

Courier Correo Courier

April 2014
Volume 29, Number 2



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

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

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

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From the Editor's Desk



"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. . . . And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them." (Acts 4:32-34, NIV)

Cover Photo:

At a meal served after the inter-Mennonite worship service, held by the Anabaptist churches in Angola in September 2013, water is poured over the hands of Brother Noe, a Mennonite who works for the Angolan Council of Churches. The service was held to honor members of the Mennonite World Conference Deacons Commission, who visited Angola twice in 2013. The service lasted about four hours, and included numerous choir performances as well as a sermon by Janet Plenert, MWC vice-president. Photo by Henk Stenvers

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the passages' claim: "There were no needy people in the church? Impossible!"

I suspect that my students – the majority of whom are relatively affluent, white, middle-class American Protestants – react so strongly because they recognize that the church as a whole does not function in this way. In this case, Christianity has lost the radical, countercultural impulse that characterized the earliest believers. In general, we have accepted the “truths” of materialism and self-sufficiency. We have insulated ourselves from the poor and the oppressed, even in our own midst. Without a doubt there *is* need in the church today – indeed, we might even speak of a “need gap” or a “wealth gap” between believers, both in different parts of the world and in the same congregations.

In fact, a wealth gap exists even in our global Anabaptist family. Some of us live in contexts of extreme poverty; others live in contexts of extreme wealth. How can Mennonite World Conference as a whole begin to address this staggering disparity? How are we already doing so? This issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier* seeks to address these questions.

In the “Perspectives” section, writers from across our global fellowship reflect on the MWC shared conviction of pursuing *shalom* – especially in contexts of economic inequality.

Arthur Dück of Brazil describes the acculturation of the Brazilian Mennonite Brethren – and how that acculturation has distanced them from the economic hardships facing their brothers and sisters in that nation.

Harriet Sider Bicksler of the USA reflects on the challenges of “repairing the breach” in the North American economy – in other words, how Christians have tried (and failed) to address the ever-growing gap between rich and poor in American society.

Bijoy Roul of India writes of the biblical command to care for the poor and the dispossessed, and how that command is carried out in his context in the Indian state of Odisha.

José Arrais tells of the Portuguese Mennonite Brethren's efforts to heal economic inequality not through the indignity of handouts, but through the grace of Christian care and compassion.

In the “Inspiration and Reflection” section, Nelson Kraybill – president-elect of Mennonite World Conference – describes how the church serves as a haven of Christian hope, even in the midst of seemingly incomprehensible suffering.

Also included in this issue are a profile of the Anabaptist churches in Spain, an overview of the Anabaptist communities in Europe and an update on the preparations for the upcoming MWC Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015.

Even as we face the reality of economic inequality, both in our churches and in the societies in which we live, we acknowledge our reliance upon God in all things. We hope this magazine will be a reminder of the riches we have in Christ – and a challenge to realize the vision of the early church, in which “there were no needy persons.”

Devin Manzullo-Thomas is editor for Mennonite World Conference.

Economic Inequality

Exploring our shared commitment to pursuing *shalom*

As a global communion of Anabaptist-related churches, we share a common commitment to pursuing *shalom*. In this pursuit, we believe in seeking justice and sharing our resources, be they material, financial or spiritual. Yet our tremendous diversity means that we carry out this commitment in very different ways. In this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier*, leaders from across our fellowship write about different ways in which Anabaptists approach issues of economic inequality – and the ways we, as *shalom*-seeking followers of Christ, address the wealth gaps in our communities.

Christian Equality – Utopia?

By Arthur Dück

We live in a fallen world. The world we live in is not the world God had anticipated. When we decided to sin, we chose our own way, our own lord and our own path that did not convey blessing to us or others. Nevertheless, God did not abandon this fallen world. He constantly attempts to redeem his creation, as the Scriptures attest throughout.

As humans, we have to deal with two contradictory elements within us and within the structures we live in. Although we live in a fallen world, God's image is not completely lost – there are elements of God's good creation in us. On the other hand, our conscious decision to rebel against God and his purposes affected everything on earth. This means that all cultures on earth have elements that resemble God's image in humankind, as well as elements of our fallen nature.

As Christians, and Mennonites/Anabaptists, we have a strong spiritual heritage. Anabaptist groups were born in a time of crisis. Their search for a Christian life that resembled the early church in Acts certainly influenced their theology, since theology never develops in a vacuum. As was the case with the early church, early Anabaptist communities at large tried to diminish the economic inequalities within the church. The radical dimension of the "first love" could also be seen in the fact that the poor were cared for. The economical dimension was a means to an end – a tangible way of revealing Christ's love.

With time, though, turmoil decreased and Christianity became more world-friendly. Of course, Christians have always become more acculturated in the world, as is evident in the letters to the seven churches of Revelation 2-3. There, we see that dualism

took over: If at the beginning most of culture was viewed as "wordly," after some time the barriers came down and culture got good reviews.

Something similar happened to the Anabaptist movements. The initial years of persecution gave way to tolerance and a certain distance from the world. This, however, did not avoid the inclinations of the flesh, which were influenced by a previous culture. The distance from the world created a false security – the world was far away and could not influence them.

For the most part, Mennonites in Brazil do not live in colonies anymore. Capitalism and materialism have given rise to huge

“Today most Mennonite churches in Brazil at least speak of doing something for the poor. But inequality itself is rarely mentioned – as happens often with the culture at large.”

inequalities, which seem even stronger in the urban contexts. Brazilian Mennonites at large have been strongly influenced by the prevailing culture. Inequalities are as great in the church as in society.

Mennonites came to Brazil from Russia as refugees, possessing virtually no material possessions. However, the desire to make things happen and the initial community spirit soon made them look for opportunities that would make an economic lift possible. It did not take long and soon most of them were doing better financially, due to hard work. Those whose situation did not improve were often accused of being lazy. With the church's mission outreach, the inequalities got even worse. Many Brazilians live in very poor situations. Mennonite people compared themselves to these

Brazilians with the remark: "We also did not have anything at first, and look at us today. It is clear that they do not want to have a better life."

Since the economy in Brazil has been growing in the last years, so has materialism among Mennonites. Individualism replaces community spirit and the inequality issue is hardly dealt with, even though it is before our own eyes. As a whole, Brazilians are able to see a mansion beside a slum and have no qualms about it. This lack of compassion has entered into the churches as well. Even social work was not something that was on the agenda of churches until a few years ago, due to fundamentalist influence and to a desire to distance themselves from the Catholic Church.

Today, most Mennonite churches in Brazil at least speak of doing something for the poor. Some try to help individuals or groups with food, clothing or some other material aid. They try to meet some of the urgent needs, but inequality itself is rarely mentioned – as happens with culture at large.

A few years back I was urged to speak at a family retreat about the simple lifestyle. While some people clearly reflected on the issue, the session did not lead to a discussion group nor to a consideration of practical issues. It seems we are not ready for that just yet – will we ever be?



Arthur Dück is director and professor of intercultural studies at *Faculdade Fidelis Christian College*, a Mennonite Brethren educational institution in Curitiba, Brazil.

Repairing the Breach

by Harriet Sider Bicksler

Lately on American television, there have been frequent commercials from North America-based organizations asking for money to fight world hunger. The commercials tug at your heart, featuring sad-looking children, most of them African. One commercial notes that 17,000 children die each day from hunger, which apparently works out to one every five seconds. It's heart-rending.

It's also not the whole story. While hunger is certainly a problem in Africa, it often feels like these commercials ignore the issue of hunger right here in the United States and perpetuate stereotypes about "those poor people in Africa." The United States is often described as the richest country in the world. So why, then, according to World Hunger Education Services, are 14.5 percent of households (or almost 49 million people) food insecure in the sense that at times "the food intake of household members was reduced and their normal eating patterns were disrupted because the household lacked money . . . for food"? How is it possible that one in seven people in the United States lives below the poverty line, including one out of every five children?

These stark facts about hunger and poverty in the United States are even more disturbing when you also consider the following: in 2007, according to the U.S.-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the top ten percent of Americans earned 47 percent of the income and held 74 percent of the wealth, and this gap has not shrunk in the years since 2007. Or this: Over the past 35 years, the income of the top one percent increased 201 percent, while the income of the middle 60 percent increased only 40 percent, according to the U.S. Congressional Budget Office. It's not that there isn't enough wealth in the United States; it's that it is unequally distributed – very unequally distributed.

Citing statistics like the ones above, U.S. President Barack Obama noted in December 2013 that the increasing inequality in the United States "challenges the very essence of who we are as a people . . . the idea that a child may never be able to escape that poverty because she lacks a decent education or health care . . . that should offend all of us and it should compel us to action. We are a better country than this."



Carlos Nieves (left) and Lamont Reed unload groceries at Hopewell Mennonite Church (Reading, Pennsylvania, USA), as part of Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) grocery bag program. This program provides urban churches in North America with groceries that can be distributed to those in need. Since food can be a timely blessing to those who are experiencing unemployment, chronic homelessness or other issues, MCC's program is one way that Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in North America respond to economic inequality in their context. (MCC Photo/Matthew Lester)

Why is there increasing economic inequality in the United States? The issue is complex with no easy answer to the question, but it seems clear that certain factors contribute to the problem. These factors include corporate business interests that take precedence over public policies that would be more just for everyone; fear of socialism and so-called "redistribution of wealth"; the belief that government needs to get out of the business of providing a safety net; and an attitude that people are poor because they have made bad choices and are not taking personal responsibility, and not because the system is often stacked against them. Cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known more familiarly as food stamps) and long-term unemployment insurance, as well as an unwillingness on the part of some politicians to raise the minimum wage while simultaneously continuing tax breaks for wealthy individuals and corporations, are examples of policies that help to perpetuate inequality.

Economic inequality is a significant challenge for the American church, and we have often responded well. Many Christians (and others) are personally very generous with their time and wealth, volunteering for and contributing to organizations that help needy people. Many congregations have developed their own ministries or participate in community ministries that serve people who are poor and/or hungry. Yet despite our best efforts, economic inequality

continues. The gap between the rich and poor widens. Generosity and practicing the "pure religion" of James 1:27 (helping the widows and orphans in their distress) are important scriptural imperatives to follow. But so are the injunctions to "do justice" and to create social systems that do not oppress and trample the needy (see Micah 6:8 and Amos 2:6-7). In our current context of significant inequality in the United States and elsewhere, the words of Isaiah 58:6-7 should challenge us every day:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to tell the oppressed to go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless into your house; when you seek the naked, to cover them?

Isaiah goes on to promise that if we do these things, we will be called "repairers of the breach" and "restorers of streets to live in" – worthy goals to work toward in these days.



Harriet Sider Bicksler is a member of the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA) and editor of *Shalom!*, a quarterly Brethren in Christ publication on peace and justice issues.

A Mission Modeled on Christ

By Bijoy K. Roul

The encyclopedia at my desk defines “economic inequality” as the difference between individuals and populations in the distribution of their assets, wealth or income.

The term typically refers to inequality between individuals and groups within a society. More controversially, one could assert that economic inequality exists in a given society not by accident. In fact, at a certain level, such inequality is the result of human forces like greed and selfishness.

Regardless of its sources, economic inequality is real. In India, such inequality is deeply rooted within society, and effects a major portion of that society. And that portion of society suffers because of it.

There is no easy answer for the question of why the majority of a society often suffers from economic inequality. We have only a few theories in response. Of course, the factors vary from place to place, time to time, society to society. A driving factor in one place and situation may not be the same in another.

Nevertheless, the reality is this: Economic inequality today has left many in dire straits – in situations of homelessness, hunger and poverty, barred from access to adequate education and healthcare. Those who suffer in these situations do not have the same privileges of those in the upper echelons of society. Often, those who suffer are hardly noticed by society’s elites. The rich become richer, the poor become poorer. As a result, the gap between these two groups grows rapidly and alarmingly.

The Bible has much to say about economic inequality and the gap between the rich and poor in society. In the Old Testament, for instance, God creates the world perfectly and tells people to maintain a balanced and just society in that world (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25). Yet humanity rebels against God and God’s will, and sin enters the world (Genesis 3:13-19). Cain’s attitude in Genesis 4 is a prime example of how sin adds misery and injustice to human history – misery and injustice that has been passed on from generation to generation to this day.

Poverty rears its ugly head in the Old Testament, too. Because the poor will always be a part of human society (Deuteronomy 5:11), God commands his people to be open-handed and generous with them. The Old Testament reminds us of God’s deep concern for the plight of the impoverished. Failing to follow his

commands concerning the poor, brings the wrath of God upon us (Ezekiel 16:48-50; Isaiah 1:16-25).

The New Testament focuses God’s concern with inequality and commands to care for the poor and oppressed. For instance, Jesus identified himself as one among the poor when He said, “The Son of Man has no place to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). He chose the common people – the poor, the oppressed, the suffering – as the focus of His ministry (Luke 4:18-19). He taught the young man how he could follow him by forsaking earthly treasures and caring for the poor (Matthew 19:21). He drove the moneychangers out of the temple and condemned their greed and hypocrisy

“Our opportunity to seek equality and justice has been provided by Christ himself, who in spite of his riches became poor in order to make us rich.”

(Mark 11:15-17). Other examples abound. Clearly, Christ’s earthly ministry focused in part on challenging society’s norms and exposing its injustices.

In its vision of the early church, the New Testament also provides perhaps the clearest example of the kind of practical, dedicated living that brings justice and equality among people. In Acts 2:42-47, the early church is described as a place where possessions and resources were shared equally, where meals were focused on fellowship and caring, and where spiritual growth was matched by physical sufficiency.

As Brethren in Christ and Mennonites, our Anabaptist heritage also offers insight on our responsibility to help the poor and needy people. In the early Anabaptist movement, believers practiced obedience in financial affairs. Nineteenth-century Brethren in Christ leader H. B. Musser said, “I think it is the duty of the church to mutually aid each other in the losses sustained. . . . I think it is the duty that belongs to us, because the Scripture says, ‘Bear ye one another’s burden.’” Our Anabaptist background clearly teaches us – in keeping with the Scripture – that the church has a vital role to play in bridging

the gap between the rich and the poor and working for justice and equality in society.

What is the nature of that role? The Bible tells us that the church should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). The church must care for widows and orphans (James 1:27; Acts 6:1-7). The church should seek transformation – not only of individual hearts, but of the unjust and oppressive structures within society itself. In fact, as the church nurtures believers in the faith, believers in turn will seek justice in their own lives, in their families and the larger society. Though it may face challenges, the church still must be that voice that reminds society of God’s concern for justice and righteousness.

The Brethren in Christ Church in Odisha, India, attempts to bring justice and equality in two ways. First, we teach the Word of God. Second, we undertake projects in areas such as education, income generation, health and hygiene, agricultural improvement and relief and rehabilitation. Our long-term goal is to improve the socio-economic condition in our local regions.

One specific way we do this is through work among the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in the eight districts of the Odisha state. These groups are two of the most impoverished groups within Indian society, and have historically been recognized as disadvantaged people. Many SC and ST people live hand-to-mouth lives. They have low incomes; sometimes, they have only one meal a day. We encourage our community members to share the burdens of these individuals. Of course, it is not an easy task to bring balance, equality and justice – it is a long and ongoing process. Yet we persevere, trusting in the Spirit for strength and empowerment.

We see our mission as reflecting that of our Lord Jesus Christ: the poor may be economically impoverished, but they are rich in spirit, in faith, in work and in deed (James 2:5). This opportunity to seek equality and justice has been provided by Christ himself, who in spite of his riches became poor in order to make us rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).



Bijoy K. Roul is chairman for the Brethren in Christ Church in Odisha, India.

An Open Hand, Not a Handout

By José Arrais

Portugal is a small country. Yet despite our size we have always had a fascination with growth and expansion. In the past, we took to the sea and found new countries and new ways to develop economically. That era of discovery and exploration made our country more international in its outlook. In fact, it wouldn't be much of a stretch to call Portugal the very first global country.

But at one point in our history, Portugal simply stopped in time. Primarily, this occurred because of a dictator that “froze” our country – economically, politically, and socially – for more than 40 years.

When Portugal won its freedom from dictatorial rule on 25 April 1974, the country expected that a new wave of development would come. Twelve years later, when we joined the European Union (EU), we immediately saw the benefits of that affiliation – new infrastructures were built, new employment opportunities arose, and new investments strengthened our economy. The time had come for Portugal to “catch up” with the rest of Europe.

Unfortunately the politicians neglected to see the reverse of the development coin. Year after year the Portuguese government overspent its budget. Its debt grew so big that the EU, the European Bank and the International Monetary Fund had to intervene in the summer of 2011.

Suddenly, Portugal's economic foundations collapsed. The unemployment rate rose to 16 percent. (Recent figures put that number closer to 20 percent.) Emigration started again, mostly among the younger generations. The struggle to survive once again became a present reality.

The Mennonite Brethren in Portugal started to see that reality in our own communities. We knew we had to respond in some way. One of the first things we did was ask our members to start bringing a gift every Sunday – small items that could be delivered to those in need. In addition, for the last few years we have received donations from Germany – mainly clothes, appliances and furniture as well as food. These donations provide yet another way to reach out to the poor around us.

Yet we wanted to avoid the “easy thing” of just giving handouts. So in October 2013 we launched a thrift store – a small one but, through God's help, one that continues



Store manager Rosemary Alves (center) and volunteer Joana Mendes (right) pose with two customers at the thrift store outside of Lisbon, Portugal, run by the *Associação dos Irmãos Menonitas de Portugal*. Photo by José Arrais

to develop well. Located in a poverty-stricken community just outside the capitol of Lisbon, the store stocks the materials we receive from Germany and provides low-income people with the chance to purchase clothes and other goods at a symbolic price. We think it's much more effective to have the customers pay even a small amount rather than just give the stuff away. And what we've found is that the customers, despite their financial problems, can afford to buy things.

Even if someone doesn't have the money, we still find ways to provide the dignity of exchange: they can bring a kilo of rice, a pack of spaghetti or another food item – for instance – to trade for what they need. In one instance, an extremely poor man who lives on the streets wanted to buy a coat, but he didn't have the money at that point. We told him he could pay later, and gave him the coat. At the end of the month, he returned to the store to honor his commitment.

In this way, we are teaching people to be responsible, even when they have to pay only small amounts.

Another real impact of our little store is the opportunity it provides for witness. Customers are often impressed by the way we witness to God's love. We have Christian literature free for anyone who comes to browse our shop, and occasionally we see members of the local community coming to our Sunday worship service. We find this is also a way for them to experience Christ. Maybe they can make a commitment to the Lord.

Once a month we gather together with the local community for a meal. That day is special because we see people coming not only to have a substantial meal, but also to have the chance to listen to the Gospel for about 10-15 minutes. Strategically we conduct this preaching service between the main meal and the dessert: people have a brief “time out,” listen to the Word of God, and afterward enjoy a delicious treat.

Our church community is made up of humble people. And yet because of our Anabaptist DNA – evident from the time the Mennonite Brethren work started in Portugal in 1984 – it's very easy to mobilize our churches to extend love and bless those around us. It's not a matter of doing good for charity's sake. Instead, we act compassionately toward one another because we recognize that in God's Kingdom we are all brothers and sisters – siblings who gather to praise God every Sunday, some wealthy and some penniless, but unified in Christ.

That is why our Mennonite Brethren community is very involved, glad and willing to extend an open hand – not a handout – to support those in need. As a result, we see our churches growing and we see God teaching and impacting the lives of the Portuguese people.



José Arrais is president of the *Associação dos Irmãos Menonitas de Portugal* (Association of Mennonite Brethren of Portugal).

Pennsylvania 2015 to include Global Youth Summit

Four days before the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly (21-26 July 2015) in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, young adults aged 18+ from Anabaptist churches around the world will gather for the Global Youth Summit at nearby Messiah College.

Global Youth Summit (GYS) is a time for learning from the global church, observes Elina Ciptadi, Indonesia, a delegate to the GYS in 2003. "This event is an oasis for young leaders of the church. Many come with burdens and challenges and come home with ideas, new energy, a new (and global!) network of prayer partners and co-workers in Christ."

The mix of cultures can be daunting at first, according to Khohlwani Moyo, Zimbabwe, who also attended as a delegate in 2003. "When I firstly attended GYS in Bulawayo, young people sat in small groups made of others from the same country, not trusting strangers. But as the summit progressed, these groups got destroyed and new cross-cultural groups emerged... We were sharing different experiences, testimonies, stories... and at the end of the summit, you got this feeling that you belong to this multicultural global community of faith; you

MWC Assemblies are reunions of the Anabaptist-Mennonite family worldwide and take place every six years.

got to discover how big God is." This new global community often results in connections and partnership even after the youth summit is over. Andrei Utkin, a 2009 GYS participant from Ukraine, remembers building relationships during breaks between sessions. "I shared



about my country and projects we do. I invited [the delegates from Switzerland] to visit us and they responded. A group of youth came and we led a camp for local youth."

Both the GYS and MWC global assembly are places to share your gifts. Ciptadi reflects, "There will be many opportunities to make yourself useful. Be it your language skills, your ability to braid another person's hair, your first aid skills, your extra snacks, your family photos, your free time – bring them all to God and He will show you how to make that useful during GYS and Assembly."



Sumana Basumata (left) and Anshu Minz, delegates from India, talk with local youth at the 2009 GYS in Asunción, Paraguay. Photo by Barbara Kärcher

New in 2015: Small Groups

Each morning, we will hear two speakers reflect on the day's theme. After the message, participants will break into small groups of 15-20 people for fellowship and a deeper discussion of the morning's theme.

The small group model was designed in response to

requests from past participants for opportunities to get to know one another more deeply while at global assembly. The groups will allow relationships to form across generations, cultures, and life experiences – and the possibilities for fresh insights, new partnerships, and joy and laughter are endless!



Photo by Barbara Kärcher, 2009



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Pennsylvania 2015 at a glance



Africa night, Asunción, Paraguay 2009. Photo by Merle Good

Assembly Scattered

before and after Assembly Gathered various locations in North America

Global Youth Summit

17-19 July 2015
Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA
Theme: Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts

Assembly Gathered

21-26 July 2015
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA
Theme: Walking with God



Photo by Lowell Brown, 2009

Assembly Gathered Program

Music

Under the leadership of an international choir, we will sing music from different continents and styles.

Morning Program

Each morning we will gather for singing and to hear two speakers, one appointed by a MWC commission and one appointed by the Young Anabaptist committee.

Small Groups

The morning program will conclude in multicultural small groups of 15-20 people for fellowship and a deeper discussion on the morning theme.

Afternoon Activities

Attend a workshop, participate in a service opportunity, go on a local tour, get active in a sports activity, enjoy music and exhibits at the Global Church Village.

Evening Worship

We will gather again to sing, listen, share gifts, hear speakers,



Photo by Ray Dirks, 2009

pray, and encourage each other.

Children's Program

After morning singing, children will experience a multicultural program all day, including lunch.

Youth Program (18 and under)

After morning singing, youth will meet for presentations, discussions, service projects, games, workshops, sports, tours, music, and opportunities to "hang out" in the Global Church Village.

Contact:

Assembly Coordinators: Howard Good, Lynn Roth, Liesa Unger
Mennonite World Conference, PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17606-5364
pennsylvania2015@mw-cmm.org

Registration

Assembly Gathered

Registration opens in August of 2014. Options for families, volunteers, meals will be announced on the MWC website soon. All prices are in US dollars.

Global North

Full Adult Registration:
up to \$575 with a full meal plan

Children & Youth (age 3 to 17):
\$230 with a full meal plan

Global South

Full Registration:
\$75-\$275, depending on country

Lodging

Hotel Rooms:
\$109-\$159 per night

Dormitories at local colleges:
\$32-\$45 per person per night

Local home:
\$25 per person per night

Bookmarks

Don't forget to check out the Assembly bookmarks on our website. Maybe you will see a familiar face!

How can I help?

- Share ideas for workshops, tours, Global Church Village, musicians, choir and more
- Host guests in your home
- Volunteer
- Partner with other churches or ministries in your region for Assembly Scattered events
- Support the Assembly fund individually or as a congregation so people from all parts of the world will be able to attend.



For any suggestions, feedback or questions please write to:
Pennsylvania2015@mw-cmm.org

Information will be updated on the MWC website frequently:

www.mw-cmm.org/article/pennsylvania-2015



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2015

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News Briefs

Brethren in Christ summits build unity amid regional diversity

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada – “What can you do for your part of the world?” That’s the question the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA) has been asking Brethren in Christ church leaders across the globe, during a series of national summits.

Launched in 2011, these national summits have drawn together a diverse mix of Brethren in Christ church leaders for intentional conversations about identity, theology and ministry.

The first summit was held in Biratnagar, Nepal, in February 2011, and included Brethren in Christ leaders from India and Nepal. For the second summit, held in June 2013 in Pretoria, South Africa, leaders gathered from six countries across the African continent. And the most recent gathering – which took place in San José, Costa Rica, in December 2013 – brought together leaders from eight countries in Latin America.

The summits’ sponsoring agency, IBICA, is an associate member of Mennonite World Conference. Many of the participants in each summit are leaders in MWC member churches.

At each summit, coordinators asked the participants to think more intentionally about ways to share and to cooperate with sister churches in their continental region.

“Our goal for each of these summits has been to ignite conversation about a mutually beneficial vision for these leaders’ areas of the world,” says Don McNiven, executive director of IBICA.

And to do that, leaders must first build relationships with one another. For that reason, each

summit set aside considerable time for fellowship and conversation.

Danisa Ndlovu, bishop of the *Ibandla Labazalwane Kukristu e-Zimbabwe* (Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe) and president of MWC, participated in the African summit. He notes, “We discovered that while we might be coming from different countries and different cultural contexts, different political and socio-economic experiences, yet we can all be Brethren in Christ in our beliefs and practice.”

He adds, “We all agreed on the need to guard jealously our Brethren in Christ identity as expressed in our core values.”

Alex Alvarado, pastor of *Ciudad de Dios* (San José, Costa Rica) and regional coordinator to Central America for Brethren in Christ (U.S.) World Missions (BICWM), reports that the Latin American summit was an “historic event” for the pastors in this region. “There was a void in the identity, communication and relationship with the Brethren in Christ,” he notes. “The summit began to change that. It was amazing to see the joy, the unity and the goals that resulted [from the gathering].”

Another major topic of discussion at all three summits was the notion of self-sustainability. “One of the lessons we learned was that it was our responsibility as church leaders to teach and stir away our members from the dependency syndrome,” says Ndlovu. “We encouraged each other to help our churches develop home-grown initiatives that will result in greater self-reliance.”

For more on these summits, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org

– Devin Manzullo-Thomas



Brethren in Christ leaders from throughout Latin America discuss a variety of issues during a breakout session at the IBICA summit, held in San José, Costa Rica, in December 2013. Photo courtesy of Chris Sharp



African Brethren in Christ church leaders and IBICA administrators pose for a photo during the summit held in Pretoria, South Africa, in June 2013. Photo courtesy of Chris Sharp



Indian and Nepalese Brethren in Christ leaders come together for a summit, sponsored by IBICA, in February 2011. Photo by Chris Sharp

Argentine Anabaptist greets Pope Francis



Vatican City – Luis Ma. Alman Bornes of the *Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina* (Evangelical Mennonite Church of Argentina), a MWC member church, shares a cup of traditional Argentine mate tea with Pope Francis during a visit to the Vatican in November 2013. Alman Bornes visited the Vatican as part of an interfaith delegation composed of Catholics, Muslims and Protestants, having previously participated in the World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Vienna, Austria. Toward the end of their gathering they visited the Vatican, during which time Alman Bornes greeted the Pope on behalf of the Mennonite family.

Time with MWC foundational for new Christian Peacemaker Teams executive director

Chicago, Illinois, USA – Sarah Thompson, newly appointed Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) executive director, credits her time of serving with Mennonite World Conference as foundational in the development of many of the skills she will use in her new role.

From 2004-2009, Thompson was the North American representative to MWC's Youth and Young Adult Executive Committee and Global Youth Summit planning group (also known as the AMIGOs committee).

During this time she met and built connections with church leaders from around the world. Thompson shares, "I want to be part of a church and a social movement that is invitational to all to participate." In her experience, MWC demonstrates that there is space in the church for everyone to bring all of their gifts.

Through joint efforts of MWC and the Mennonite Central Committee, Thompson learned

about strategic planning and organizational development. Former MWC executive secretary, Larry Miller, was also an important mentor for Thompson.

Part of the role of the CPT executive director is fund- and



Sarah Thompson, newly appointed executive director of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), served for several years with MWC. Photo by Wilhelm Unger

friend-raising. Thompson shares that, "Communities of support and challenge are important and that is what friends bring to the table." She credits her time with MWC as training her for these tasks, as she had the chance to

practice inviting people to share some of their life energy with Mennonite youth world-wide.

As she begins this new role, Thompson anticipates a continued working relationship between CPT and MWC member churches. She adds that CPT will have a presence at the MWC Assembly in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA in 2015.

Thompson assumed her new position in January 2014, succeeding outgoing director Carol Rose.

The idea for what became CPT was sparked at the 1984 MWC Assembly in Strasbourg, France, when North American Anabaptist theologian Ron Sider called the global church to active peacemaking. Since its formation in 1986, CPT has challenged the church to directly and daily live out its peace and justice commitment in situations of lethal conflict.

– Kristina Toews

In Memoriam: Cornelius J. Dyck (1921-2014)

Bogotá, Colombia – Mennonite World Conference mourns the passing of Dr. Cornelius J. (C.J.) Dyck, Mennonite historian and church leader, in Normal, Illinois, USA, on 10 January 2014. Dyck served as executive secretary of MWC from 1961-1973.

Born in Russia on 20 August 1921, Dyck grew up in Kansas (USA). After World War II he served for several years with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) in England and the Netherlands. After earning a PhD in church

history, he became professor of historical theology at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, a position he held for 30 years until retirement in 1989. During his career he produced numerous books and articles on Mennonite history and theology, including the popular *Introduction to Mennonite History* (1967).

Dyck's service as MWC executive secretary came at an important time in the



Cornelius J. Dyck (1921-2014). Photo courtesy of AMBS

organization's history. He played a crucial role in articulating the necessity of MWC's global vision, claiming in 1972 that "[MWC] must be a part of the mission Mennonites are being called to in the world – not just white, Western Mennonites, [but] all Mennonites . . . Unless MWC can become an integral part of what all Mennonites want to be and do in the world, it cannot have a real future." Dyck's vision continues to inspire the mission of MWC today.

Give a gift to MWC

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

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

Go to www.mwc-cmm.org and click the "Get Involved" tab for prayer requests and on the "Donate" tab for multiple ways to give online. Or mail your gift to Mennonite World Conference at one of these addresses:

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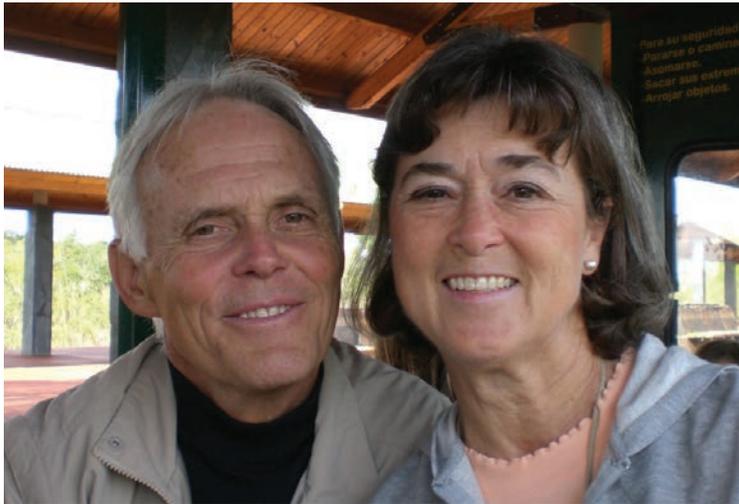
Support for MWC draws on father's lessons about giving

Goshen, Indiana, USA – From an early age, Myrl Nofziger, a real estate developer from Goshen, Indiana, USA, learned life-shaping lessons about philanthropy, benefiting many Mennonite organizations, including Mennonite World Conference.

“My father talked and lived giving every day,” says Nofziger. “For him, giving included not only one’s money but also one’s

have been faithful to a holistic lifestyle. We know that we cannot force a certain lifestyle on you; we only hope that we have been good role models for you.

“It is important that you think ‘globally’ and not just locally or about yourself,” Myrl writes in his testament. “Issues such as immigration, persons of different ethnic backgrounds, how you treat the poor, people who are or have been incarcerated, peace and justice issues; the list goes on and will change from time to time.”



Myrl and Phyllis Nofziger in Paraguay for the MWC Assembly, held in Asunción in July 2009. Photo courtesy of Myrl Nofziger

intellect, feelings, volunteerism and ethics. Tithing was just the beginning, not the end, of giving.

“Recessions had no impact on his giving. He would even borrow from the bank in order to give to the church or an organization in need of funds.”

Myrl said he and his wife Phyllis – as well as his first wife Ardith, who passed away in 1988 – have lived with the same values that giving includes one’s whole self, and goes way beyond tithing.

They also feel strongly about encouraging their children and grandchildren to live by similar values. Myrl has prepared not only a will but also his “testament” that spells out his hopes and expectations for the next generations.

The testament includes the following statement: “In my Will there are stipulations that money be given at certain times to each of you, only if you

In 1948, Myrl’s father brought the whole family all the way from Ohio to Goshen – a long trip by car in those days – to participate in the fourth MWC Assembly – the first to be held in North America.

Myrl became more directly involved in MWC by being solicited to help provide funds after the 1967 Assembly in Amsterdam and again after the 1990 Assembly in Winnipeg. He and Phyllis also created an MWC endowment fund in the late 1990s.

In addition to his family’s attendance in 1948 he has attended the last four assemblies: Winnipeg (1990), India (1997), Zimbabwe (2003) and Paraguay (2009, with Phyllis).

Each Assembly, starting in 1948, has broadened his understanding of what it means to be a Mennonite Christian, going beyond the rules and restrictions that seemed to

define a Mennonite when he was growing up.

“Watching Africans dancing, watching worship styles from different parts of the world, and observing different lifestyles, I have come to see that there is far more to Christianity than my own limited understanding and my own experience,” says Myrl.

When asked why he thinks everyone should support MWC, Myrl comments: “MWC provides the structure that permits us to interact at a world level. We in North America hold much of the world’s wealth, and it is our responsibility to share our resources.

“Today’s church is much bigger than one’s own congregation or even one’s own city. Our congregations used to be self-contained communities, but now we live in a world community, which means we all need to expand our practice of benevolence.”

MWC leaders share insights from their travels

Bogotá, Colombia – Mennonite World Conference leaders often travel globally to teach, preach or meet with MWC member churches or affiliated organizations. The following excerpts give highlights from some of those journeys, and provide perspective on MWC’s vision 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.”

In November 2013, MWC general secretary César

García was blessed with the opportunity to get to know our brothers and sisters of MWC member church *Nihon Menonaito Kirisuto Kyokai Kaigi* (Japan Mennonite Christian Church Conference). During his visit, García met with their leadership to strengthen relationships with MWC, share about the role of the new MWC Asia representative, and hear of the challenges this denomination is facing and how MWC can support them. “We’re thankful for the rich diversity we have in our global family of faith!” he comments.

That same month, Peace Commission secretary Robert J. Suderman, led part of a workshop discussion at the Ecumenical Day on Peace at Bishop’s College in Kolkata, India, with over 100 people in attendance. Given that part of MWC’s mission is to relate to other Christian world communions and organizations, often MWC leaders – like Suderman – are invited to teach and share an Anabaptist perspective in ecumenical settings.

The previous month, Suderman led two other workshops, both in South Africa. The first was held in Mthatha, at the Bethany Bible Institute. Suderman reports that of the 25 attendees, all but one were female. The second workshop was titled “Anabaptist Contributions: Past, Present and Future” and took place in Hermanus.

To read more stories from traveling MWC leaders, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org



Jack Suderman (under banner, with microphone), secretary of the MWC Peace Commission, speaks at an Ecumenical Seminar on Peace at Bishop’s College in Kolkata, India, in November 2013. Photo courtesy of Jack Suderman

Colombian churches prepare for MWC leaders' visit



Bogotá, Colombia – In December 2013, representatives of the three MWC member churches in Colombia (pictured above) had their first meeting as they prepare to welcome MWC leaders in May 2014. Leaders from *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (Mennonite Church of Colombia), *Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo* (Brethren in Christ Church) and *Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia* (Mennonite Brethren Churches of Colombia) are excited to work together to welcome the MWC family.

For their annual meeting, the MWC Executive Committee will be gathering in Bogotá, Colombia. Along with the Executive Committee, the MWC Young Anabaptist Committee, the presidents and secretaries of the four MWC Commissions, the MWC regional representatives and other MWC staff will all be meeting for about eight days. On Sunday, 18 May 2014, all the Anabaptist churches in Bogotá will come together for a joint, multi-denominational worship service with the MWC visitors.

The Colombian churches will continue preparing for this joint service with a planning committee involving the three denominations, and are looking forward to this opportunity to share their gifts with the global church.

Resources

Booklet explains Anabaptist faith

The MWC Faith and Life Commission encourages MWC member churches to consider using Palmer Becker's brief booklet, "What is an Anabaptist Christian?" as part of their teaching ministry.

This resource employs clear and simple language to summarize the main themes of Anabaptist-Mennonite faith, rooting them deeper in the larger Christian tradition, claim Faith and Life Commission

leaders. They note that the booklet describes why we believe in following Jesus in daily life; in studying and interpreting Scripture from an ethical, Christ-centered point of view; in structuring the church for community; and in the notion that forgiveness from God and forgiveness among each other is essential for community.

For more information on "What is an Anabaptist Christian?", including a listing of the languages in which it is available, visit the Mennonite Mission Network website at www.mennonitemission.net

Educators called to new teachings on Lutheran-Mennonite history

Leaders of the MWC Faith and Life Commission are

calling Mennonite educators to embrace a new pattern of teaching about Lutheran-Mennonite history.

In 2010, MWC participated in a service of reconciliation with the Lutheran World Federation, in which the latter group formally asked for forgiveness for the violence against the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century and for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries. MWC representatives responded by offering forgiveness and acknowledging our own role in perpetuating memories of hostility.

In light of these and other commitments, the Faith and Life Commission is encouraging Mennonite educators to take seriously this new reality in a few tangible ways. Their recommendations include:

1. Take time to read and to share the document *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*. The document is available in English, Spanish and French.

2. Review the way in which you are currently representing Lutherans or the story of Anabaptist beginnings in your teaching. Might there be some things that you need to revise in light of these new understandings and commitments?

3. Integrate this story of Mennonite-Lutheran reconciliation in your teaching.

4. Consider inviting representatives of a local Lutheran church or school for public conversations about Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation.

For more resources, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org

Prayers

- Pray for the Kutuzivka Mennonite Church in Ukraine which is building a new church in the neighbouring village of Molochansk where most of the members live. Around 70 people attend the church, with half under the age of 40. A depressed economy presents challenges. The church is part of the Christian Union of Mennonites Churches in Ukraine.

as they prepare together to host the MWC Executive Committee, which will meet in Bogotá, Colombia, in May 2014. The three member churches are *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (Mennonite Church of Colombia), *Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo* (Brethren in Christ Church) and *Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia* (Mennonite Brethren Churches of Colombia).

- Praise God for the faithful service of the members of the MWC delegation at the second of five annual meetings of the International Catholic/Lutheran/Mennonite trilateral dialogue on baptism, which took place 27-31 January, in Strasbourg, France. Members of the MWC delegation are: Alfred Neufeld, chair (Paraguay); Fernando Enns (Germany); Rebecca Osiro; (Kenya); John Rempel (Canada); Larry Miller, secretary (France). For more on this dialogue, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org

- Praise God for the witness of the *mamans pasteurs* (as pastors' wives are called in the Democratic Republic of Congo). These women were overcome by joy and an emotional time of remembering on 8 August 2013, when the Kinshasa conference of *Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo* (Congo Mennonite Brethren Church, or CEFMC) organized a service of encouragement in honour of deceased pastors, with a focus on their surviving widows. Pray for this church as it continues to pray for and to share with these widows.

- Pray for the three MWC member churches in Colombia

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Hope crosses boundaries

How God uses relationships to build the church



by Nelson Kraybill

The global Mennonite church is diverse and vibrant! We grieve that parts of this faith family live in areas plagued with poverty, violence or religious conflict. But the most important message Christians bring to a suffering world is hope: God cares, the followers of Jesus care and the Spirit brings healing to the nations. Already God's salvation is beginning to transform individuals and communities, and the Mennonite church is part of that redemption project.

Diversity, suffering and hope describe the neighborhood around my congregation in Elkhart, Indiana, USA. Thousands of white, middle-class people moved away from this part of the city a generation or two ago. Into this area moved African Americans (blacks from southern parts of the United States), Latinos (immigrants from Central or South America) and other ethnic groups. There is wonderful energy in the restaurants,

grocery stores, churches and music styles of the various cultural groups. But Elkhart also struggles with gangs, violence and prejudice.

Building community between blacks, whites and Latinos has not been easy – and Mennonites all over the world minister in the midst of similar ethnic and cultural diversity. New arrivals to Elkhart often come with few economic resources, modest education or limited English-language ability. Many Latinos come illegally without visas, seeking opportunity and fleeing violence or poverty in their homelands. Some live in fear of being discovered, arrested and deported. The household income of people in this part of the city is low. Public schools struggle with high turnover of students and strained budgets.

In places of suffering or fear, the church declares, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5). God's love became visible when a peasant girl named Mary gave birth and poor shepherds visited. Jesus came offering living water to a Samaritan woman, forgiving Roman soldiers, healing lepers and otherwise crossing ethnic, political and social boundaries.

Reaching across boundaries

Prairie Street Mennonite Church is a mostly white congregation with a few Latinos and

Pastor Ruben Santos (middle) and Morela Santos (right), leaders of the *Restauración* congregation in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, chat with Lora Miranda, a member of the Prairie Street Mennonite Church. Photo by Peter Ringenberg

blacks. We want to become more diverse and better represent the breadth of the Kingdom of God.

So it has been life-giving for our congregation to open our doors recently to a small new Latino congregation to use our building for worship. Pastor Ruben Santos and his wife Morela are from Venezuela and recently became citizens of the United States. On Friday evenings they worship in our building with twenty-five other Spanish-speakers. My wife Ellen and I, and several others from our congregation who speak Spanish join this *Restauración* (Restoration) group for worship.

Pastor Santos was schooled in another denomination, but is eager to learn from Anabaptists. I want to learn from his congregation about evangelism, worship and prayer. My background of carefully planned and controlled worship is different from the Pentecostal style of *Restauración*. Our music styles are different. But in these new brothers and sisters I sense a gracious spirit and big vision. We do not know exactly what will happen with the meeting of our two congregations. But God is up to

something, and it includes the hope and joy of reaching across cultural and linguistic boundaries and finding ways to collaborate. In both of our congregations we welcome people who are homeless, single parents or undocumented.

Responding to suffering

What does it mean for the global Mennonite church to say that if “one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26)? One response to suffering is for persons with skills or money to share directly with those in need. When Christians in Elkhart realized that the family of a recent shooting victim did not have money for the funeral, we gathered several thousand dollars for the burial.

Mennonite churches around the world similarly share money and resources through some kind of local mutual aid fund. In Elkhart Mennonites have paid rent or medical bills for people who are unemployed. We helped an undocumented immigrant family buy and renovate a house. Some members have opened their homes to women who seek safety from an abusive marriage relationship.

Jesus speaks to the causes of suffering

Such direct aid is important and necessary, but it is not enough. Those with greater wealth are tempted to continue to control, for their own benefit, the economic or political systems that created the gulf between rich and poor. If unjust economic or political patterns persist in society, an occasional gift to those in need might make the giver feel good without changing the causes of poverty.

Jesus came to save all humankind, including the wealthy. But he was born in a stable, among the poor, in a country plagued with violence. His mother Mary praised God who “brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly,” who “filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:52, 53). Jesus launched his ministry by declaring that God sent him “to bring good news to the poor . . . and recovery of sight to the blind” (Luke 4:18). In other words, Jesus became flesh to proclaim hope in the midst of society’s brokenness.

Can the fellowship and sharing that happen through Mennonite World Conference be good news both for parts of the church where there is poverty

and where there is material abundance? Through our global interaction, can persons blessed with material resources recover sight to see the great gulf between rich and poor? Might we also see the opportunity this gulf creates for God to change our hearts and build a stronger global church?

The Mennonite world has changed

In recent decades the momentum of Mennonite spiritual and numerical growth has shifted from Europe and North America – where Mennonites first

“Can the fellowship and sharing that happen through Mennonite World Conference be good news both for parts of the church where there is poverty and where there is material abundance?”

flourished – to Africa, Latin America and Asia. God’s activity often is most evident in places where there is not material abundance. Persons at the political or economic margins of the world are more likely to receive and live into the gospel than those who feel secure at the centers of economic power.

MWC provides a way to respond

There are at least three ways that MWC can help me and other North American Mennonites respond to suffering or economic injustice at home and elsewhere in the world.

First, MWC builds understanding through relationships that cross political, racial and economic barriers. When we know and love people who are in very different life circumstances, we can pray with empathy. The spiritual vitality and vision for mission in economically or politically stressed parts of the church can inspire Mennonites elsewhere.

Some of us will meet face-to-face at a MWC Assembly, or when Mennonites travel to visit another country. Such interaction is most productive when all participants expect to learn from the other rather than simply impart something. How does the witness of Christians in another part of the world challenge me to grow and change?

Second, understanding motivates us to act. When we know and love someone who

suffers, we want to help. The twenty-one year-old nephew of an immigrant woman in my congregation died recently in the desert in southeastern United States, trying to cross the border without documents. That tragedy motivates me to speak and act for a change in immigration laws in my country. It makes me want to speak up about corporations that move their factories to Central or South America where they can pay unethically low wages.

Third, and finally, action can inspire us to invest in the church. Anabaptists emphasize that Christians are citizens of the Kingdom of God above any other national or ethnic loyalty. Being part of MWC reminds me of this allegiance, and gives a way to put it into practice. Even Mennonites in a distant country are no “longer strangers and aliens, but . . . citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19). My highest priority is to invest time and resources in the church of Jesus Christ. Because it is my spiritual home, I especially want to connect to the Mennonite Church.

Stay connected through MWC

Go to the MWC website (www.mwc-cmm.org) and learn about the International Missions Association, a group of twenty-two Anabaptist mission groups whose representatives met recently in Singapore. Learn about Mennonites from several continents who are collaborating with Mennonites in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Burkina Faso to promote sustainable agriculture projects. See a video about Mennonites in Paraguay providing childcare for single mothers so they can seek employment.

Consider establishing a sister relationship with a Mennonite congregation elsewhere in the world. Plan to attend the MWC Assembly in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, in 2015, or give money to help someone else attend. Contribute your proportionate share to MWC so this networking organization can remain strong. Above all, pray for sisters and brothers in other parts of the world. In this small but vibrant Mennonite part of the Kingdom of God, we get a foretaste of the salvation, freedom and justice that someday will cover the earth. God is using MWC to strengthen the global church.



Nelson Kraybill is lead pastor at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, and president-elect of Mennonite World Conference.

Celebrating with the global faith family

Churches observe World Fellowship Sunday 2014

Each January, Mennonite World Conference encourages Anabaptist communities around the world to participate in World Fellowship Sunday (WFS) – a global observance marking the anniversary of the first Anabaptist baptisms in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525. WFS provides an opportunity to remember our common roots and celebrate our worldwide *koinonia*.

To facilitate this global celebration, MWC provides worship resources and prayer requests from around the world. MWC Executive Committee members from different continental regions designate writers and direct the preparation of these materials, which are intended to reflect the life and the church in their part of the world. Planning for this special day rotates among the five continental regions, and the 2014 WFS focused on Asia and the Pacific.

This year, MWC also invited participating congregations to collect a special offering to strengthen the work of MWC around the world. For this offering, each member of each participating congregation was encouraged to contribute the cost of one lunch in their own community to help support the networks and resources of our global Anabaptist church family.

Congregations around the globe participated in WFS this year, observing the birth and continued vitality of Anabaptism in a variety of ways that match the diversity of our worldwide communion.



Bogotá, Colombia – Sandra Báez, of the *Torre Fuerte* Mennonite Brethren Church, reports that her congregation's celebration of WFS "was a very special time." By passing colorful string between one another, the congregation weaved "a network that represents our global church united through the love of Christ," notes Báez. "We [also] prayed for our churches in Asia and the Pacific and took an offering for the invaluable work of MWC."



Leeuwarden, Netherlands – Mennonite churches in Friesland (a region in northern Netherlands) came together to observe WFS on 19 January. Through video messages, greetings of peace were exchanged between the Mennonite churches in Indonesia and in Friesland. The messages focused on the need to grow and maintain connections within the global Anabaptist family, and to work together for peace. "A true feeling of being a global family was expressed by many," claimed a report on the event sent to MWC.

Corvallis, Oregon, USA – Members of the Corvallis Mennonite Fellowship observed WFS by using MWC worship materials and by collecting the costs of a single lunch in their community, as part of the special WFS offering. "We appreciated the opportunity to remember and celebrate our connections to the global Anabaptist family," wrote Cathleen Hockman-Wert, a member of the congregation, in a letter to MWC.

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo – An inter-Mennonite worship service, intended to demonstrate Mennonite unity, was held at the *Communauté des Eglises de Frères Mennonites au Congo* (Congo Mennonite Brethren Church) congregation in Mafuta in Kinshasa on 9 February. All Mennonite congregations in Kinshasa were invited. According to a report by Charlie Malembe, the gathering included a sermon on II Corinthians 8:1-9 by Rev. Eric Mukambu, centered on the theme "giving generously." During the service various speakers encouraged Congolese Mennonites to give the equivalent of the cost of one Congolese meal toward the work of MWC. The amount was visually represented at the service by a display of the materials of a basic Congolese meal: fish, fufu, cassava greens, dried caterpillars, bread, and peanuts.

Spain

New churches in old Europe

by Dionisio Byler

Christianity is experiencing rapid decline in Europe. We have gone in the past two or three generations from being an outwardly Christian culture, to something post-Christian. In general, statistics from Mennonite World Conference indicate that the evolution of the old Mennonite churches in Europe reflect this same tendency.

One exception is the case of Spain, where in under forty years a new reality has come into being: a flourishing Anabaptist presence. We see this growth as a sovereign work of the Spirit that surpasses our own inadequate efforts.

Our brothers and sisters in the old European Mennonite churches (those that originated in the sixteenth century) tell us that they find our reality encouraging and hopeful. We, on the other hand, value their centuries of faithfulness and feel honored when they keep us in mind for continent-wide activities and organizations.

History

The first documented activity of Mennonites in Spain occurred during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), when Mennonite Relief Committee sent several volunteers from the United States to participate in a program to feed child war refugees. The victory by the fascists faction, of National-Catholic ideology, effectively terminated Mennonite involvement in Spain at the end of the war.

During the 1970s, it became possible to send missionaries to Spain. After consulting with leaders of the Spanish Protestant churches, Mennonite missionaries initially decided to cooperate with them instead of establishing yet another denomination in the country. The first missionaries, John and Bonnie Driver, were well received for the freshness of their deeply biblical message, with Anabaptist emphases that many young Evangelicals found especially exciting. The Drivers remained in Spain for 10-15 years, before returning to South America, where they climaxed a long missionary career.

Meanwhile, the first Mennonite Church had come into being in Barcelona. The

group that initiated it arrived from Brussels, Belgium, where they had migrated years before and where they had been worshiping with a Mennonite congregation at an American mission. José Luis Suárez gave initial leadership to this group, and was their pastor for many years until his retirement.

Also during the 1970s an interesting development occurred in the city of Burgos. There, a movement of conversions among teenagers was taking place within the Catholic Church. With a strong component of music and the arts, plus communal life in shared households, this movement shook the whole city. John Driver was one of the many people they invited to speak in Burgos, and his approach to the teaching of Jesus caught the imagination of these young Christians.

When three “elders” of the movement made a trip to the United States to visit radical Christian communities, they met Dionisio and Connie Byler of Argentina. They invited the Bylers to come to Burgos to continue the teaching ministry they had received from Driver. The Bylers have remained in Burgos since 1981, with the support of Mennonite Mission Network. In the mid-1990s, the group that started out as Catholic adopted a Mennonite identity.

North American Brethren in Christ (BIC) missionaries Bruce and Merly Bundy arrived in Madrid in the 1990s, inaugurating another era of Anabaptist influence in the country. Through their efforts and the efforts of others, the BIC now have two churches in the Madrid area. More recently, Juan and Lucy Ferreira from Venezuela began a BIC work in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, which relates to the BIC churches of Madrid.

Another effort developed early in the present century, when *Organización Cristiana Amor Viviente* – a MWC member church in Honduras – sent Antonio and Irma Montes to Spain to lead a missions effort. The fruits of their work include two churches in Catalonia and a small group in Madrid.

Get-togethers and associations

Since the 1980s these different groups in Spain – widely dispersed in cities that are far from each other – have made a point of getting to know each other and of cultivating jointly an Anabaptist or Mennonite identity. Since 1992, this relationship has been rooted in *Encuentros Menonitas Españoles* (EME – Spanish



Mennonite Get-Togethers), which are held every two years.

After a few years we organized as a fraternal association, called *Anabautistas, Menonitas y Hermanos en Cristo – España* (AMyHCE). As AMyHCE we participate in FEREDÉ, the association of Spanish Protestant churches (where we are known as one of the “denominational families” of Spanish Protestantism), and also in Mennonite World Conference. In MWC we are rather unique in having all of our churches, with their various connections with the historic Anabaptist denominations, participate jointly under this single representation.

Finally, our Anabaptist/Mennonite identity has been strengthened through fraternization with old European Mennonite churches. In 2006, for instance, the



A worship service at the Burgos Anabaptist Church in Spain. Photo by José Lozano

European Mennonite Conference (MERK) was held in Barcelona, bringing together Mennonites from across the European continent for encouragement and discussion.

Outstanding characteristics

As this brief history indicates, one of the features of AMyHCE is our great diversity – diversity of connectedness to the different denominations of world Anabaptism, but also diversity of emphasis and practice, in spite of being small. For instance, in our communities it is possible to find typically Pentecostal practices, but also misgivings regarding emotionalism. Theologically, there are among us both Fundamentalist and Liberal tendencies, but neither are we lacking in an Anabaptist “third way,” which explores alternative ways of explaining Christian faith.

Though few in numbers, our churches have not neglected service and missions. For years the congregation in Burgos was known for its center for rehabilitation of drug addicts, while the congregation in Barcelona operated homes for the elderly and the mentally handicapped. The Burgos church has established a home for children in the African nation of Benin, and a ministry with ex-child soldiers in Ivory Coast. This ministry in Africa is blessed by the support of other churches and individuals.

Since our beginnings in the 1970s, there has been among us an important element of biblical and theological exploration in a Mennonite or Anabaptist mode, which finds expression in ministries of teaching and literature, in print and in the Internet. And since 2010, Dr. Antonio González – pastor of one of the BIC congregations – has worked with other Anabaptists in leading a small center for theological studies, *Centro Teológico Koinonía* (CTK, or Koinonia

Theological Centre), which seeks to train a new generation of leaders.

Some other clearly Anabaptist emphases surface repeatedly in our communities:

- The church as a close-knit, closely bonded family that practices mutual assistance.
- Jesus as Teacher and example, as well as Savior and Lord
- Nonviolence and objection to military service
- A pragmatic – rather than dogmatic – theology: more interested in personally following Jesus than in theoretic affirmations about doctrine

On Being Anabaptist in Spain



Agustín Melguizo
Pastor, United Anabaptist
Communities (Burgos)

Some of the demands of Anabaptism have been accepted by most of the Evangelical churches which I relate to: for instance, separation of church and state and adult baptism. This implies [we are] living alongside of and in cooperation with different Christian churches, with which we have some differences, but also much in common.

It also means [we need] to look at our environment in order to take the light of Jesus to anyone who is open to him and, with personal and community witness, present a conversion which involves all areas of life and also implies a lifelong discipleship.



David Becerra
Pastor, Barcelona
Mennonite Church

I am Mennonite because one day I discovered that the message and life of Jesus implies a radical nonviolence. Reading the gospel this way led me

to be a conscientious objector to military service.

I am Mennonite because one day the pastor of the Barcelona Mennonite Church knelt and unexpectedly washed my feet. This taught me the true measure of authority: to serve others (as a slave).

In the Spanish context, to be Mennonite is to understand and live the gospel differently, focusing especially on Christ and his message of reconciliation.



Antonio González
Pastor and theologian,
Brethren in Christ Church

For me, to be Anabaptist in Spain is not a biographical coincidence, but rather an option. For a time, the Lord led me on a search for a true and radical model of

Christianity. [Becoming Anabaptist] was not in the first place, then, a choice of a local church or of a denomination. My walk with the Lord (and without him) and my theological search led me to look for a closer connection with the community project which Jesus and the apostles sought.

Undoubtedly, many of today's Christians can also lay claim to a return to our origins. However, in that return they tend to forget some aspects of the message of Jesus, such as pacifism and the community dimension of faith, which are for me essential even though they have been forgotten by the main currents of Western Christianity.

Looking ahead

Some significant challenges face this new growth of Anabaptist/Mennonite Christianity in Spain. In the next 10-15 years, most of our churches will face a significant generational relay in leadership. New leadership will arise, or else be imported from other churches. Will this second-generation leadership have a clear sense of identity beyond generic, Evangelical Christianity as a form of non-Catholic Christianity, are relatively new arrivals in Spain. They have arrived, not coincidentally, in precisely the generation in which the Spanish people began to reconsider the ancient connection between Spanish identity and Roman Catholic religion. But the weakening hold of Catholicism over the

mechanically automatic response from God. Yet we redouble our commitment to prayer, beseeching God on our knees to pour out God's Spirit upon this country.

Spanish people does not necessarily mean openness to other forms of Christianity. Rather, it is a sign of a Europe-wide trend to a post-Christian, profoundly atheistic way of understanding human existence. Superstition and silly credulity are on the rise.

The prevalent culture is not necessarily hostile to Christianity, but it does find Christianity utterly uninteresting, perhaps embarrassingly primitive. The challenge for our churches – and sister churches of every other stripe – is to find a way to light the flame of interest, curiosity and commitment. Essentially, this constitutes a call for a church that overflows with the life and presence of the Spirit of God.

We have no illusion of being able to kindle the flame of interest, conviction and passion for Christ, with our own witness or human resources. But we are of course committing our energies and resources to this end anyway. We do not live under the illusion that the fact of prayer generates a



Juan Ferreira makes an announcement at Iglesia Evangelica Manantial de Vida, a Brethren in Christ congregation in Tenerife, Canary Islands, that he started about two years ago. Photo by Tim Huber, Mennonite World Review

mechanically automatic response from God. Yet we redouble our commitment to prayer, beseeching God on our knees to pour out God's Spirit upon this country.

In the final analysis, this youngest shoot of Anabaptist/Mennonite Christianity in Europe shares with our older sister-churches of Anabaptist origins the reality that our very survival – not to mention propagation – depends most absolutely on the grace of God. Only the grace of God can grant us a future.

Paradoxically, this is precisely the reason for our hope and confidence and faith for a future for our churches.



Dionisio Byler is a writer and a teacher at the Protestant Faculty of Theology in El Escorial, near Madrid. He has been secretary of AMyHCE since its creation.

Europe

Old stories and new hope



by Henk Stenvers

When Conrad Grebel baptized his friends in the evening of 25 January 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland, little did he know that this

small act would mark the start of the worldwide family of faith that we now are as Mennonite World Conference. From Switzerland, the Anabaptist movement spread north, to Germany, France, and the Netherlands. After the debacle in Münster and under the leadership of Menno Simons, Mennonites migrated east to Prussia and later Russia and Ukraine. And even later still, Mennonites moved to North and South America, and then to all continents of the world.

And everywhere in the old countries, groups of Mennonites stayed on. Today, there are very old congregations in France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland – MWC members since the very beginning.

These old Mennonite churches carry the rich history and tradition of the Anabaptists and Mennonites of past centuries. Yet the old churches in Western Europe are going through hard times, this time not because of persecution but because of secularization.

Membership drops and congregations disappear because there are not enough new members anymore. But although smaller in number, the churches remain faithful to their Mennonite and Anabaptist identity and to doing God's work, each in their own context.

The leaders of each national conference and their MWC General Council representatives meet every year to inform, to share and to discuss developments in their countries and in MWC. For the last few years also the younger Mennonite communities in the south of Europe – in Portugal, Spain and Italy specifically – have attended this meeting as well, along with representatives from Austrian and Bavarian conferences and some former Umsiedler communities. A new kind of cooperation in Mennonite Europe is emerging, where young and old communities learn from each other and inspire each other. The young churches are eager to learn about the roots of the Mennonites, the old churches are inspired by the mission, the liveliness and the new methods the younger churches bring.

These developments have convinced the leaders of the importance of intensifying the contact between all European Mennonite churches, and of inviting more European Mennonite churches – such as those in Ukraine and Belarus – to the table. That's why after some years of discussion, they

Dutch Mennonites sing hymns during a workshop conducted as part of the 200th anniversary celebrations of the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (Dutch Mennonite Church) in 2011. The observance depicts European Mennonites' rich history as well as their quest for new expressions of faithfulness. Photo by Derk Stenvers

decided at their October 2013 meeting in Mainz, Germany, to appoint a European Mennonite Coordinator, starting in July 2014. Although not all conferences have yet decided on their level of support, leaders trust that there will be enough backing to finance this position at least for the coming years.

This development is a clear sign of hope. The Mennonite communities in the European countries, although small, have a strong commitment to the Mennonite and Anabaptist tradition, identity and mission. Together – whether more conservative or more liberal, evangelical or pietistic – they are part of the global body of Christ. And working together, each from their own identity and with a wonderful mix of young and old, they learn from, inspire and support each other.



Henk Stenvers (Netherlands) is secretary of the MWC Deacons Commission and general secretary / director of *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (Dutch Mennonite Church).

A Hard Question



Some months ago I had the privilege of visiting our churches in Malawi. There we were, along with delegates of several local Brethren in Christ (BIC) congregations, gathered under a tree in order to worship God and speak about our global communion. After a vibrant time of worship I had the opportunity of speaking about following Christ in our worldwide Anabaptist family. Then a pastor raised his hand and asked: How can we follow Christ in contexts of poverty, economic inequality and intense financial needs?

That was a hard question. What could I say – as a comparatively wealthy Latin American – to my brothers and sisters facing such a difficult context? In Malawi there are around 4,500 baptized members in about 46 local congregations. All of them face low life

expectancy, high infant mortality, increasing statistics of HIV/AIDS and lack of financial resources.

All these facts, plus the images of the immense financial resources that we have in other parts of our global family, came to my mind when I considered how to respond. After leaving our meeting a clear thought came to my mind: This church already had the response to the pastor's question. Generosity that balances economic inequalities brings hope and practical ways of overcoming this inequality. Some days before our service under the tree I attended another service in Blantyre, one of the main cities of Malawi. I was amazed when there was the time of offering. Every member (children included) got out of their chairs and went to the front to deposit their donation. Not a single person stayed seated! The joy and hope expressed in worship that followed that time of offering amazed me. Generosity, I thought – generosity of resources, and generosity of spirit in worship to God – is the answer to the pastor's question.

Generosity is an action that transcends economic inequalities to bear fruit as hope. Generosity proves that the immediate situation can be overcome. This is one of the reasons why these two topics (hope and economic inequality) are related in this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier*. Through generosity, our global community can find hope in the midst of our economic inequalities. How could this happen?

First, we could follow the words of the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, writing in his book *Ethics of Hope* (Fortress Press, 2012): "Perceive things not just as they have become and now exist but also in the different ways they could be." Our life needs to be eschatologically oriented. We can look to the future that is revealed by God – a future without economic inequality – and, in this light, denounce, criticize and look for ways of changing current circumstances that contradict such a future. As Johannes Baptist Metz and James Matthew Ashley claim in their book *Faith in History and Society* (Crossroads Publishers, 2007), the imminent coming of a final point in history – a point in which justice and restoration will be a present reality – brings hope and strength in order to transform current realities of injustice, suffering, and oppression.

Second, we need to be set free from the world around us, and resist its pressures. Consumerism and identity based on materialism are modern idols that feed inequalities. We can destroy them through the practice of generosity. Moltmann affirms: "People who expect God's justice and righteousness no longer accept the so-called normative force of what is fact, because they know that a better world is possible and that changes in the present are necessary. Being able to wait means resisting the threats and seductions of the present, not letting oneself be brought into line, and not conforming."

Third, we must find a new identity and fellowship. This new identity must be more important for us than the old one. "We are Christians first of all, and only after that are we members of our own particular country," concludes Moltmann. This means we should develop a Kingdom of God mentality instead of a nationalistic mentality. Let's start to think as citizens of a new nation in which there is not a gap between rich and poor, but where economic equality exists between all people. Let's start to experience the reality of this new Kingdom among us today. Our church is called to be a foretaste of this kingdom. Let us live it here and now!

César García, MWC general secretary, works out of the head office in Bogotá, Colombia.

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