmm.org/wfs](http://mwc-cmm.org/wfs) can be used any Sunday of the year to help churches to celebrate the global Anabaptist communion.

“We remember that 500 years ago, brave men and women, motivated by the real teachings of Jesus, decided to follow him even though that action cost them their lives, says Oscar Suarez, member of Iglesia Menonita de Ibagué (Ibagué Mennonite Church), Colombia.

“It means the breaking of bread in serving and in meeting the needs of others. It doesn’t mean any absence of challenges, but recognizing we are assured of victory with and through God,” says Manjula Roul of Bethel BIC Church, Cuttack, Odisha, India.

World Fellowship Sunday is about “Encouraging and exhorting the brethren to make decisions that transcend the walls that others want to impose,” for pastor Ofelia García de Pedroza of Chihuahua, Mexico.

For a small local church, like one in Frankfurt, Germany, the celebration marks the joy of being part of the worldwide Anabaptist fellowship. “In prayer, we lifted up the concerns of our worldwide family of faith, those being persecuted and those discouraged by political events,” says Andrea Lange of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden congregation.

“It was good to speak of the reality of refugees,” says pastor Siaka Traoré of the Mennonite church in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, which welcomes those fleeing Mali. The congregation’s celebration of World Fellowship Sunday 29 January 2017 inaugurated a new building. “Our joy was the



Photo: Siaka Traoré



Photo: Jan Ceas Noord and Jacob H. Kikkert

**Top: The celebration of World Fellowship Sunday in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, inaugurated the new Mennonite church building.**

**Above: Mennonite churches in Groningen and Drenthe, the Netherlands, celebrated World Fellowship Sunday at Doopsgezind Gemeente Haren.**

greater because our new church welcomed seven new people to worship God with us and become members of our community.”

World Fellowship Sunday is “an important event because it says that the teaching of Jesus is the final authority for how Christians live their lives,” says Marvin Dyck, pastor of Crossroads Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. It’s not about what the government or culture tells people to do: “It’s about following Jesus’ teaching and example in the Bible.”

– Mennonite World Conference release



Photo: José A. Vacca B.

**In Ibagué, Colombia, pastor Cesar Moya spoke on the situation of migrants around the world, the congregation viewed the MWC year in review video, clips from *The Radicals* film, and took an offering for MWC.**

# The Bible still speaks, say Renewal 2027 speakers

**Augsburg, Germany** – Regional Anabaptists and leaders from around the world gathered 12 February 2017 for “Transformed by the Word: Reading Scripture in Anabaptist Perspectives,” the first in a 10-year series of events called “Renewal 2027” organized by Mennonite World Conference (MWC) to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition with appreciation and critical reflection on what is now a global movement within the larger body of Christ.

From their beginnings, based on their understanding of the Bible, Anabaptists emphasized a personal commitment to following Christ, baptism upon a free confession of faith, a collective approach to reading and interpreting Scripture, a commitment to reconciliation and love of enemy and a rejection of the state church, said Alfred Neufeld (Paraguay), chair of the MWC Faith and Life Commission.

At the church tradition’s 500th anniversary, “What should be reconsidered or reformulated? Where are the gaps in our theology and practice?” Neufeld asked.

The full-day event was interspersed exhortations from representatives of the MWC family with singing from the Assembly 16 songbook and a participatory Bible study on reaching agreement on controversial subjects within the church, based on Acts 15:1–21.

Anabaptism is as needed as ever, said Valerie Rempel, professor at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (USA), calling for “radical Bible reading in the spirit of the early Anabaptists... [and re-engagement] with God’s Word and with our own theological tradition to see how it can offer us wisdom for living as Christians in our world and for engaging in mission that invites all people.”

“There is no segregation when it comes to the message of Christ, to those sharing it and to those receiving it,” said Makadunyiswe Ngulube (Zimbabwe). She and the other YABs committee (Young AnaBaptists) speakers, reflected on Matthew 28:19, highlighted personal responsibility to learn, go and share as followers of Christ. “We need a culture that emphasizes discipleship as a responsibility for every believer of Christ...[drawn from] our deep understanding and full experience of his power and grace,” said Ebenezer Mondez (Philippines).



**“As Christians, once we begin to follow in Jesus Christ’s footsteps, we also desire to love like him, to live like him, and above all, to share about the kingdom of God just as he did,” says YAB (Young AnaBaptist) speaker Makadunyiswe Ngulube.**

Ecumenical guests spoke about reading Scripture across confessions. Renewal can come from when we read the Bible as individuals, but it is even more powerful when read Scripture together, says Lutheran Friederike Nuessel (Germany). Nuessel and Roman Catholic Monsignor Augusto-Castro (Colombia) were representatives in the just-completed trilateral dialogue between Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans.

Worship, fellowship, witness and service in the Anabaptist tradition turn reading Scripture into a living faith, said YABs mentor Tigist Gelagle (Ethiopia). “The way of the cross is the basic teaching that inspires me about the future of the church.” The truth that inspired early Anabaptists to martyrdom is the key for following Jesus today: “The suffering of Christ is the central theme of the gospel.”

Doris Hege, chairperson of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeiden, said the event reminded her



**Top: Local musicians lead worship singing from the Assembly 16 songbook.**

**Above: Attendees at the event participate in a Bible study.**

Scripture is a living word. “We need to read it as if for the first time in our current context,” she said. “What new things can God speak to us?”

Daniel Geiser-Oppliger of a Mennonite congregation in Switzerland was similarly impressed with the relevance of the Word of God for Anabaptism today, and valued the fellowship of the event: “being together, seeing old friends and meeting new brothers and sisters.”

The next Renewal 2027 event will be April 2018 in Kenya, on the theme of the Holy Spirit.

John D. Roth was the primary coordinator of the Renewal 2027 event in Augsburg, with help from Jantine Huisman (the Netherlands), Henk Stenvers (the Netherlands) and Rainer Burkart (Germany), who served on the local planning committee.

— Mennonite World Conference release

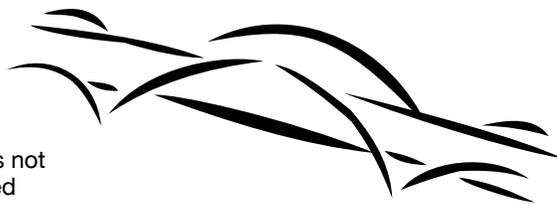
Photos: Harry Unger

## Peace Sunday

### A renewed peace church builds bridges

In a world divided by difference, it is not easy to be a peace church dedicated to the ways of Christ's peace. As we mark 500 years since the birth of the Reformation, Mennonite World Conference recommits ourselves and our congregations to the work of peace by building bridges. Indeed, our desire for Christ's peace requires us to embrace those who are different.

Along with the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Church of the Brethren, Mennonites are one of three historic Peace Churches. As a worldwide communion of



faith, MWC will be commemorating Peace Sunday 24 September 2017.

How does your church build bridges with intentionality, persistence and even sacrifice?

Visit [mwc-cmm.org/article/peace-sunday](http://mwc-cmm.org/article/peace-sunday) for worship resources to observe Peace Sunday with your congregation.

—MWC Peace Commission

## Farewell to a faithful servant

You may not have heard of one of the longest-serving workers for Mennonite World Conference who is retiring this year, but you are surely familiar with his work.

Glenn Fretz was at the beginning of his career as a designer when general secretary Paul Kraybill contacted the resident of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, to do all the design work related to Assembly 10 in 1978. Glenn designed the publications in multiple languages, created signage that features pictorial symbols that communicate across cultures without using words, and he created the logo.

Glenn's simple, memorable combination of the cross and the globe is the instantly recognizable symbol of MWC today. This logo continues to ground its visual identity.

Over the next four decades, Glenn designed the 1990 *Mennonite World Handbook: Mennonites in Global Witness*, Assembly songbooks (1990, 2003, 2009), a variety of brochures, the World Directory (2012, 2015), the MWC world map (2009, 2015) and signage for Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA.

He also designed the global MWC section at the visitor's centre in St Jacobs, Ontario, Canada.

In 2012, chief communications officer Ron Rempel brought Glenn on retainer with MWC as visual identity consultant to create a manual to standardize the look of MWC communications for the evolving needs of the future. Applications Glenn produced include the trilingual signature (the logo plus MWC in 3 languages); letterhead; templates for print



**Glenn Fretz with the initial planning map and some of the hallway signage at Pennsylvania 2015.**

Photo: Byron Rempel Burkholder

applications like brochures, posters, report and resource headers, ads, exhibits/displays/banners, bookmarks; Reference Notebook and Workbook templates; and templates for electronic applications such as the website, MWC Info (e-newsletter), Facebook, PowerPoint. Glenn also supervised a redesign of *Courier/Correo/Courier* magazine.

Glenn's final project was the proceedings book, a record of the speeches and activities at Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA. (View the proceedings book here: [mwc-cmm.org/pa2015proceedings](http://mwc-cmm.org/pa2015proceedings))

His designs have and will continue to make MWC materials recognizable with visuals that speak across languages.

—Karla Braun

## How are you transformed by reading Scripture?



I study the Bible every day. I meditate on it every morning. Every night, I have a worship time with my family at home during which we have a sermon. Sometimes it's delivered by me, sometimes my wife, and each child – even the eight-year-old – has a turn giving a sermon. —**Garcia Pedro Domingos, Igreja da Comunidade Menonita em Angola**



The reading of the Word has also helped me to become aware that there is another way of doing things; that one shouldn't be guided by the world itself, but also by the Word of the Lord, which is immutable. One's understanding of the text continues to evolve, for it is good to hear different interpretations and this is what enriches us. There is always a key message which is love and this is what we need most in our lives. —**Ester Martín Malló, Anabautistas, Menonitas y Hermanos en Cristo, Spain**



I am transformed when reading Scripture because the more I dwell on the words, the more the Holy Spirit brings them to my mind in my daily life and the more I am driven to live in the way that God desires.

—**Larissa Swartz, Conservative Mennonite Conference, USA**

## MWC Executive Committee deliberates, welcomes and celebrates

**Bogotá Colombia** – As Mennonite World Conference (MWC) kicked off Renewal 2027 (a 10-year event commemorating Anabaptism’s birth through the Reformation), the Executive Committee welcomed a record number of new members at their meeting in Germany.

Before and after “Transformed by the Word: Reading Scripture in Anabaptist Perspectives” (Renewal 2027) in Augsburg, Germany, 12 February 2017, the Executive Committee, four commissions, Young Anabaptists (YABs) committee and MWC staff including regional representatives gathered for fellowship and decision making. The multi-year trilateral dialogues, in which MWC engaged with the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council on Christian Unity, also held their final meeting in Germany during this time.

Official church membership of Mennonite World Conference totalled 105 national churches and 1 international association after the Executive Committee processed membership updates, which the General Council will affirm in 2018 along with any other new members received in 2018. The Australia Conference of Evangelical Mennonites, Convención de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas del Noreste de México and the British Conference of Mennonites, United Kingdom, were moved to inactive or closed status. The Executive Committee welcomed Hmong



**EC member Paul Phinehas (India) shares while member Agus Setianto (Indonesia) looks on.**

Photo: Wilhelm Unger.

7th District of the Church of Christ in Thailand, Convenção Brasileira das Igrejas Evangélicas Irmãos Menonitas (COBIM), and Convención de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas de Puerto Rico as full members, and the following national churches as associate members (due to their size): Uganda Mennonite Church, Mennonitische Freikirche Österreich, Associação dos Irmãos Menonitas de Portugal.

The Executive Committee recommended a proposal to General Council to start a discernment process on a potential name change for MWC. Over the next year, regional representatives will engage church leaders regarding a more inclusive name.

John Roth of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism presented on the Global Anabaptist Project. Published in English as *Global Anabaptist Profile: Belief and Practice in 24 Mennonite World Conference Churches*, the report will also be translated into Spanish, French and three additional languages, and the PDF is posted at [www.goshen.edu/isga/gap](http://www.goshen.edu/isga/gap).

To ease financial planning in response to the volume of donations received in December, the Executive Committee will meet online in late 2017 to process the possibility of a year-end change to 31 August 2018.

The general secretary’s six-year term comes to an end in 2018. The Executive Committee unanimously requested César García renew for a second term. “MWC wants to hire a ‘wool-making, milk-producing, egg-laying pig that can be eaten!’” says MWC president Nelson Kraybill, quoting a German proverb. “Despite the large assignment, César works hard, has vision for MWC, and is effective in a broad range of tasks and roles. We are grateful he has accepted [another term.]”

At their meetings, the Peace Commission accepted Jeremiah Choi Wing Kau (China – Hong Kong), replacing Namshik Chon (South Korea), and the YABs Committee welcomed Oscar Suarez (Colombia) who will represent Latin America after Dominik Bergen (Paraguay) stepped down.

“When 70 followers of Jesus from around the world meet at a historic centre of 16th-century Anabaptism, the past and future of the church meet in life-giving ways. At Augsburg, these modern-day witnesses on the leading edge of Anabaptist mission worshiped, shared vision, debated, planned, laughed and sometimes wept,” says Kraybill. “It was a particular joy to fellowship with Catholic and Lutheran representatives who were part of the recent trilateral dialogue on baptism. To build friendship today and find shared hope in the gospel is an encouragement to all and a strength for our shared witness to the world.”

— Mennonite World Conference release



The Bible has really transformed my life since I was very small. Thank God, we were disciplined by my mother. We read the Bible every day after lunch, and this was very important. We need more and more to study the Bible according to our own reality and our own context. For to read the Bible and to live out the Word of God are very different one from the other. — **Gladys Siemens, Associação das Igrejas Menonitas do Brasil (AIMB), Brazil**

### Give a gift to MWC

Your prayers and financial gifts are deeply appreciated. Your contributions are important. They will:

- Enable and expand communication strategies to nurture a worldwide family of faith,
- Strengthen our communion’s identity and witness as Anabaptist Christians in our diverse contexts,
- Build up community through networks and gatherings so we can learn from and support each other.

Go to [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org) and click the “Get involved” tab for prayer requests and on the “Donate” table for multiple ways to give online.

Or mail your gift to Mennonite World Conference at one of the following addresses:

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17808 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA
- Calle 28A No. 16–41 Piso 2, Bogotá, COLOMBIA



## MWC Publications Request

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**YAMEN participants Dina Molina and Marly Aceituno from Honduras.**

Photo: Janet Plenert

## A discipling community



“Do not cry,” said to me a member of my church when I lost a relative in a very tragic way. “Read this verse of the Bible,” she continued. However, I could not hear her. I needed somebody able to listen to me, somebody ready to cry with me, and somebody open to walk with me during those days of deep grief. I did not need a biblical lesson – I needed a friend.

“I do not believe in counseling” a pastor of a local congregation told me some years ago. “People need to know how to obey God’s word instead of depending on what somebody says. Giving advice generates dependency,” he said. Years later, I heard a member of his congregation expressing resentment against the church for the loneliness and abandonment he felt during a relative’s terminal illness.

Where was his pastor during the hard times of suffering, questioning and lack of hope?

We need somebody to walk with us during difficult times. We need the support of others when we are dealing with conflicts, resentment, sicknesses and death. We need the company of wise people to help us to identify our weaknesses and strengths, and to discover the causes of them. We need christocentric guidance about sexuality, how to manage our money, and how to navigate crucial decision times in our lives: getting married, raising children, choosing a profession, retiring and other decisions.

In other words, we need *discipleship*. Christian counselling is not giving advice or telling others what they should or should not do. It has to do with walking with others and accompanying in a way that helps them make decisions based on their decision of following Christ. That is what discipleship is. It has to do with imitating Christ in our every day life, and in order to do so we need the compassionate company of other members of our community and the support of the specialized gifts that can help us to deal with specific challenges.

Today, in Christian circles, discipleship has taken many names: coaching, therapy, spiritual direction, mentoring, pastoring, counselling. This is just a way of showing how big is the need to find people with the kind of expertise that can be really useful for specific areas of need in discipleship. Depression, for example, or a learning deficiency is the kind of matters that require a specialized training for the person that will serve as counsellor.

In a basic level, all of us have the wonderful opportunity of walking with others in their process of discipleship. Even during very difficult and challenging times, to those who are suffering, we can remain close as compassionate people without offering empty words or advice. Just listening. Many local congregations in the Global South, in a context of violence and suffering, are learning how to support others through active listening. They have discovered the healing power that is hidden in the simple act of being there for others without a judgmental attitude. Compassion, again, has become their distinctive.

However, in many places in the Global South, the need of specialized ministries of counselling is huge. How to deal with mental illness? How to help in process of healing of memories that require specific counseling skills? How can some of the enormous resources in the Global North be shared with our churches in the Global South? I am speaking here about educational resources in the area of counselling, conflict resolution, mentoring, therapy, etc.

This issue of *Courier* is just a humble initiative that looks for ways of inviting our churches to speak more about these issues and to do so in a multicultural way. We need to share our educational resources, experiences and needs in order to grow together in our discipling call.

May God guide our churches around the world to walk with compassion, serving as healing communities that take seriously our call to discipling.

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