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2012 / 2 & 3

Conférence Mennonite Mondiale • Mennonite World Conference • Congreso Mundial Menonita

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Koinonia —the gift we hold together

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld



Photo by Merle Good

What does it mean for member churches of Mennonite World Conference to share an Anabaptist identity? What is the value of Anabaptist “tradition”—and what does that word mean in a global context? What are our Anabaptist understandings of mission and fellowship?

Three years ago, the newly appointed Faith and Life Commission was asked to produce three papers that could be used in helping MWC communities reflect on such questions. The papers were presented to the MWC General Council in May (see pages 6–12 for reports): “A Holistic Understanding of Fellowship, Worship, Service, and Witness from an Anabaptist Perspective” by Alfred Neufeld Friesen of Paraguay; “Revisiting Our Vision: The Anabaptist Vision,” by Hanspeter Jecker of Switzerland; and “Koinonia — The Gift We Hold Together” by Tom Yoder Neufeld of Canada.

The papers are being edited into a final form as teaching resource. Beginning with this issue, we share them in Courier-Correo-Courrier. The following is an excerpt of Yoder Neufeld’s paper.

The word *koinonia* has rightly become a central term and concept for Mennonite World Conference. In addresses, publications and programmatic efforts, leaders have been nudging the global Anabaptist community to a deeper relationship with each other. Even when we don’t use the word *koinonia* itself, much of the terminology we use depends on it: meeting needs, mutual encouragement, gift giving and receiving, fellowship, interdependence, solidarity, consensus, communion, community, unity, being “together.”

As used in the Greek New Testament, *koinonia* and its immediate family of terms do not lend themselves to precise definition. Sometimes their meanings are very ordinary, other times profound to the point of mystery. Together, however, these meanings take on force and depth in shaping our calling to be a community of faith.

The range of meanings extends from *koinos* (ordinary, profane; Acts 10, 11) to *koinonia* as “sharing” and “partnership,” whether in labour or money (Philippians, 2 Corinthians 8, 9, Romans 15), and to “solidarity” with each other in times of need (Romans 12:13). Going far beyond our ability to comprehend, we are invited to participate in the *koinonia* of the

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 17; Philippians 2). The most material and the most spiritual dimensions are celebrated in “communion,” the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 10, 11).*

Koinonia is the biblical name we give to the loftiest and the same time the most ordinary and practical of concepts. It is found in the nature of the *koinonia* God gives us, in the incarnation of the Son, and in the blowing of God’s Spirit. Yet the most profound dimensions of *koinonia* are to be found in the utterly ordinary exercise of it in our communion with God and in the body of Christ. *Koinonia* is an identity-giving, life-shaping, commitment-forging, and action-provoking gift of God.

Cover: *Thioro Bananzoro of Burkina Faso and Marsha Ragoonath from Trinidad and Tobago pray together before communion at the conclusion of the MWC General Council meetings.*

Photo by Merle Good

Courier / Correo / Courier (ISSN 1041-4436) is published quarterly by Mennonite World Conference, Calle 28A No. 16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia. Publication office: *Courier*, 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg VA 22802-2434 USA. Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg VA. Printed in USA. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Courier, 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg VA 22802**

We receive it with Christ standing among us and his Spirit enabling us to both receive and exercise this gift.

Koinonia in MWC: both reality and goal

In a 2010 article entitled “Diversity: Blessing, curse, or call to communion?” Larry Miller correctly identified it as the reality undergirding our life together, but also as a goal toward which we are moving. While the specific terminology of *koinonia* is not employed by Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind in their *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith*, it is clear that “global gift sharing” perfectly captures many of the dimensions of *koinonia*, not least in locating its ground and origin in God’s own gift sharing. Similarly the seven “Shared Convictions” and Alfred Neufeld Friesen’s commentary on them, resonate well with what we have discovered about *koinonia* in the New Testament.

At the same time, the International Planning Commission of the MWC identified “autonomy” as one of the given realities of the MWC community of churches. It is in fact one of the criteria for membership in the MWC. As I see it, *koinonia* and autonomy are in considerable tension. “Autonomy” implies independence rather than interdependence. That is likely not the intention behind the use of the term in MWC. But in MWC history, the insistence on autonomy has sometimes reflected the desire not to have the search for unity compromise our own efforts at faithfulness.

Larry Miller called for “autonomy-in-communion,” clearly wishing nevertheless to move “beyond autonomy into communion-in-diversity.” Might our study of *koinonia* nudge us to speak less of autonomy, independence and self-determination, and more of granting each other the space to be as diversely and distinctly and uniquely faithful as possible? This is a *koinonia*-space where the walls are thin, the windows and doors are open, the conversations are overheard, maybe even interrupted, where we grant each other profound

Photo by Merle Good



Tom Yoder Neufeld presents his paper at the recent General Council meetings in Switzerland.

respect without distancing ourselves beyond the reach of counsel and exhortation.

In Romans 14:1–15:13 Paul addresses a vexing set of issues in the circle of house churches in Rome, made up of observant Jews and not so observant Gentiles. Should one eat meat? Should one observe special days? These issues were at least as troubling to early believers as any doctrinal or ethical issues we face. What made the issues so difficult is that they were competing visions and practices of holiness and worship. How do you compromise on faithfulness?

Interestingly, Paul never settles the question of who is strong and who is weak, whether meat should be eaten or special days observed. He does insist that nothing is *koinon* (unclean, profane) of itself (14:14). But even that hardly settles

the question. Paul recognizes that these issues are a test of the *koinonia* of believers with God and each other. He insists that Roman believers not violate each other’s efforts at faithfulness. They must find a way, precisely as those whom God has welcomed, who together share one Lord (14:1-6; 15:7)—to grant each other such space and freedom.

Diversity: the noisy place of new creation

Such mutual respect and freedom shows the strength of *koinonia*. Those granting each other such space remain firmly tethered to each other in the “chains of peace” (Ephesians 4:3; cf. Romans 14:17-19), not because of their resolve, but because of God’s. We might think that true *koinonia* might lessen differences that can bring conflict. Instead, it opens even more space for differences. Indeed, it is driven by a “desire for difference” as a gift from God to the community of faith.

Since the *koinonia* of the gospel invites and embraces strangers (Romans 12:13) and enemies (Matthew 5:43), this space must be expected to be the noisy and often conflictual place of new creation.

New challenges to unity will arise; new strains will put on the chains of peace precisely *because* the Spirit will sometimes disturb “fellowship.” True *koinonia* is always of the Spirit, the wind of God that blows where it wills.

Such an understanding informs our relations to the global body of Christ, where we are coming to value the differences that our histories and our diverse experiences of faithfulness and unfaithfulness have

Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (*koinonia*) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness.
—*The MWC vision as articulated and approved by the General Council in Bulawayo in 2003.*

Note: Yoder Neufeld’s full paper explores in greater depth the meaning of the terms associated with *koinonia* in the New Testament, laying the groundwork for the reflections excerpted here. Once finalized by the Faith and Life Commission, the full paper will be posted at www.mwc-cmm.org or available at MWC offices. For now, an edited version of the initial draft of the paper is available in English in the July 2012 issue of Mennonite Quarterly Review (www.goshen.edu/mqr).

brought about. This appreciation recognizes that we belong to each other by an act of God, and that *koinonia* is a mix of listening, appreciating, exhorting, critiquing, dialoguing—all in the interests of growing closer to each other within the *koinonia* of God.

A body made up of “all things in heaven and on earth” (Ephesians 1:10) is not designed to be one of uniformity, but of God-created diversity. *Koinonia* will present different challenges in different parts of our communion. In a modern and post-modern context *koinonia* challenges our individualism, our self-sufficiency, and our power- and control-oriented culture of communication and authority. In highly homogenous parts of our communion *koinonia* may well collide with the human tendency to feel threatened by difference. And yet, *koinonia* stands for oneness in our diversity, unity in our multiplicity.

Koinonia as word, concept, and experience is a pearl of great price. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit enable us to receive this gift—again and again.

Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld is Professor of Religious Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Canada, and a member of the Faith and Life Commission of MWC's General Council.

It takes imagination to see how the various Commissions of the MWC are all, each in their own way, profound expressions of *koinonia*. All together, they help us move ever deeper into communion with God and each other. The Mission Commission represents “the *koinonia* of the gospel.” The Deacon’s Commission might, in light of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, have been named the *Koinonia* Commission. The Peace Commission is a reminder that in light of what we have seen in the New Testament, *koinonia* is shalom in the making. And the Faith and Life Commission is engaged in nothing less than helping to forge a *koinonia* of conviction. —TYN

The leadership model of Jesus

By César García

I could share many good things about my country, Colombia—its coffee, its rich cuisine or its scientific and artistic contributions. But today I would like to focus on a feature which Colombians share with most Latin American cultures: a leadership style known in Spanish as *caudillismo*.

Caudillismo is an important element of political and religious leadership in Latin America. It is authoritarian, with power concentrated in one person, in contrast with leadership which is shared and values team work.

In Colombia many believe that religious leaders have almost magical qualities, fulfilling their duties in a way that no lay person could. The concentration and abuse of authority among many Protestants and evangelicals reflects this cultural feature. They do not abide by the norms and restraints of democracy. The wishes of the leaders are the laws of the land.

This is reinforced by the fact that Colombians support the leaders themselves rather than their ideas. Recent electoral history has proven that people vote according to the candidates’ charisma, their way of relating to the media and their physical appearance. Programmatic issues or political ideologies are not relevant when deciding which candidate to support.

Considering this cultural reality, one wonders what is in store for Mennonite World Conference with a Colombian serving as General Secretary. In response, I would like to follow John Howard Yoder, who reminds us that the church is called to reflect models of society that show God’s purpose for humanity. This includes leadership models that are alternative to the abusive patterns of

power in Latin America.

What is God’s wish for our society? And specifically, which is the leadership model that God is inviting us to reflect as his church? In Revelation 7 we find a good foundation. Verses 16 and 17 focus on the effects of leadership exercised from a divine perspective:

“They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Amid consumerism and the search for satisfaction, leadership exercised in God’s way provides fulfillment and contentment. Amid persecution and suffering, leadership exercised in God’s way provides relief and security.

Verse 17 tells us why. Here we see a leadership that guides and governs; there is someone on the throne, exercising power and authority. But the person on the throne is a Lamb who is also Shepherd; this kind of power leads us to the fountain of life and is characterized by *compassion*.

Oliver Davies defines compassion as “the recognition of ‘the other,’ involvement in the suffering of ‘the other,’ embracing the sufferer, willing to act on their behalf.” Much of this is missing in various leadership circles in our communities.

A call to vulnerability

The leadership of compassion requires two elements which we find in the

This article is a condensed and edited version of the opening plenary address to delegates of the MWC General Council sessions in May (see page 6 and following).

leadership model of Jesus: First, *vulnerability* and second, *hospitality*.

Vulnerability is Christ's answer to three temptations faced by leaders. The **first** one is the yearning for *recognition*: Does anyone love me? Do I really matter to anyone? Such questions often lead us to seek the recognition of others. Revelation 7 doesn't show Jesus as a leader yearning for recognition. He feels safe in his Father's love, which allows him to show himself just as he is: a wounded Lamb who doesn't need to hide his scars or pretend to be powerful.

The leadership model of Jesus is free of suspicion and resentment. Our Father's love nurtures our identity as his beloved children, accepting us just as we are. Knowing that we are accepted and loved frees us to fulfill our mission. As Henri Nouwen has written, "when we live in the knowledge of this, we can do nothing else but bring healing, reconciliation, new life and hope wherever we go."

Nouwen suggests that to carry this out we need to dwell in the Word, pray, listen to the voice of the Spirit and have a true bond with the Word incarnate: Jesus. Thus we will find the power to become vulnerable and overcome the temptation to seek recognition.

The **second** temptation that can be overcome through our vulnerability is the temptation to be *spectacular*— to gain popularity and receive praise, to appear to be perfect, to work alone and not share success. Yielding to this temptation plunges us into a world of loneliness, trying to keep false appearances that prevent us from receiving support in the midst of our daily struggles.

Jesus' leadership offers an alternative. He calls us to confess and forgive, placing us on the same level as others. We are not the healers, God is. Jesus becomes vulnerable and doesn't hide his wounds,

so why should we? This does not mean that we take our sins to the pulpit or talk about them all the time. Rather, it implies that we seek out wise people to whom we become accountable.

Most Christian leadership is in the hands of people who do not know how to develop close, wholesome relationships, and who have chosen power relationships. This leads us to the **third** temptation that Jesus overcomes, the temptation to be *powerful*. Previous verses have referred to a multitude awaiting the Lion of Judah. In the midst of great expectation, the Lion enters, and to everyone's surprise, it is a Lamb. Instead of fear or anxiety, the multitude feels tenderness and appreciation. The leadership model of Jesus is based not on fear, authoritarian power or arrogance, but on a willingness to die to oneself on behalf of the wellbeing of those we serve.

A call to hospitality

Our text points out another important characteristic of Jesus: hospitality, the ability to focus attention on the guest. This is difficult for us when we are engrossed in our own needs and concerns—but it is possible when we are driven by the compassion of Jesus.

Jesus makes room in his glory for people from all nations who come to worship him. His attention is not centered on himself but on others, which is the essence of pastoral ministry. It is this kindness and shepherding which heals the multitude, mistreated by pain

Photo by Merle Good



César García, MWC General Secretary, gives the opening plenary address from the pulpit of the historic chapel of the St. Chrischona Conference Centre—a worship and training hub for many free churches in Switzerland.

and suffering. Neither Jesus' wounds, nor his victory, nor his place on the throne lead him to worry about himself. He has come to bring comfort, to guide and shepherd others, to serve and not to be served—even in his glory.

Vulnerability and hospitality are the fundamental elements of *compassion*. "The deeper we are willing to enter into the painful condition we all experience, the easier it will be to become victorious leaders, guiding the people from the desert to the promised land," writes Nouwen.

Earlier, I referred to Latin American *caudillismo* because I believe it is being challenged by the Scripture. But my desire is that all cultures of leadership reflected in our global family may be challenged as they look to Jesus' model of leadership. May we all heed the call to follow the Lamb, drawing our inspiration from his model of compassion—and its hallmarks of vulnerability and hospitality.

César García is General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference.



Photo by Bastian Gegenheimer.

105 delegates represented MWC's 101 member and associate member churches and associations. The delegates, joined by 45 commission members and as many other participants and observers, came from 48 countries, most of them from the Global South.

Exploring roots, pursuing collaboration in mission **Delegates gather from 48 countries**

by Byron Rempel-Burkholder

Bettingen, Switzerland—Swiss Mennonite historian Hanspeter Jecker stood on the bank of the Limmat River in Zurich, Switzerland, near the site where Anabaptist martyr Felix Manz was drowned. He was speaking passionately to a group of international church leaders about the 16th century drowning.

Suddenly from the group came an outburst from Joly Birakara Ilowa from the Democratic Republic of Congo: “I’m very happy to be here. If I were not already baptized, I would want to be baptized right here and now.” In Congo, he had learned and taught about his Anabaptist “ancestors”—but now that he was on the same soil as they, it meant so much more to him.

Ilowa, vice president of the Communauté Mennonite au Congo, was on one of three busloads of delegates who took a day during this year’s gathering of Mennonite World

During a tour of Zurich, Hanspeter Jecker tells stories of the earliest Anabaptists. Here the group is seated at the site on the Limmat River, where Felix Manz was executed by drowning.

Conference’s General Council to tour landmarks of Anabaptist beginnings in the 16th century.

A grounding in historical and theological roots was a strong undercurrent for the triennial gathering, held May 20-26, at the St. Chrischona Conference Centre in Bettingen, near Basel, a Swiss city on the borders of both Germany and France.

The symbolism of the venue loomed large. Basel was an important crossroads for persecuted and migrating early Anabaptists, and for a century and a half, Mennonites and other theological heirs of the Anabaptists have come here for training in ministry.

St. Chrischona was also the site of the first and the fifth MWC assemblies in 1925 and 1952—in eras where the faces



Photo by Byron Rempel-Burkholder

were almost exclusively white. This year's General Council, by contrast, counted 105 delegates from 48 of the 54 countries of MWC membership. About 80% of these were from the Global South—along with 45 commission members and as many volunteers and guests.

Fittingly, "Revisiting our Vision," was the banner for three reflection papers presented by members of the Council's Faith and Life Commission and approved as resources for MWC member churches in exploring holistic ministry, the Anabaptist tradition, and the meaning of the biblical term *koinonia* (communion or fellowship).

Resourcing leadership and ministry

Far from nostalgic throw-backs to earlier patterns of church, the discussion papers and the decisions at this year's gathering were about new ways that global Anabaptists can be the church together in a rapidly changing world.

With the appointment last year of César García of Colombia has come energy to adjust staff structures and working styles to anticipate even more networking among churches, especially between the international Assemblies that occur every six years.

In his opening address to the delegates on Sunday evening, García lamented the prevalence of "caudillismo"—the authoritarian, above-the-law style of leadership that prevails in his country, often feeding Colombia's violent reputation.

"What kind of leadership does God want to see in society and in the church?" García asked. From the apocalyptic vision of the "lamb on the throne" in Revelation 7:9-17, García committed himself and called upon delegates to exercise leadership whose power is marked by vulnerability, love and hospitality. "Jesus invites the multitudes, creates space in his glory to receive them, focuses his attention on them, he suffers with them, and offers his wounds to heal them."

In the ensuing days, many of the points discussed in regional caucuses and passed in MWC's consensus style of decision-making, addressed structures to help its 101 member and associate member churches to work together at common issues and identity in an



Photo by Merle Good

After the General Council selected J. Nelson Kraybill (second from left) as MWC President-elect, the MWC officers—President Danisa Ndlovu (left) and Vice-president Janet Plenert (right), along with representatives from North American MWC churches such as Ervin Stutzman (second from right), offered prayers of blessing.

Nelson Kraybill chosen as President-elect

On May 25 General Council delegates selected J. Nelson Kraybill of Elkhart, Indiana, USA as President-elect.

He will begin his six-year term as MWC President in July 2015, at the next global Assembly to be held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. As President-elect, he will participate in the annual meetings of the Executive Committee and in meetings of the MWC Officers—President Danisa Ndlovu, Vice-president Janet Plenert and Treasurer Ernst Bergen.

Kraybill is currently one of three pastors at Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart. He was President of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary from 1996 to 2008 and Program Director of the London Mennonite Center in London, England from 1991 to 1996.

He participated in the process of creating a statement of Shared Convictions, which were adopted by the MWC General Council in March 2006.

Kraybill was one of two nominees for the MWC President-elect position. The other nominee was Markus Rediger of Muensingen, Switzerland, a member of the MWC Executive Committee.

When Kraybill was asked to let his name stand for the role of President-

elect, he felt as if his calling was complete. He called together a "clearness committee" of close friends in his congregation who helped him discern that he should indeed say yes if the call came.

After being selected in a close vote, Kraybill commented: "I am excited about learning from and with parts of the world where the church is growing," he said. "I want to explore the missional energy of Anabaptism. I've known for a long time that Anabaptism in its origins pointed back to the vitality of the early church as a Spirit-filled, slightly chaotic and subversive mission movement. There are such winds of the Spirit in the world today. I hope my role can be as an ambassador from one part of the world to another, a conduit of insights, and a bridge-builder."

After members of the Executive Committee and the North American delegation offered a prayer of support for Kraybill and thanks for two strong candidates, Rediger came to the stage to embrace Kraybill.

MWC release



Photo by Javier Soler.

Reaching a wider MWC audience, and more nimbly

Ron Rempel (right), Chief Communications Officer, presents a strategic communications plan. One of the key goals of the plan is to share more stories and resources more quickly and in a variety of venues. Rempel reported that with the distribution of 12,000 copies in three languages, only 1% of MWC members are receiving Courier-Correo-Courier.

While print communications will continue to be key for many, especially in the Global South, the rapidly changing world also requires greater use of electronic means such as social media and email dissemination. Currently, the MWC website is being restructured to be easier to use and to allow working groups, such as the General Council Commissions, to use the site for collaborative work. As delegates affirmed in caucus discussions, the direction of the communications will place greater emphasis on stories about churches and people from the global Anabaptist community of faith than about MWC structures and administration.

Left to right in the photo are President Danisa Ndlovu, General Secretary César García and Ron Rempel.

ongoing way.

García introduced a revised staffing structure appropriate to the shift of the head office from Strasbourg, France, to Bogotá, Colombia—a move to be completed in August. In order to develop administrative capacity, García said, there are plans to have a staff representative in each of the five continental regions. These will work with an Operations Team of “chief officers” that share the administrative load and multiply opportunities for MWC networking globally.

The Council’s four commissions appointed three years ago in Paraguay were given new support and clearer mandates. In addition to the teaching papers of the Faith and Life Commission, the delegates heard reporting and took action on a wide range of commission work.

Perhaps most dramatically, the Mission Commission took under its

oversight the newly formed Global Anabaptist Service Network—a group of indigenous service agencies from all of MWC’s five continental regions—whose representatives had met a week earlier. The existing network already relating to the commission is the Global Mission Fellowship.

The Faith and Life Commission agreed to serve as a reference group for a “Global Anabaptist Profile” research project, to be headed up by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism at Goshen College, in the United States. The institute is directed by John Roth, who is also the secretary for the MWC Faith and Life Commission.

The commission will also help facilitate and promote inter-church dialogue, such as recent conversations with the Seventh Day Adventists on common history; and dialogue with Lutherans and Catholics on baptism.

The Deacons Commission received

approval of a protocol that will guide its engagement with member churches and their agencies facing critical needs. The purpose of the protocol is to ensure prompt communication and effective cooperation in addressing those needs.

The Peace Commission has been doing a “peace audit” to ascertain member churches’ involvements and desire in promoting the peace position. Also, the General Council supported a protocol developed by the Peace Commission to guide its possible involvement in internal conflicts of member churches.

It’s all about communication

To do all this work requires a growing investment in communication. That topic came up at many points—from pleas on the floor to make sure all documents are available well in advance in all three of MWC’s official languages (English, Spanish, and French), to calls for more storytelling.

Ron Rempel, Chief Communications Officer, presented a strategic communication proposal that included the updating of electronic communication for faster and nimbler dissemination that majors on stories (see sidebar).

Assembly 16 and beyond in view

Face-to-face gatherings will continue to be a mainstay of MWC life. General Council also heard and endorsed plans for Assembly 16 in 2015. Dick Thomas, chair of the Assembly 16 National Advisory Council, and Assembly 16 National Coordinator Howard Good presented slides and plans for the assembly slated for July 21-26, 2015 at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The delegates pledged support for the plan, but urged the five US host churches to do all they can to facilitate the obtaining of visas, especially for youth delegates. Liesa Unger, MWC Chief International Events Officer, confirmed that a special committee will be devoted to help with visas, but also



Small group interaction during a plenary of the General Council meetings. Philippino delegate Edgardo Docuyan (left) in discussion with Albert Ndlovu (far right) of Zimbabwe and Thobekile Ncube, also of Zimbabwe.

emphasized that each national church must work diligently and in advance to provide authorizations for their members to attend.

Subject to a feasibility study, the Council also accepted an invitation from the three Mennonite synods of Indonesia to host the 17th Assembly in 2021. Giving leadership in the years leading up to that moment will be Nelson Kraybill of the US, whom the delegates voted to be President-elect (see sidebar).

Finances in a global economy

Chief Operations Officer, Len Rempel, reported that MWC finances are in relatively strong shape, given the challenges of the global economy and the extra expenses of MWC's leadership transition in the last triennium.

And yet, especially as expenses rise sharply in the two years before Assembly 16, delegates from almost all regions also acknowledged that the "fair share" formula for supporting MWC is a struggle (see sidebar). The formula, based on World Bank figures of average incomes, gives each member church a dollar amount that it is expected to contribute.

Even delegates from affluent countries expressed the challenge. The European economy has been in flux, and North American churches vary in their level of commitment to MWC as they deal with declining support for their own programs.

According to MWC Treasurer, Ernst Bergen of Paraguay, "Mennonites have a great gift in making money; there are many in our family who are very rich. The news that is not so good is that the money that is in their account is not

making its way into our account. I would like you to help us in collaborating and talking to people who could be donating money for the work of the Lord."

Len Rempel added: "If MWC is ours, let's make it happen. If we can't meet the challenge, let's negotiate."

In other significant actions, the General Council:

- Ratified the Executive Council decision to accept into MWC membership the Mennonite Church of Chile, and into associate membership the International Brethren in Christ Association.
- Celebrated the progress of the Global History Project, which has published four of five books on the continental regions, with the fifth to be completed this year. Among the titles, nine translations have already been completed, with more in process.
- Recognized Pakisa Tshimika of DR Congo, for his longstanding service with MWC in several responsibilities—recently for his vision for the Global Anabaptist Service Network and his involvement in forming it.
- Applauded the work of the Young Anabaptists (YABs) whose six-member committee had met the previous week to carry forward efforts at international networking and to plan the next Global Youth Summit, to be held in conjunction with Assembly 16 in 2015.
- Endorsed terms of reference for the merger of the Asia caucus with the Asia Mennonite Conference, which has met for more than 20 years and has shared overlapping mandates

What is the "fair share"?

At the 2012 MWC General Council meeting, delegates reviewed and voted on the financial projections for the three years leading up to Assembly 16. A significant part of this work was to approve "fair share" contributions from all the member and associate member churches for that period.

The fair share seeks to enable financial responsibility and ownership to be spread among all MWC members and associate members, despite the wide variations of income and size of churches. The fair share formula, takes into account both the number of baptized members of each member and associate member church, and the gross national income of

their country. Delegates recognized this is not a perfect system (for example, average income in MWC member churches may be more or less than the average incomes in their countries). Even so, they unanimously supported the principle as well as the budget projections. They also asked MWC staff to refine the formula during the next three years.

In a time when many countries are experiencing economic difficulties, the churches are not immune. However, delegates showed a sense of optimism and excitement as they were challenged to find ways to help realize the goals of MWC in the next three years—particularly in supporting the emerging mandates of the four commissions and establish regional representatives to further the work of MWC.

with the caucus.

- Conferred on Larry Miller the title of MWC General Secretary Emeritus in recognition of his 22 years of service before César García assumed the role in January 2012. Miller, who is now General Secretary for the Global Christian Forum, was feted in a special dinner and program Wednesday evening, along with his wife, Eleanor.

Byron Rempel-Burkholder is editor of Courier.-Correo-Courier.



Photo by James Krabill

Thobekile Ncube of Zimbabwe (right) and Larry Miller, General Secretary Emeritus of Mennonite World Conference, hold a quilt that was given to Miller at the General Council meeting. Many delegates brought a piece of fabric, and in three days the pieces were assembled by a team of volunteers.

‘Blueprint’ for Young Anabaptists network taking shape

The emerging Young Anabaptists (YABs) network has been taking concrete form as the YABs committee implements a “blueprint” accepted in 2010 by the MWC Executive Committee. Through electronic communication, and annual face to face meetings, the YABs committee has laid groundwork for “an empowered young body” that is involved in decision-making in the church, both locally and globally, and that nurtures global, regional and local fellowship among youth.

When the YABS committee met May 14-17, just prior to the General Council meetings, it worked on a list of specific action plans for the next three years.

Key on their agenda is the Global Youth Summit, to be held July 17-19, 2015 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, in connection with the 16th MWC Global Assembly. In addition to planning the program for the event, YABs committee will be involved in fundraising for the Summit.

Other initiatives include connecting youth groups from different parts of the world and providing resource materials for a YABs Day—an opportunity to highlight “the joy and responsibility of being a young Anabaptist.”

High on the committee’s list of priorities is to establish more frequent

and enduring connections via the Internet and online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. A Facebook fan page called “YABs—Young AnaBaptists” (<http://www.facebook.com/younganabaptist>) was started in the past year.

In Switzerland, the YABs committee put into practice their “connecting youth groups” project by conducting a variety of workshops for youth at the Mennonite European Regional Conference (see page 19). At their planning meeting, the committee gave counsel to MWC Chief Communications Officer Ron Rempel on how to structure the MWC website to help foster relationship building among youth.

Following their own meeting, they appealed to the MWC General Council to support them in making it possible for young people to attend the 2015 Assembly, particularly in helping obtain visas for youth. They also asked delegates to help identify and support youth in their countries who would participate in the Global Youth Summit.

In response, MWC vice-president Janet Plenert commented: “Our job in leadership is to do everything we can to back these young adults so that they can show up [at the next global Assembly].”



The YABs committee (from left): Sumana Basumata (India), Rodrigo Pedroza García (Mexico), Marc Pasqués (Spain), Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle (Ethiopia), Kristina Toews (Canada). Toews is chair of the committee. Photo by Merle Good.

Four Commissions, single heartbeat

Introducing the leaders and the work they do

By Phyllis Pellman Good

Like four chambers of a heart, the three-year-old commissions of the MWC General Council work together to pump life into the work of MWC. With mandates corresponding to the four purposes of MWC, the Commissions have been working to define their activities and network together. Each Commission is composed of members representing the five continental regions of MWC.

Based on their work together in the week before the General Council meetings in May, General Council has recently taken steps to strengthen their work. Here are brief profiles of the chair and secretary of each Commission, with their statements of vision:

Photos by Merle Good

Peace Commission

General Council action: Approved a protocol to guide the Commission in possible involvement in the resolution of internal conflict in member churches.

Key activities: Developing guidelines, teaching resources and networks to assist local congregations who are experiencing conflict; representing Anabaptists in working with other Christians in promoting peace and nonviolence.

Members: Calixte Thioro Bananzaro, Burkina Faso; Antonio González Fernández, Spain; John Paul Lederach, USA; Jenny Neme, Colombia; Markus Rediger, Switzerland; Saucedo Rodriguez, Bolivia; David Rouse, Australia; Lakshmi N. Subandi, Indonesia; Robert J. Suderman, Secretary, Canada; Paulus Widjaja, Chair, Indonesia;



Paulus Widjaja, Chair

- Member, and chairperson of, Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI)
- Professor of ethics and peace studies at Duta Wacana Christian University; adjunct professor at Gadjah Mada University, a public institution, teaching “peace and violence in religions.”
- Married to Janti; parents of a daughter and a son



Robert J. Suderman (Jack), Secretary

- Member of Mennonite Church Canada
- “Missional ambassador” for Mennonite Church Canada, teaching in churches internationally; member of “Being a Faithful Church” task force, which deals with tough issues facing Mennonite Church Canada
- Married to Irene; parents of three sons; grandparents of four

“Our biggest challenge is that the MWC member churches all want to be ‘peace churches.’ Yet they admit they don’t always succeed. They’re crying for help. We [in the Peace Commission] have established a protocol for MWC when a member church becomes involved in a conflict. We are also developing guidelines for local congregations to use when they’re faced with a conflict. We are using our networks to build capacity in local congregations.”

“It’s apparent that we’re living in a broken world. My compelling vision has always been that instead of lodging peacemaking in particular institutions, each congregation—all 14,000 of them—would be living the gospel right where it is. Everyone should be an agent of peace and reconciliation. We want the Peace Commission to empower the church to be what it’s meant to be. Imagine a beautiful wall hanging for each congregation, reminding all members of our commitment to living peace.”

Deacons Commission

General Council action: Approved a protocol that guides the commission in responding to “critical needs” from member and associate member churches.

Key activities: Facilitating networks of caring across international borders and, on occasion, visiting churches experiencing crisis or celebrating special landmark events.

Members: Dave Dyck, Canada; Barbara Hege-Galle, Germany; Shemlal Hembrom, Nepal; Warren Hoffman, USA; Yukari Kaga, Japan; Delbert Kuhosakubi, Dem. Rep. of Congo; Samuel Martínez Leal, El Salvador; Cynthia Peacock, Chair, India; Enock Shamapani, Zambia; Gladys Siemens, Brazil; Henk Stenvers, Secretary, Netherlands.



Cynthia Peacock, Chair

- Member of Bharatiya Jukta Christa Prachar Mandali (India Missionary Church)
- Elder/deacon and treasurer in home congregation; member of BJCPM executive committee as president of the conference’s women’s groups
- Parent of a son and a daughter; grandparent of three.

“I learned through my career with Mennonite Central Committee that our churches do not need to live in poverty. As I look around the world, I see that our churches are much better off than many of our neighbors, but we haven’t learned to share. Sharing spiritually is also one of our frontiers as a global fellowship. Another is to sponsor and encourage a teaching ministry to overcome the absolute lack of knowledge in many congregations about who we are as Anabaptists.”



Henk Stenvers, Secretary

- Member of Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit (ADS), the Netherlands
- General Secretary of ADS
- Married to Jeannette Matthÿssen; parents of two sons and a daughter.

“The Deacon’s Commission is the warm hand of Mennonite World

Conference [as Tim Lind has said]. Being with sisters and brothers who are under duress is one of the most important ways of walking together. ...“Even if we can’t do or say something that will fix the situation, it is so necessary that we stand together, pray for, and listen to each other, and in that way be a family... It is so important that our churches know where to turn. We are here, representing the global fellowship.”

Faith and Life Commission

General Council action: Approved the use of Commission-initiated papers as teaching resources in member churches and their congregations: “A Holistic Understanding of Fellowship, Worship, Service, and Witness from an Anabaptist Perspective” by Alfred Neufeld Friesen; “Revisiting Our Vision: The Anabaptist Vision,” by Hanspeter Jecker; and “*Koinonia*—The Gift We Hold Together” by Tom Yoder Neufeld.

Key activities: Providing leadership and links for the promotion of Anabaptist identity and values, including the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism.

Members: Rainer Burkart, Germany; Alfred Neufeld Friesen, Chair, Paraguay; Hanspeter Jecker, Switzerland; Alix Lozano Forero, Colombia, Albert Ndlovu, Zimbabwe; Thomas Yoder Neufeld, Canada; Rebecca Osiro, Vice Chair, Kenya; Valerie Rempel, USA; John D. Roth, USA, Secretary; Janti Widjaja, Indonesia.



Alfred Neufeld Friesen, Chair

- Member of Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays
- President of Protestant University, supervising social work, languages, and educational departments. Media Supervisor (TV and Radio) for Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays
- Married to Wilma; parents to two adult sons and two adult daughters.

“During the recent meetings of MWC’s General Council, several delegates said, “We need ongoing theological work on the global level.” On the Faith and Life Commission we are rethinking our heritage and working at renewing it, and

contextualizing it for our various settings and situations. We're looking at our heritage from the Bible and from the whole world. But how do we reach our churches with all of this? That's the assignment we really have to figure out."

John Roth, Secretary



- Member of Mennonite Church USA
- Professor of history at Goshen College; director of Mennonite Historical Library
- Married to Ruth; parents of four daughters.

"Theology is the task of the whole church. But it is valuable to have groups within the church, such as the Faith and Life

Commission, step back and reflect on what are the underlying assumptions, what are the convictions that give our church life and faith. I'm grateful that MWC recognizes the importance of this. It is a real privilege to be able to talk about ecclesiology and to have complex conversations about these parts of life. It is such an opportunity to have our diverse backgrounds sometimes open up into a kind of unity."

Mission Commission

General Council action: Approved the placement of the new Global Anabaptist Service Network under the umbrella of the Mission Commission, along with the Global Mission Fellowship.

Key activities: Facilitating gatherings of the GMF and the GASN, helping to build networks of support for holistic witness and service among MWC member churches.

Members: Ron Byler, Global Anabaptist Service Network, USA; Edgardo Docuyanan, Philippines; John S. Fumana, Global Anabaptist Service Network, DR Congo; Ofelia García Hernández, Mexico; Adolphe Komuesa Kalunga, DR Congo; James R. Krabill, USA; Agus Mayanto, Global Mission Fellowship, Indonesia; Don McNiven, USA; Rosa Erlinda Bonilla de Robelo, Global Anabaptist Service Network, Honduras; Richard Showalter, Chair, USA; Max Wiedmer, France; Hermann Woelk, Uruguay; Rafael Zaracho, Secretary, Paraguay.



Richard Showalter, Chair

- Member of Mennonite Church USA
- Coach for International Missions Association (IMA, which includes about 20 missions partners; about 80-85% of their sponsoring churches are members of MWC)
- Married to Jewel; parents of two sons and a daughter; grandparents of ten.

"The Mission Commission now includes both the Global Missions Fellowship (GMF) and the Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN). We are experiencing a groundswell of enthusiasm for connecting in more and more ways for witness and service globally. Our work happens with much more integrity and vitality when the whole world is involved and it's not just a Western enterprise. It is happening now. There is so much energy here!"



Rafael Zaracho, Secretary

- Member of Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas
- Currently a doctoral student in Anabaptist Hermeneutics; will rejoin the faculty of the Mennonite Brethren seminary in Paraguay when degree is completed
- Married to Ruth; parents of a daughter and expecting the birth of a son in July.

"Living in [the tension between unity and diversity] allows for humility and interdependency. We come in openness to work together. We bring our partial answers, our small pieces. We may not make much sense when we stand alone, but when we come together, we can do something helpful and useful. We somehow model what can be done through the love of God and the love of each other."

Twins with a purpose

Mission Commission gathers Global Mission Fellowship and new Global Anabaptist Service Network

By Jewel Showalter

Basel, Switzerland— It's hard to imagine a more fitting place for the vibrant assembly of 84 Anabaptist mission leaders from 34 nations than Switzerland, the birthplace of the Anabaptist movement, May 14-17, 2012.

For many Anabaptists with names like Okanya or Minj, it was their first time to breathe Swiss air and ponder the passion that drove thousands of sixteenth century Anabaptists from their picturesque farms on these green hills—into exile or death.

Here on a Swiss mountain that borders France and Germany, the fledgling Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN) held its first meeting with 38 service organizations from 21 countries, joining the Global Mission Fellowship's (GMF) 44 church and mission leaders from 29 countries for a four-day conjoint congress.

Mennonite World Conference General Secretary César García opened the first joint session with a devotional on the ministry of Jesus.

"The mission of God requires a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit," García said explaining that Jesus cared that widows receive justice, that outsiders are reconciled to God, and ethnocentric Israelites change their attitudes toward their enemies.

When Jesus announced in Luke 4 that "Jubilee" had arrived he was inaugurating his kingdom—a reality God wants people to experience now. "In our history as agencies we fail if we don't emphasize the peace, justice, and unity Jesus calls us to," García said.

In a second plenary, Paraguayan theologian Alfred Neufeld Friesen fleshed out the meaning of *missio dei* (the mission of God). "Early Anabaptists almost never used the word mission," Neufeld said. "But they understood themselves to be a missionary people.



Photo by John Warkentin

The Global Mission Fellowship sessions included an afternoon of prayer and fasting led by Randy Friesen of Mennonite Brethren Mission. Like many of their Anabaptist forebears, the group gathered in the woods near the St. Chrischona Centre to pray for the witness of the global church.

Missio Dei is not a dimension of the Anabaptist vision, but the very essence of Anabaptism."

Neufeld, chair of the Faith and Life Commission of MWC's General Council, also challenged participants not to be ashamed of the "crazy, charismatic dimension" of the Holy Spirit's work.

Throughout the week walls and stereotypes came tumbling down— not only between the two networks but between ethnic groups.

Following an address on "holistic mission" by Cynthia Peacock, Indian chair of the Deacons Commission, a Tanzanian mission leader, John Wambura, said, "That was amazing! It's the first time I ever heard an Indian Christian speak. Now I know there are Christians, Mennonites in India. In Tanzania we don't mix with the Indian

community— and we don't know any Christians among them."

The GASN reflected on biblical texts such as Luke 4 and Matthew 25 that guide their work on behalf of "the widow, the orphan, and the alien." Participants introduced their organizations and agencies to one another and began the energizing work of cross-fertilization.

Leaders such as Paulus Hartono of Mennonite Diakonia Service in Indonesia, Adriana Rodriguez of Proyecto Paz y Justicia in Honduras and Mathewos Belissa of the Relief and Development Agency of the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia shared stories from their experiences.

"We need to treat each part of the body with the love of Christ," Belissa said. "Are we only concerned by HIV?"

No, we're also concerned about hunger prevention. Yet each body part has its own function. If the ear warns that the car is coming, but the leg refuses to run—the whole is destroyed."

One afternoon the GMF spent time in prayer and fasting led by Randy Friesen, president of Mennonite Brethren Mission. Reading from Revelation 7, Friesen encouraged the group to begin "with the end in mind"—the day when all peoples will be gathered around Christ's throne.

Continental representatives asked for prayer in the face of violence in Latin America, the rise of radical Islam in East and West Africa, rampant secularism in Europe, natural disasters in Asia, and spiritual lukewarmness in North America.

Identifying with their spiritual ancestors, the GMF prayer group trekked into the woods—sharing stories and prayers for oppressed and persecuted Christians around the world.

A rich variety of workshops covered topics of interest to both groups—Principles in International Partnerships, Trauma Healing, Tools Churches need for Witness and Service, Climate Change, and Anabaptist Witness in the Muslim World, to name a few.

In a closing joint plenary Pakisa Tshimika, who chaired the task force that led to the creation of the GASN, said, "Really, it's all about relationship. Mission is relationship. Witness is relationship. Service is relationship."

"We belong together," Tshimika said. "Do we believe this? If we do, we won't create obstacles. It's about Christ. It's not about money. We reject God when we reject each other."

The congress closed with a commissioning service for the newly structured Mission Commission that now includes members from both networks, and the chairs of GMF (Agus Mayanto) and GASN (Ron Byler) who work closely with Richard Showalter and Rafael Zaracho, chair and secretary of the Commission.

Jewel Showalter recently retired from her work in communications with Eastern Mennonite Missions. This year she and her husband Richard will be teaching and consulting in Asia.



Photo by James Krabill

Candles line the steps at the chapel of the Chrischona Centre, site of the first joint meeting of the new Global Anabaptist Service Network and the Global Mission Fellowship.

Twining of networks culminates 12 years of imagination and work

The first joint meeting of the Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN), and the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF), May 14-17, preceded one of the key outcomes of the Mennonite World Conference General Council meeting: the decision to include both networks within the mandate of the council's Mission Commission. The formation and eventual coming together was the product of 12 years of developments:

2000—MWC convenes the Global Anabaptist Mission Consultation in Guatemala City

2003—the Global Mission Fellowship is born, bringing together mission leaders from many MWC-related churches. But many also recognize that service agencies also need a space to collaborate.

2006—General Council meetings focus on the theme of "Service as a Mandate for the Global Anabaptist Family" and name a task force to organize a service network.

2006—At its second meeting, in Kazakhstan, the GMF vote to formally connect with MWC under the umbrella of a new "Mission Commission."

2009—Four new commissions are formed at Assembly 15 in Paraguay: Faith and Life, Deacons, Peace, and Mission

2010—The service network task force convenes a forum

entitled "Diakonia and Service" in Addis Ababa, and a new task force emerges to create a new network of service agencies from around the world, including both large organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee in North America, and Global South organizations such as Indonesia's Mennonite Diakonia Services.

2012—The task force brings a recommendation, processed by the MWC Executive Committee and the four commissions, that the new Global Anabaptist Service Network be lodged under the umbrella of the Mission commission

At the May joint meeting of the two networks, discussion and study revolved around the mission of God as speaking to the whole person, not driving a wedge between spiritual and social ministry.

"The two networks are 'twins,'" quipped Richard Showalter, chair of the Mission Commission as he and Tshimika discussed the coming together of the two groups.

"That's right," affirmed Tshimika. "We don't have an adolescent and a newborn here. No one is coming in through the window. We're both coming in through the door."

—*Jewel Showalter*

Cradling Anabaptism in a secular society

Getting to know today's European Mennonites

By Alle G. Hoekema

In September 2011 a Koinonia delegation of the Mennonite World Conference visited the Dutch Mennonites. “We don’t have a success story to tell you,” we had to confess to them.

We told them that Christianity in Europe— especially in the Northwestern part—is in crisis. All denominations suffer from it, although Pentecostals, some evangelicals and most migrant churches do a bit better than others. For most others, their identity and their falling numbers are creating new challenges.

Europe, however, is the cradle of Anabaptism. The Anabaptist movement came into being in different locations in the early 16th century. That era was ripe for a definitive change of worldviews as well as political and social-economic patterns. Reformers like Luther and Zwingli stood up, and their ideas were critically evaluated by those who were to become founders of Anabaptism.

The movement grew, but survived challenges of persecution and migration. Especially in the 20th century, the groups experienced various renewals or rediscovered their roots—yet in recent decades the pressures of decline have also been apparent.

Mennonites in Europe today can be divided into four groups: *Swiss, South German and French Mennonites* are mainly characterized by a plain biblical faith, influenced by Pietism and lately by evangelicalism. Many of their ancestors suffered religious opposition and had to flee to Netherlands and America in 1711.

Some of them still live in rural areas, but most of them are well integrated in their societies. They have struggled to become less hidden and “quiet in the land.”

North German and Dutch Mennonites, by contrast, became socially accepted in the seventeenth century and have played a role in urban life ever since. They have included in their ranks scholars, artists and even politicians. Many are involved in poverty reduction and human rights. But their communities, too, are wondering: what is our proper identity? The chairperson of the Dutch Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit (ADS), Otto Bleker, often says, “We need a coming-out”.

A third group are those, whose ancestors moved in the eighteenth century from Prussia to Russia and the Ukraine. After the political situation there made it impossible to live according to their deepest convictions, most migrated or fled in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to North America and Latin America. After World War II, others emigrated to Western Europe, and especially Germany.

The latter are known as “Umsiedler.” (In Germany they now form, by far, the largest group of Anabaptists. However, with their recent history of pain and isolation and differences of opinion, it is not yet easy for them to be united among themselves or to join the older groups of Mennonites in



Photo by Derk Stenvers

Children at last year’s 200th anniversary of the Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit, the Dutch Mennonite church.



Photo by Liesa Unger

Members of the Mennonite Church in Regensburg, Germany, assemble school kits for Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Front to back: Elisabeth Horsch, Elisabeth Krehbiel, Walter Horsch, Ernst Horsch and Uwe Ulbrich.

Germany; there are over ten associations of German-Russian Anabaptists. There are a few signs of overture towards the other European Mennonites, however.

Finally, there is a fourth type of Anabaptists: *the new communities that came into being as fruits of North-American Mennonite mission agencies after World War II*, in Italy, Spain, France, England, Northern Ireland and other areas. They have a strong Anabaptist identity, both as to the peace witness and social activities in their local contexts. Some, however, are isolated from their sister churches.

In France, these new communities became members of the association of French Mennonites; the multicultural communities in the Paris region enriched the older congregations. The communities in Spain felt strong enough to host the Mennonite European Regional Conference (MERK) in 2006. And the London Mennonite Centre has developed an impressive Anabaptist network, where many people from other denominations share their vision with the Anabaptists.

Search for community and renewed witness

All in all, there certainly is hope for the European Anabaptists—provided they dare to cooperate with each other. Contacts between all groups are intensifying, though the differences in history, language, and tradition sometimes form serious obstacles. Apart from MERK; further exchanges take place at the seminaries at Bienenberg (Switzerland), Amsterdam (Netherlands) and Bonn (Germany); these draw on teachers from other countries as well, such as France.

The publication of the Global Anabaptist History volume *Testing Faith and Tradition* (2006) has been

Within the increasingly complex context of this continent, Anabaptists will need to be more and more interdependent. Dutch and North-German Mennonites can learn from the Swiss and French Mennonites what genuine Anabaptist piety is. The large group of Umsiedler can be taught by the young communities in Spain, England and elsewhere how tradition can be combined with spiritual and liturgical renewal. In turn, the Umsiedler can help the other groups to respect a painful history. And German and Dutch Mennonites can continue to contribute a critical yet open attitude towards the surrounding society.

Alle G. Hoekema



An ordination at the chapel of Jeanguisboden, Switzerland. Left to right: Dorli Bühler, Michel Ummel, Paul Gerber, Ute Schneider Boegli, Nelly Gerber, Ulrich Scheidegger.

another example of a joint effort; French and Dutch translations are being released this year.

Finally, groups of Mennonites from one country often visit their brothers and sisters in other European countries: Dutch Doopsgezinden go to Gdansk in Poland, for example, while German-Russian ‘Umsiedler’ groups visit Witmarsum in the Netherlands, where Menno Simons worked.

Beyond their ties with each other, European Mennonites have unique gifts to offer their societies. “We present ourselves as a faith community more than as an institutional church,” says Henk Stenvers, General Secretary of the Dutch churches. “Our

| COUNTRY | GROUPS | CONGREGATIONS | MEMBERS |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Austria | 1 | 5 | 368 |
| Belgium | 1 | 2 | 35 |
| France | 1 | 33 | 2,100 |
| Germany | 10 (3 MWC members or associates o) | 219 (75) | 46.207 (7.114) |
| Ireland | 1 | 1 | 25 |
| Italy | 1 | 5 | 250 |
| Lithuania | 1 | 6 | 200 |
| Moldova | | 1 | 10 |
| Netherlands | 1 | 114 | 8,000 |
| Portugal | 1 | 5 | 150 |
| Romania | 2 | 2 | 63 |
| Spain | 1 | 9 | 379 |
| Switzerland | 1 | 14 | 2.500 |
| U.K. | 3 | 8 | 277 |
| Ukraine | 2 | 11 | 409 |
| Russia | | | Approx. 3000 |

Chart provided by Henk Stenvers, with July 2012 MWC statistics.

society is a post-Christian society; we think that Anabaptist faith could be an answer to post-Christendom.” Within that witness, Anabaptists are appreciated for their gifts in peace witness and social ministry.

The impulse toward the Anabaptist value of community is a concern that Barbara Hege-Galle hopes can be transferred to young people. “If young people become Christians in South Germany, their formation is often limited to their own personal life,” says the member of the MWC Deacons Commission and former board member of the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden). “The challenge is to transfer Anabaptist ideas about community. How can we integrate them into the life of the church?”

The search for renewal is often prominent theme in the periodic meetings of the chairpersons of the various Anabaptist groups in Europe. Says Emmanuel Neufeld, a leader among the Swiss Mennonite Conference, “Many churches are asking what God wants us to do in our neighbourhoods and cities.”

Neufeld was inspired by the storytelling at the recent MERK conference (see page 19). “There are open doors to cooperate with other churches, business people or even political leaders—to reach hands across borders and to not only talk, but to do things—in the name of Christ.”

Alle G. Hoekema is associate professor of missiology at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam and has worked as a teacher with the Mennonite churches in the Netherlands and in Indonesia. He was one of the editors of the Global Anabaptist History volume Testing Faith and Tradition.



Photo by Claude Nardin.

French Mennonites at an Easter gathering in the Alsace region.



Photo: courtesy of MERK

Menno Canto, a choir from the Jura region of Switzerland, present music under the direction of Aurèle Gerber; at the MERK gathering in May. Seated on stage facing the “campfire” are from left, Silke Stanzl, Fernando Enns, Joji Pantoja and Danisa Ndlovu.

One of the challenges in Europe is, that people fill the words “Anabaptist vision” with such different meanings. For some it means “four-part-singing.”

Others think of history (not present or future!) or boring traditions. And still some others think, it’s all about ethics, and they miss evangelism.

I believe that the Anabaptist vision is what some would call “Re-Jesus”, which

means not only going back to the 16th century, but going back to Jesus. It means being Christ-centered church, where spirituality and ethics go hand in hand.

Like Helmut Thielicke used to say: “The only way to live the Sermon on the Mount is by the hand of the one who preached it!” I think the challenge is to really get a new passion in the

relationship with Jesus, who first loved us. And from this relationship to take steps in the new land as sent people, seeking the best for the city (Jeremiah 29) and seeking the kingdom of God. *Emmanuel Neufeld, pastor of the Schänzli Mennonite Church in Basel, Switzerland. Neufeld, was one of the devotional leaders at the General Council meeting (see p 6-10).*

“Hands Reaching Across Borders”

Ninth Mennonite European Regional Conference

Sumiswald, Switzerland—Every six years, Mennonites in Europe gather for their regional assembly known as the Mennonite European Regional Conference (MERK). This year’s meeting, held from May 17 to 20, preceded the meetings of the Mennonite World Conference General Council at the St. Chrischona Centre near Basel.

MERK drew a total of 855 people to a recreational complex in Sumiswald, Switzerland, in the heart of the Emmental region where Anabaptists have had a long and durable history. Most participants were from the Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland, and Spain, but the group included delegates from smaller European conferences and visitors from the MWC General Council and Commissions, some 36 countries were represented.

“Borders— they are everywhere around us and in us,” observed Louise Nussbaumer, president of the French association of the MWC and former MWC Executive Committee member. “It is argued that they protect us; in fact, they isolate us and leave us alone and poor. Social, political, ethnic or cultural boundaries block relationships.” The



Photo: courtesy of MERK

Samuel Rich (left) and Daniel Saegesser, of the Schaenzli Mennonite Church near Basel, dramatize how reaching hands across borders might be lived out in a banking job. Each day of the MERK conference, they presented a skit as the introduction to the theme of the day.

gathering included plenary addresses by European leaders Lukas Amstutz and Ruth Raab-Zerger of Germany, and Philippe Gonzalez of France.

The participants were often reminded that to reach out is an act. Many personal stories from Europe and beyond punctuated the plenary meetings. Some were spectacular, but all bore witness to the faithfulness of God when people were ready to reach out their hands. The morning Bible studies by Anne-Cathy

Graber of France and Jeanet van Woerden of Germany explored the subthemes “Because God Provides an opening “(on the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4) and “Because God gives a chance to each one” (the woman caught in adultery, John 8) respectively.

Afternoon workshops related to the theme were well attended. Activities were also offered for children, youth and young adults. More than 250 volunteers helped at every level and contributed to the conference’s organization.

Esther Braun of Langnau, who provided crucial administrative support in the months leading up to the conference summed up the theme well: “More and more I am aware, personally, that in order to reach hands across borders, one has to let go. One has to be detached from one’s expectations, prejudices, and fears. One has to avoid

Joji and Dann Pantoja, Mennonite Church Canada workers, share stories of their peacemaking activities in violence-prone area of the Philippines, while Hansuli Gerber of Switzerland interprets.



Photo: courtesy of MERK

Photo: courtesy of MERK



Simea Gyger (left) and Aline Liechti, both from the Sonnenberg church in the Swiss Jura region. The MERK conference included workshops and events for youth and young adults.

jumping to interpretation or being rigid in one's beliefs that one's own way has to be right. When—with God's help—we are free in this way, other barriers (religious, cultural or linguistic) will not seem so impenetrable and scary."

During the gathering one could experience firsthand the opportunity to reach out to the other—to the one who was there for the first time, the one whose language one did not understand and whose story one had to discover. And one could also reach out to receive a word of encouragement or exhortation, a story of forgiveness or of new beginnings.

In order for hands to be truly extended, the Mennonite Mission Services of the Swiss Mennonite church sponsored an aid project for the marginalized Roma people of Serbia and Albania. It was an opportunity to learn to cross borders of prejudice with regard to the Romas, and to help break the cycle of poverty. Each participant at MERK had been asked to

bring knitted socks, underwear, school kits, and emergency health supplies. And they responded; they brought 190 school kits, filled 54 pails with emergency health supplies and knit more than 500 pairs of socks. A truck was hired to deliver the items to Christian organizations which will take care of the distribution.

For Mari Friesen, each pail was like a seed that can bring forth fruit. Mathias Hofer remembers how one elderly woman came, bright-eyed, with 20 pairs of socks that she had knit. "Finally," she said, "there is something I can do with my hands, and I do it with all my heart."

As Louise Nussbaumer said, "Hands reaching across borders [is also] to recognize invisible, never-named borders in our lives, and find the courage to cross them."

—from reports by Elisabeth Baecher and others, compiled by Sylvie Gudin Koehn

Warmth, honesty mark Mennonite-Adventist dialogue

Liestal, Switzerland— Representatives of Mennonite World Conference and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists met in dialogue May 28-31 at the Bienenberg Study and Conference Center near Liestal.

This was the second round of dialogue based on the theme, "Living the Christian Life in Today's World." The first series of conversation took place June 28 to July 1, 2011 at the Adventist church world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland., USA.

In the latest dialogue, major papers were presented from each side on eschatology, non-conformity, and hermeneutics. In addition, shorter discussions took up questions raised by each communion prior to the meeting at Bienenberg. Mennonites responded to issues of pacifism; Sabbath; salvation and obedience; personal lifestyle; ordinances; hermeneutics; and eschatology. Adventists addressed questions of military service; Sabbath; contextualization; justice and discipleship; the role of women; church discipline; and eschatology.

At the conclusion of the dialogue, the representatives drafted a statement summarizing the values of the discussion and recommending the dissemination of the materials generated in the conversation. This paper will be referred to the respective authorities of each communion

Participants from Mennonite World Conference were: Robert Suderman (Canada), Valerie Rempel (United States),

Henk Stenvers (The Netherlands), Patricia Uruena (Colombia), Danisa Ndlovu (Zimbabwe), and Tom Yoder Neufeld (Canada). From the Seventh-day Adventist Church participants were: William Johnsson (Australia), John Graz (France), Bert Beach (United States), Denis Fortin (Canada), Peter Landless (South Africa), and Teresa Reeve (Canada).

—from joint release of MWC and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Growth of women's theological networks celebrated

"Like an infectious laugh that spreads throughout a room full of people, one after another, theological networks have been formed by Anabaptist women in Africa, South America, Asia and Europe," reports Ruth Guengerich, codirector of Mennonite Women USA (MW USA).

Guengerich, who attended the Mennonite World Conference General Council gathering 20-25 May (see page 6 and following), met women from around the globe, many of whom are current or past recipients of MW USA International Women's Fund scholarships for church leadership training.

Guengerich met with women from the African Anabaptist Women Theologians, the Latin American Women Theologians, the Asian Women Theologians, and the director of the Dutch Mennonite Women's

Organization. All of these groups had one thing in common: they saw women in the church networking in other places around the globe and began to organize themselves.

Inspired by the presentations from African women theologians at the 2003 MWC Assembly in Zimbabwe, MW USA and the African women in church leadership began to explore ways of encouraging women in the church to use their gifts.

In 2004, a unique Sister-Link (a program of MW USA) began between MW USA and a group of African women in church leadership, known as “the African Anabaptist Women Theologians” (AAWT). These organizations were linked together with the assistance of Mennonite World Conference. This five-year partnership was formed in order to increase the number of African Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women trained in theology by the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly in 2009.

In 2006, Latin American women saw that the AAWT were empowering women in church leadership, and organized a gathering for biblical and theological reflection. This meeting provided a forum to explore women’s roles in the church. In 2007, MW USA helped to sponsor three women’s theological gatherings on three continents in which women



Photo by Ruth Guengerich

Emelia Amexo (left), Ghana, and Manjula Roul, India, walking to worship services during MWC General Council meetings near Basel, Switzerland.

met to support theological training for more women. Throughout these years, MW USA’s International Women’s Fund has continued to provide scholarships to women in Africa, Latin America, and Asia for training in church leadership. All of the women come from MWC member and associate member churches.

In hopes of empowering more women, the Latin American Women Theologians hosted a gathering of women theologians just prior to the 2009 MWC Assembly in Paraguay. This gathering inspired women in attendance from Netherlands to establish the Anne Zernike Fund (see sidebar).

In October 2012, Asian Women Theologians will meet with representatives from Japan, India, and Indonesia. Their meeting stems from what they have observed in the other women theologians’ organizations. —from *Mennonite Women USA release*

Anne Zernike Fund marks centenary of first ordination of female pastor in the Netherlands

Netherlands—On November 6, 2011, the Anne Zernike Fund was established in honour of the first Mennonite female pastor in the Netherlands a century after her ordination on November 5, 1911. She was also the first female pastor ordained in any church in the Netherlands.

The fund has two goals. The first is “to encourage and empower Mennonite and Anabaptist female pastors all over the world in their calling to God and to add, if necessary, a limited financial support to their scholarship.”

The second is “to encourage Mennonite and Anabaptist congregations around the world to value the skills and talents of women theologians by giving them a paid position according to their education and capabilities as an ordained pastor and honour the congregation with an award when they first ordain a woman pastor.”

The idea for the fund stems from the gathering of women theologians (*mujeres teólogas*) from across Latin America held just prior to the Mennonite World Conference 2009 assembly in Paraguay.

The group who established the Anne Zernike Fund included three—Christina Duhoux-Rueb, Coot Winkler Prins and Thijn Thijink—who are ordained pastors serving a congregation within the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (Mennonite Church in the Netherlands), a member church of MWC. Another woman, Antje van Dijk, chairs the Dutch Mennonite sister circles. —from *MWC release*

Advisory council prepares to host Assembly 16; approves \$850,000 fundraising goal

Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA—Both the welcome anticipation and the challenges of hosting the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly were evident in the meeting of the National Advisory Council held here March 22-23.

Council members, who represent the four inviting denominations, spoke of the “honour” and “privilege” of hosting members of the MWC global communion for the 16th Assembly to be held July 21-26, 2015 in

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. They agreed to help increase awareness and ownership of the upcoming assembly within their respective denominations. They also decided to appoint members to a prayer network, a Finance Task Force and a Visa Task Force.

The Council approved a fundraising goal of \$850,000. Of this amount \$150,000 will support the Global Youth Summit and \$300,000 will go into a travel fund for the pre-assembly General Council and the Executive Committee meetings. The rest of the money raised, along with registration fees, are expected to cover an expected \$2.8 million budget.

The council emphasized the importance of having each continental region take ownership—including in a financial way—of the assemblies. Representatives of each region will be asked how much money they can raise—over and above their fair share contributions for ongoing MWC operations—as the beginning of a pattern that will be used for future assemblies.

The council also reaffirmed its commitment to do everything it can to make it possible for young adults from outside the U.S. to get visitor visas for the assembly.

MWC staff met with David Myers, Director of one of the U.S. Centers for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, on March 26 to explore ways to best approach the visa challenge, especially as related to young people. During the meetings, the Council also appointed Howard Good as National Coordinator for the Assembly (see item on page 27).

Council members include: Richard Thomas (chair), Elizabeth Soto Albrecht and Sheldon Good from Mennonite Church USA; Dennis Becker (officer), Lynn Jost and Ed Boschman from the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches; Warren Hoffman, Don McNiven (secretary) and Chris Sharp from the Brethren in Christ General Conference; Lowell Bender and David Kochsmeier (officer) from the Conservative Mennonite Conference.

—from MWC release

Ndlovu invites support for victims of Zimbabwe drought

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe— On March 10, in the wake of media reports of impending drought, MWC president Danisa Ndlovu met with Zimbabwe deputy Minister of Agriculture, who made a passionate plea that the church must do something to source food for Matabeleland South province.

Ndlovu, who is also a bishop in Zimbabwe's Brethren in Christ church, reported on the meeting in a note to MWC staff. "We are also calling for prayers for rain," he said. "We have not had any significant inflows to dams that supply our city of Bulawayo. It is worrying, as it might mean decommissioning of some of the dams in the next few months."

When asked how the church can help, Ndlovu commented, "The church calls upon those who can partner with us in purchasing food that can be distributed to needy communities. We think people can initiate projects within their communities that they can work on in exchange of food rations."

He added, "It will be necessary as a church to think not only how people can be helped but domestic animals too, which are considered by many in these communities as security. It is also clear that communities that need food now will need seed and farming inputs down the road if they are to grow their own food."

—from MWC release



Photo by Gordon Obado

Nursing mothers were given priority in the Kenya aid distribution.

Kenya Mennonites help with aid and peace following border clashes

Kenya—In the aftermath of this year's border clashes between Luo and Kalenjin ethnic groups in eastern Kenya, Kenya Mennonite Church is helping to provide aid to displaced persons and participating in peace initiatives.

In late February and early March, over 6,000 people were displaced when Kalenjin youth raided a number of Luo communities and burned crops and houses. The violence was touched off by incidents of cattle theft.

"It is hard and emotional," wrote Gordon Obado, "to put down [in writing] the episode of what is now referred to as the border clashes...that shocked the whole nation." Obado is program coordinator for the Relief and Development arm of Kenya Mennonite Church in the Kisumu East Diocese. Obado reported that when the violence broke out, Clyde Agola, the general secretary of

Kenya Mennonite Church, informed Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) workers. Both agencies responded promptly with emergency aid for displaced persons.

"We continue to receive appreciation for their timely support both from those who were affected and from the government," wrote Obado. "We saw God's new society in these men and women. It is true they have become a visual aid before a watching world."

Now that the violence has abated, the focus is on continuing support for displaced persons and also on addressing issues that caused the violence. According to Obado, the joint peace initiatives of various organizations and churches include joint meetings of Luo and Kalenjin elders and a petition to the government "to resolve the boundary issue on a large tract of land which initially belonged to some Asian tycoons and whose leasehold had elapsed."

—from MWC release

Burkina Faso Seminars encourage spiritual renewal and relationships

Orodara, Burkina Faso—During the second week of February, more than 100 Mennonite women met in Orodara for the annual women's seminar of l'Eglise Evangélique Mennonite (EEM—Evangelical Mennonite Church) of Burkina Faso. As in the past, the seminar combines adult continuing education, business training, spiritual renewal and recreation.

Since the Burkina church has only 374 baptized members, the participation of over a quarter of the national church does much to raise the spiritual vitality of the church, increasing the capacity to share the Bread of Life with surrounding communities.

The effect of such conferences was also clear last August at a couples seminar. Nearly 80 men and women



Photo by Siaka Traoré.

Marie and Bala Sourabie enjoy time together at the couples' seminar in Orodara, Burkina Faso. Bala Sourabie is the national treasurer of Eglise Evangélique Mennonite in Burkina Faso.

deepened their knowledge about marital relationships, the importance of communication, mutual forgiveness, child psychology, and pedagogy, and resource management and other topics.

Siaka Traoré, president of the EMM, told how, in the wake of the August seminar, church leaders were called to intervene in a disagreement

between a father and his children.

"After attending the seminar, the father was able to talk to his children himself," Traoré said. "They resolved the issues threatening to divide the family without outside mediation."

Claire Traoré, president of the Burkina Faso Mennonite women's association and wife

of Siaka, added that husbands and wives were talking together more—and making time to pray together, too.

"Communication with each other and God really reduces problems in the home," Claire Traoré said.

—from a release by Lynda Hollinger-Janzen for Mennonite Mission Network (Mennonite Church USA)

Aid to residents of temporary housing a focus of Japan relief work

Japan—Assistance to residents of temporary housing is one way that Japan Mennonite Fellowship (JMF) is focusing its ongoing work of relief assistance following the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

By the end of December, many shelters had closed and affected people had to move into temporary housing as the first step to independence.

Japan Mennonite Fellowship decided to help the people from Kesennuma First Bible Baptist Church which was completely leveled by the tsunami. Aid so far has included food distribution to

the 153 families in temporary housing. Food was assembled in a temporary community hall in a residential area. Assisting Japan Mennonite Fellowship in the aid initiative were members of Hiroshima Mennonite Church.

Japan Mennonite Fellowship, which represents four MWC member churches in Japan, formed the East Japan Great Disaster Relief Assistance Committee in May 2011 to coordinate response to the earthquake and tsunami disaster.

—from reports translated by Takanori Sasaki, chair of Japan Mennonite Fellowship



Photo by Bert Lobe

Pastor Hiroshi Minegishi and his wife Yosocho in the midst of the remains of the Baptist Church in Kesennuma in 2011. Pastor Minegishi commented: "Some live with God, and some without God. We choose to live with God. When we surrender everything we get the blessing, and we win."

Straddling Laos and Zimbabwe

By Linda Espenshade

Vientiane, Laos—Godswill Muzarabani grew up straddling two cultures in Zimbabwe. His father was from the majority ethnic group, Shona, and his mother was Ndebele, the minority ethnic group—classifications that have led to violence between the groups at worst and a recognized distinction at best.

“I became a person who can relate to everyone,” he said. He could fit in with the language and culture regardless which group he was relating to.

That ability served him well when he went to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao) with YAMEN! in 2011 and 2012. There he learned to respect different religions and different understandings of peace and still value and relate to the person.

Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN!) is a joint program of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC). It places young adults from MWC-member churches in the Global South in other countries of the Global South for cross-cultural learning and service.

Muzarabani’s biggest concern about going to Lao was how he would adjust to living among Buddhists and Hindus, after growing up in a country where people predominantly identify themselves as Christian.

“I thought it was going to be impossible,” Muzarabani said. “I thought, ‘Imagine living with someone who doesn’t believe the same as me.’ When I came, it was even worse because we even work with Buddhists.”

It didn’t take very long in Laos for Muzarabani to respect Buddhists for their peaceful way of living. From the kind way they respond to a mistake to the way they perceive conflict, Buddhists are even more peaceful than Christians, he concluded.

In Zimbabwe, physically fighting is a common way to resolve a conflict, political or personal, he said, but in Laos, conflict is about the heart. The belief is: “If you say something bad about someone, be careful because you might



MCC Photo by Silas Crews

Godswill Muzarabani of Zimbabwe teaches English in Lao People’s Democratic Republic. Some of the same students he teaches are part of the peacebuilding club, Mittapab, that he works with on weekends.

hurt their heart.” This belief, however, means that Laotians tend to allow people to take advantage of them and rich people to exploit them, he said.

“If I could take the two societies and mesh them together: Laotians wouldn’t go out and fight, but they would still know how to protest and do it nonviolently,” he said. “If people in my country would think about the heart as much as these people do, they wouldn’t be fighting, but they would probably go and protest. Soldiers wouldn’t beat up people because they know it will hurt them inside.”

Muzarabani’s assignment through YAMEN! was to teach English in a secondary school and to teach peacebuilding through Mittapab, a peacebuilding club for secondary students. He graduated from Solusi University in Zimbabwe with a bachelor’s degree in peace and conflict studies.

As students grew to respect him and as his Lao language improved, they started looking for opportunities to talk with him. Laotians asked him many questions about his culture and beliefs, and he asked about theirs.

They discussed differences, like skin color, but they’ve also found many similarities: poverty, music and value of extended family. They also discussed religion.

“Here some are Muslim; some believe in spirits. They can sit down and discuss their religion and share. In some cases, people change to become Christians because of the example of the next person. I’ve learned how to give someone space to change instead of pointing and judging and trying to convert them.”

Because he was willing to listen, learn and share, Laotians treated him like he belonged. “Oh you are not foreign; you are one of us,” he’s been told.

Next year, Muzarabani will be an MWC intern in MCC’s United Nations Office if his visa is approved. The position is offered through MCC’s International Volunteer Exchange Program.

Eventually he wants to return to Zimbabwe and stay there for a long time, he said. As the eldest son, he is responsible to care for his immediate family and contribute to his extended family—an obligation he wants to fulfill.

He’s also eager to bring together what he has learned in Laos and will learn in the U.S. with his own Ndebele and Shona cultures, working to build peace among youth and in his church.

Linda Espenshade is news coordinator for MCC U.S.

Resources to help deepen global relationships

The main resource that Mennonite World Conference offers is a network of relationships as the global Anabaptist community shares their experiences and understandings of Christ. A related resource is the reciprocal sharing of gifts within the diverse global family of faith.

To help facilitate this exchange, Mennonite World Conference has developed resources such as the following, all available through the MWC website (mwc-cmm.org) or one of the MWC offices.

Shared Convictions. This document, adopted by the MWC General Council in 2006, is serving as an important theological reference point for member churches. (Available in English, Spanish, French.)

Worship resources for Peace Sunday. Member churches are encouraged to observe this day on the Sunday nearest to September 21, which is the International Day of Peace, as designated by the United Nations. For 2012, the MWC Peace Sunday is September 23. (Available in English, Spanish, French.)

Worship resources for World Fellowship Sunday. Member churches are encouraged to observe this day on the Sunday closest to January 21. On this day, in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism was held in Zurich, Switzerland. (Resources for 2012 are available in English, Spanish, French and German. Resources for 2013 will be available in October, with some parts appearing in *Courier*.)

Worship resources for the World Day of Prayer. Starting in 2010, the Latin American Women Theologians have prepared materials to help Anabaptist-related churches worship in solidarity with other Christian communions on the

World Day of Prayer, observed in May. (Available in English and Spanish.)

Issues of Courier/Correo/ Courier going back to 2001. This archive of quarterly issues yields a rich collection of inspirational and teaching materials, as well as summaries of news from across the globe. (Available in English, Spanish, French.)

News service searchable archive. The current MWC website includes over 100 news articles going back to the early months of 2010. (Most service items are in English only; some are translated into Spanish and French.)

Videos. A five-minute video, *Beyond Assemblies* was produced shortly after the 2009 MWC Assembly in Paraguay. (English, Spanish,

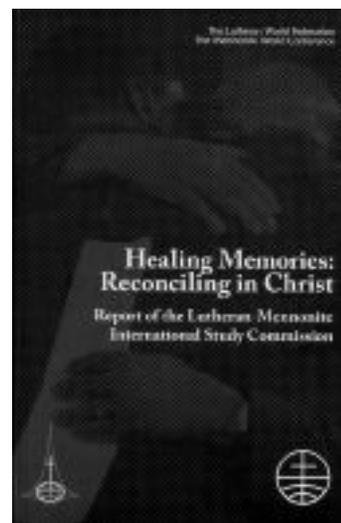
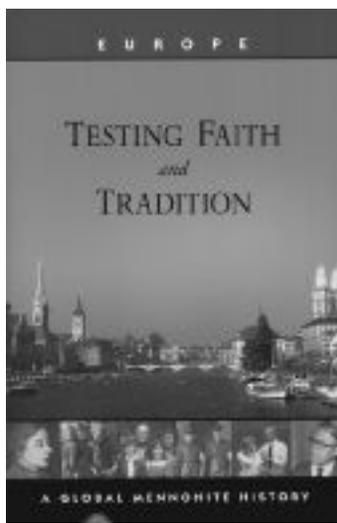
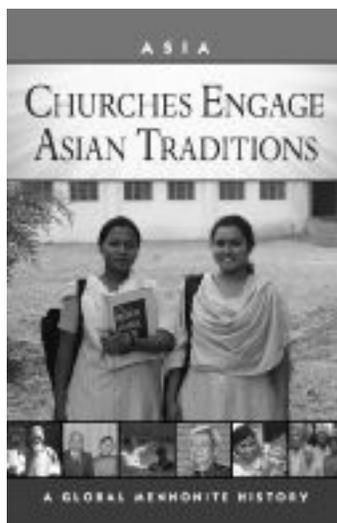
French) A one minute adaptation called *We're Not Alone* is also available. Another video shares *Stories of Service* of the Mennonite Church in six countries, with an accompanying study. (Available in English, Spanish, French.)

Global Anabaptist Shelf of Literature. This list includes titles to help member churches nurture a common Christian Faith. Titles listed so far are: *From Anabaptist Seed* by Arnold Snyder; *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith* by Pakisa Tshimika and Tim Lind; *God's Shalom Project* by Bernhard Ott; *A Culture of Peace* by Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja; *Stewardship for All?* by Bedru Hussein and Lynn Miller; *What we Believe Together* by Alfred Neufeld Friesen. (All titles are available in English; some have been translated into other languages.)

Global Mennonite History Project. Initiated in 1997, this project has so far produced four volumes tracing the origins, development and mission of Anabaptist-related churches

in four continental regions. The stories have been told by voices from within these regions. The volumes produced so far include: *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts* (2003); *Testing Faith and Tradition* (2006, Europe); *Migration and Mission* (2010, Latin America); and *Churches Engage Asian Traditions* (2011). The fifth volume on North America is scheduled to be released in late 2012. (All volumes are in English, with translations of some into selected languages.)

Healing Memories, Reconciling in Christ: Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission. This booklet caps the work of the Lutheran-Mennonite Study Commission, which completed its five-year dialogue in 2010. The process culminated in the historic step of Lutherans asking Anabaptist-Mennonites for forgiveness for past persecutions. (Available from MWC in English, Spanish, French and German.)





Len Rempel



Anna Sorgius



Liesa Unger



Ron Rempel

MWC Operations Team appointed

In January, when the MWC head office opened in Bogotá Colombia, a new staff structure was also put in place, reflecting the growth and maturity of MWC. One of the first tasks of César García was to establish an Operations Team to share responsibilities.

Len Rempel of New Hamburg, Ontario, Canada, is Chief Operating Officer responsible for finances and budget, maintaining and monitoring staffing, policies and job descriptions. Rempel, a Certified Management Accountant, began working for MWC in March 2011. Len is married to Kathleen and together they parent three children. They are members of Tavistock Mennonite Church.

Anna Sorgius of Strasbourg, France is Chief Administrative Officer responsible for managing the general secretariat office, membership, database, archiving, translators. Sorgius has worked for MWC for 13 years, mostly as manager of office of Strasbourg, France,

and executive assistant to the General Secretary. She moved to Bogotá, Colombia following the closure of the Strasbourg office in June. While in France, Anna attended the Strasbourg Mennonite Church.

Liesa Unger of Regensburg, Germany is part time Chief International Events Officer responsible to lead the organization of MWC international events such as Executive Committee and General Council meetings and Global Assemblies. Unger has worked with MWC in various capacities for the past decade. She coordinated the logistics for the recent General Council meetings in Switzerland in May. She will lead the Assembly (16) Program Planning Group

responsible for the overall program, worship, workshops, and assembly scattered in the US in 2015. Liesa and her husband Wilhelm Unger are co-pastors of the Mennonite Church in Regensburg.

Ron Rempel of Waterloo, Ontario as part time Chief Communications Officer responsible for managing and planning the global communications strategy, and overseeing the communication program that currently includes news service, Courier magazine and the website. Rempel began as news editor in November 2011. Ron, who retired in 2011 as Executive Director of Mennonite Publishing Network (now called MennoMedia), is married to Kaye and they have two

children and three grandchildren. They are members of Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

Still to be appointed is a Chief Development Officer responsible for managing and planning a global strategy for fundraising and capacity building.

Also envisioned in the new structure are several coordinator positions reporting to the General Secretary. One is a Coordinator of Commissions—Faith and Life, Deacons, Mission, and Peace. The second is a Coordinator of Regional Offices. The goal is to have an MWC office in each of the five continental regions—Latin America, Africa, Asia and Pacific, Europe, and North America.

YAMEN participants for 2011-2012

In addition to **Godswill Muzarabani**, (featured on page 24), eight other young adults participated in the South-to-South exchange program jointly sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference. They include **Kenia Zulema Vasquez Nuñez** of the Iglesia Anabautista in Bolivia, serving in Mozambique; **Luisa Alejandra Santos Montoya** of the Iglesia Evangelica Menonita in Honduras, serving in Nicaragua; **Yohane Ephraim Mbewe** of Malawi's Brethren in Christ Church, serving in Brazil; **Brighton Mashebe** of Zambia's Brethren in Christ Church, serving in Brazil; **Nancy Isabella Sabas Gonzalez** of the Iglesia Evangelica Menonita in Honduras serving in Indonesia; **Aristiya "Tiya" Dwiyanti** of Indonesia's Gereja Kristen Muria (GKMI) Indonesia, serving in Cambodia; **Nicole Knelsen Hubert** of the Hermanos Menonitas in Paraguay, serving in Indonesia; **Janny Lweendo Hachilenge** of Zambia's Brethren in Christ Church serving in Indonesia.



Howard Good



Bert Lobe

Planners named for Assembly 16

When US-based National Advisory Council met in March to begin the work of hosting Assembly 16 (see page 21), it appointed **Howard Good** of Lititz, Pennsylvania, USA, as National Coordinator for the event. In this role, he will lead the Assembly Logistic Planning Group, which will arrange food services, transportation, lodging, local tours and other practical aspects of the assembly. For his MWC involvement, Howard will be seconded for some of his time from his ongoing work as vice president for Association Engagement with Mennonite Economic Development Associates. Howard and his wife Gloria are parents of four adult children and one grandchild. They are members of Lititz Mennonite Church.

Howard will also work as part of the assembly planning team, directed by Chief International Events Officer **Liesa Unger** (see profile on page 26). Also on that team is **Bert Lobe**, North American Representative, from St. Jacobs, Ontario, Canada. Bert will provide initial coordination for the Visa Task Force, the Prayer Team

and communication. He will also provide initial leadership, along with **Merle and Phyllis Good** of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, in assembly fundraising. Bert, a veteran leader in MWC and Mennonite Central Committee, will retire as North American representative in December. He and his wife Martha are parents to four adult children and grandparents to six. The Goods, who are also communications consultants for MWC, are parents to two adult daughters and belong to East Chestnut St. Mennonite Church in Lancaster.

Karen Flores, left, translated for the Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee during the General Council meetings in May. Here she consults with fellow volunteer Arnold Voth of Paraguay, who helped coordinate some 30 volunteer and staff translators.

MWC volunteers indispensable to Switzerland gatherings

As with MWC Assemblies, the triennial General Council meetings could not go forward without the dozens of volunteers, many of whom donated much of their vacation time. For the meetings of the General Council and related sub groups that spread between May 10 and June 2 in Basel, Chief Events Officer **Liesa Unger**, who oversaw a complex plan of volunteer work, acknowledges the huge contribution of the volunteers:

Arnold Voth and **Egon Sawatzky** Asunción, Paraguay recruited and coordinated 23 interpreters who each gave between one day and three weeks of their time to translate sessions into Spanish, French, English, and Portuguese.

Markus Rediger, Swiss member of the MWC Executive Committee, worked tirelessly with Swiss officials on behalf of participants who faced challenges in obtaining visas.

Bruno and Heidi Sägesser of Basel coordinated dozens of volunteer chauffeurs for airport and train station pickups at all hours of the day and night. **Doris Hege** of Frankfurt coordinated airport welcome in her city.

Members of the three congregations in Basel—Schänzli, Bruggi, and Holee—helped with registration, lent bicycles, prepared celebration desserts (**Erhard Bitterli and Christine Hofer**), or sang in a choir (led by **Margrit Ramseier**). **Emanuel Neufeld**, pastor of the Schänzli church, helped with coordination and encouragement, and **Gilbert and Rebecca Krähenbühl** of Basel, **Christine Fehrle** and **Barbara Kärcher** of Karlsruhe provided medical and other support onsite.

In addition to European hosts, spouses of MWC staff and participants also gave of their time to help with meals, distribution of headsets, registration, and hosting.

A big thank you to all!

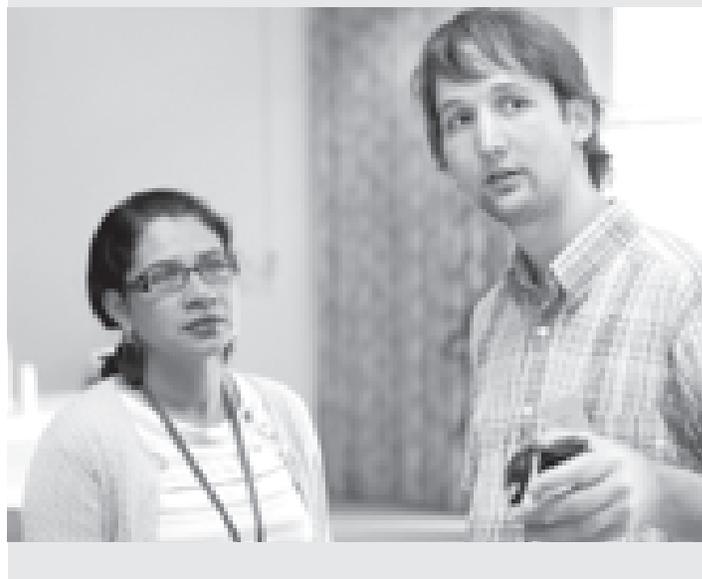


Photo by Bastien Gegenheimer

Plan now!

Every January, Anabaptist churches around the world take time to celebrate their common identity in Christ—sharing similar Scripture texts, sermon themes, and worship resources. Will your congregation participate?

The next World Fellowship Sunday (WFS) falls on January 27, 2013, six days after the anniversary of the day in 1525 when a group of believers in Zurich, Switzerland, practiced adult baptism, rather than the state-mandated infant baptism.

Please reserve this day—or a different Sunday if necessary—for a special celebration of global unity in MWC. A group of writers from the Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite, and Brethren in Christ churches in Colombia, with the participation of Mennonite Central Committee, is preparing a set of worship resources which will be available electronically in October, with selections also appearing in the next issue of *Courier-Correo-Courrier*.

Two stories from 2012 World Fellowship Sunday



Photo by Luis Alman

Maria Ines Rearte, member of the pastoral committee at the Ramos Mejia church, explains the origin of World Fellowship Sunday. Maria Ines is the niece of the first Argentinian Mennonite pastor.

Argentina

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity!” With a song inspired by these words from Psalm 133, Argentine Mennonite Evangelical Alliance in Boulogne welcomed the Ramos Mejía and Ituzaingó congregations of Buenos Aires for a joint WFS celebration. We merged our voices in a variety of songs of joy and fraternity, Bible readings and sharing about each congregation’s activities. There was a special time for historical memories, and for prayers of thanksgiving and intercession for local and international needs. In the biblical reflection, we were called to be grateful “hosts” in our daily



Photo by Luis Alman

Guillermo Steinfeld of Buenos Aires shares his views during a discussion on the meaning and value of our Anabaptist heritage and the importance of hospitality for Historic Peace Churches.

lives. Then, with equal enthusiasm we gathered around the table to share a holy agape meal.

—*Juan Angel (Tito) Gutierrez, pastor of the Boulogne congregation*

Costa Rica

This year a group from different churches in the country traveled to Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí, north of the Caribbean, on January 29. About 425 people participated in a lively worship service and then a time of fellowship. “This was our fourth gathering and we find that each year new people join in the celebration,” said Sandra Campos, president of the Asociación de Iglesias Cristianas Menonitas (Christian Mennonite Association of Churches) de Costa Rica, and a member of the Executive Committee of MWC.



Sandra Campos stands at the pulpit and welcomes Milton Bontrager and his wife Joan from the US, who some 46 years ago were in Costa Rica as voluntary service workers.

For your prayer...

Prayer requests from the General Council

The triennial General Council meetings (see pages 6 to 15) included a great deal of reporting, decision-making, theological reflection and fellowship. But on the last day, when 45 minutes were allotted for delegates to share anything that was on their hearts, it wasn't the business that filled most of the time: rather, it was pleas for prayer from Latin American and African delegates. They asked us to pray:

- For the churches of Belize, Panama (see separate item), Mexico, Kenya, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Congo and Zimbabwe in the context of increasing violence;
- For the churches of Angola, Zimbabwe and Kenya in anticipation of national elections;
- For the Meserete Kristos church Ethiopia, as it works to recover properties confiscated by the government 30 years ago;
- For the resolution of a leadership conflict in one member church;
- For one member church in Africa facing persecution from their government;
- For churches in Paraguay, Nicaragua and Zimbabwe dealing with food insecurity because of drought or floods.

Answered prayer: Panama's Wounaan community receives land rights

In April of this year, MWC's news service passed on an urgent request from the Iglesia Evangélica Unida Hermanos Menonitas de Panamá (United Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church of Panama) to the global church: to pray for a peaceful settlement of land claims, following a confrontation between members of the Wounaan community and loggers. Several people had died in the confrontation,

including a community leader Aquilo Opúa, brother-in-law of Hermes Barrigón, a leader in the IEUHMP.

On June 5, IEUHMP leaders emailed MWC offices with a note that the dispute had been resolved: "Today is an historical day in Panama. For the first time, the Wounaan received an official certificate for their collective lands in two territories (Puerto Lara



From left: Tiliano Tovar, a leader of the community in Puerto Lara; Elibardo Membache, leader of the Collective Land in Embera; Cardenio Membora, Cacique del Pueblo, leader of the Wounaan people; Aladino Bipuru, a leader of the community in Puerto Lara.

and Caña Blanca). All this is the result of years of hard work, sacrifice, patience, frustration and even death. Thanks to God, the right they were claiming for years is a reality today."

Later communications from the church, however, indicated that similar work remains for other territories where their members live. The church calls for continued prayers.

Colombian Anabaptists pray for victims, perpetrators and peacemakers

On April 15 and 16, several congregations of Colombia's three Anabaptist churches, along with friends and churches in North America, participated in "Days of Prayer and Action" to pray and advocate for the internally displaced people of their country, and for the victims, perpetrators and peacemakers related to conflict. According to Colombia's Internally Displaced Monitoring Center, armed conflict has forced five million Colombians from their lands and homes. Justapaz, a ministry of the Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia (Mennonite Church of Colombia), notes that at least 69 documented cases of

human rights violations against Colombia's faith community occurred in 2009, the most recent year for which statistics are available. The prayer and action event, sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee and other faith-based groups, included the annual tradition of holding special Sunday prayer services among congregations of the Iglesia Menonita (Mennonite Church), Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren) and Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo (Brethren in Christ). Organizers also called on churches in the United States to speak to policy makers in their country to advocate for peace and justice.



Argemiro Joaquin Maza Contreras is a campesino from the Mampujan community in Colombia. "Campesino" refers to a person from rural Latin America, often a farmer or farm worker. He was displaced from his home in 2000 by violence.

MCC Photo by Silias Crews.

MWC: Thanks for your generous support!

Financial results for MWC for the year ending December 31, 2011 were better than anticipated. Total income in the unrestricted fund (for general operating expenses) was up more than \$100,000 from 2010 due primarily to a large increase in contributions in the Leadership Transition Campaign. Total unrestricted contributions for the year were \$735,240 and total income including investment income and management fees charged to restricted funds totaled \$895,487.

MWC member churches, regional conferences, and local congregations made up over 30% of the income, while individuals contributed 45% of the income. Other income came through contributions from agencies and foundations and management fees charged to restricted funds and investment income.

Unrestricted expenses for 2011 were the same as the previous year and \$40,000 less than the budget. Since this year was part of the transition time when MWC anticipated deficits, the combination of increased income and lower than expected expenses put MWC \$170,000 ahead of its budgeted financial results.

Beginning in 2013, after the transition time, MWC has committed to operating with an annual surplus in the unrestricted fund.

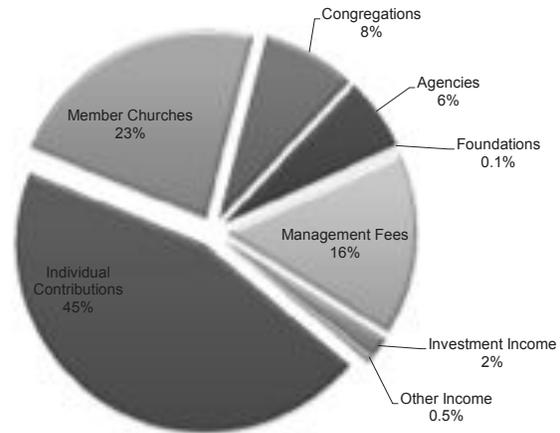
The charts show the sources of income as well as the distribution of expenses for the year. The third chart shows the allocation of restricted fund expenses, which are supported by special, designated donations separate from donations for regular operations. More detailed reports for 2011 are available upon request by contacting the MWC offices.

Because of the Assembly in 2015, the budgets for both the Assembly Fund and Travel Fund (restricted) will be significantly higher for 2014 and 2015. Otherwise, projections for 2012 through 2014 show little change in regular (unrestricted) income or expenses—although if additional income is received it will enable MWC to undertake new opportunities for the future.

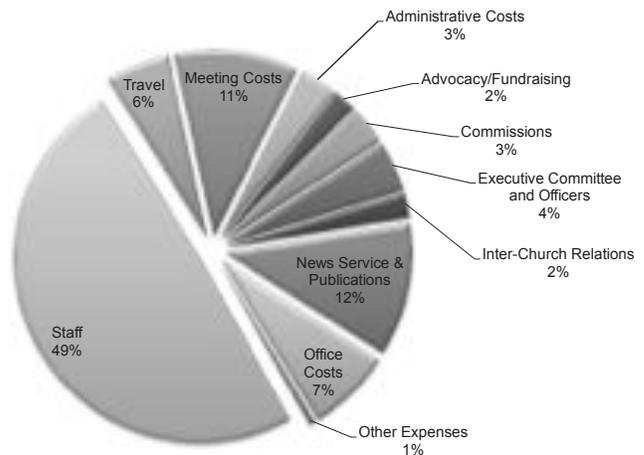
Many thanks to all who have supported MWC this past year, not only financially, but also through many gifts of time and talent.

— Len Rempel, Chief Operations Officer

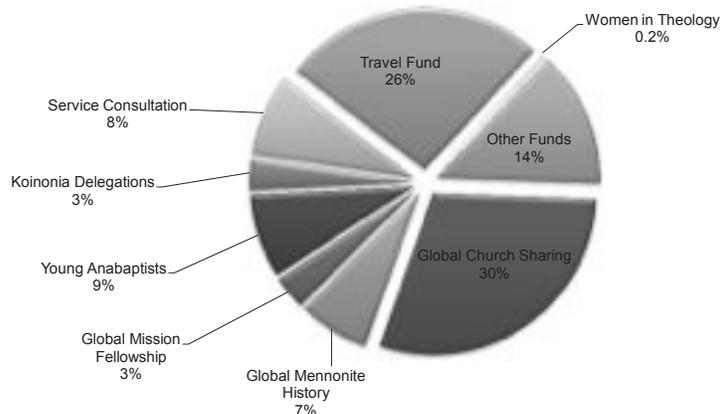
2011 Unrestricted Income for operations: \$895,487



2011 Unrestricted Expenses for operations: \$930,128 USD



2011 Restricted Fund Expenses: \$283,094



Church in India celebrates centennial

Dhamtari, India—The Mennonite Church in India (MCI) celebrated its 100th anniversary Oct. 27-30 with a gathering of about 1,000 people at Sunderganj Mennonite Church.

The MCI, one of eight MWC member churches in India, traces its origins to a 1912 meeting in Balodgahan convened by Mennonite mission workers and visiting representatives of the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, who together drafted a constitution.

MCI moderator and bishop C.F. Nath said it is important to remember the “foundation stones” of the past. “These 100 years are full of experiences and information,” he said. We have to learn from them and go ahead with new ideas, new

energy, new assurance and new vision, so that we may glorify our almighty God and our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ.”

Myron S. Augsburg of Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, who attended the festivities with his wife, Esther, noted that Westerners have stepped aside over time, allowing leadership to emerge from the Indian community of faith.

The focus of the conference came from Revelation 3:3: “Remember therefore what you have received and heard. Obey it and repent.”

— *Mennonite Weekly Review*

Brethren in Christ Church in South Africa celebrates conference status

Johannesburg, South Africa—At a celebration held October 14-16, 2011, the Brethren in Christ Church in South Africa (BICCSA) commemorated its recognition as a conference of the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA). The celebration was held in the Hillbrow BIC church of Johannesburg. Representatives

from Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana were in attendance.

The first BIC congregation in South Africa was begun in 1988 in Soshanguve by the late Rev. Hamilton Madlabane. In the early 1990s, another BIC branch began in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, as many BIC members from Zimbabwe moved to South Africa after the economic downturn in Zimbabwe. These two congregations were the building blocks of the BICCSA, which currently numbers 13 congregations with 1,246 members.

At the celebration, BICCSA overseer Reverend Benedict Macebo Ndiweni noted that the BICCSA’s Anabaptist emphasis on the community contrasts with many churches in South Africa. “Many churches are owned by the founder members,” he said. “Churches are owned by particular families. If a minister dies, the son takes over. You see churches resorting to the courts to decide the successor. The church leaders become like traditional kings. They



Photo courtesy of Andrew Suderman

Rev. Benedict Ndiweni.

cannot be questioned. In short, BICCSA is bringing into the fore the issue of accountability.”

Bishop Thuma Hamukang’andu, as chairman of IBICA (and a member of the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee), presented the certificate of conference status to Rev. Ndiweni.

The Brethren in Christ Church in South Africa (BICCSA) is linked with Mennonite World Conference through the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA), an associate MWC member.
— *Andrew Suderman, director of the Anabaptist Network in South Africa*



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Volume 27 • Number 2—3

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Courrier - Correo - Courier, published quarterly by Mennonite World Conference in English, Spanish, and French editions, is available on request. Send all correspondence to C-C-C, MWC, Calle 28A No. 16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia.
email: info@mw-cmm.org

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C-C-C is published by Mennonite World Conference on a non-subscription basis. However, readers are urged to contribute \$40US, \$40 CAD, or 35€ toward the costs of printing and distribution. Those who are able are invited to give more on behalf of those in the MWC family who have less.

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Building a diverse, multicultural community

An interview with César García

Over a span of three weeks in May, almost 300 leaders from the Mennonite World Conference community came to Basel, Switzerland, to network, to make decisions, to collaborate in ministry and to build relationships (see features inside). In his new role as General Secretary, César García reflected on those intense weeks.

What was the most significant development in May?

César: For me it was the work we did on our communication strategy. The core of the strategy is to have our communications available in our three working languages (English, Spanish and French), whether news releases, theological articles, core documents or other materials. Through a variety of media—electronic, social, print and in person—we want to strengthen our ability to enjoy, in the life of our local congregations, the life of the global community. A related development will be the creation of regional representation in MWC, where more tasks are carried out in the continental areas. This will increase our ability to nurture visibility, share financial resources and do specific work that is relevant in the regional contexts.

What inspired you most about the meetings?

César: The diversity of gifts and ministries focusing around Christ and the work of his body, the church. Some meetings focused on church planting and service, and others focused on peace, social development, administration, Anabaptist identity, or education. There were times of theological reflection, sharing, laughing, eating, praying, and worshiping together. All of that diversity, which allows MWC to focus on Christ from different perspectives, ministries, cultures, ways of thinking—that's something that builds the body of Christ in a way that is not possible in other settings.

An emerging gift in MWC is the desire of some specialized ministries to work globally with other parts of the body of Christ that are interested in the same area of work. Participants were saying "Let's be together in education, or peacemaking, or writing history." That desire to share resources, wisdom and theology has been there for a long time, but it was evident in this particular Council that the desire is growing in a progressive way. The diversity is very special, but we also don't want to fragment; we recognize that we'll also need to work together.

What challenges stood out for you?

César: One of the biggest challenges is the finances to achieve our goals. Even though our budget is limited, we don't own buildings, our staff is very small, many positions are volunteer, and we keep our budget low—the tasks of building community implies a big financial effort. There is the tendency in responding to the challenge by focusing on what we can do with the resources we have currently. However, for these coming years, we have asked ourselves, "What do we think God is saying to us?" And then, in light of that, we want to pray, plan and work, trusting that the resources will come.

What did you hear God saying to the churches?

César: In this age, God is speaking as never before about the importance of global community, about the necessity of building a multicultural family of faith that witnesses to Christ. Our societies are not impacted in a relevant way by churches with a lot of money, members and power, or by a gospel based just on feelings and individual fulfillment. Our societies will get tired of that. But when they see a global family working together in spite of cultural differences or political boundaries, and when they see such a church loving each other, serving together as a global community—that shows something that you don't see anywhere else: a God who has thrown off the boundaries and formed a new family. That is something that will touch the world.

The last prayer of Christ was for unity among believers as a way of showing the nations that Jesus was the Messiah. God is saying to the churches that we can't impact the world by ourselves; we really need a global family of faith. That is why people in ministry are networking around the world. That is why MWC exists.

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

