

Courier Correo Courrier

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Volume 37, Number 2



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

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

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



**Indonesia
2022**

Assembly 17 Indonesia 2022

**ANGSA SALUMAHING BUMI,
JI DHATENG ASMA TUWAN.**



Cover Photo:

Setya R.K.J, Roni Driyastoto and Arjuni Prasetyorini composed music and choreographed dances in Javanese cultural tradition for the opening ceremony with dancers from GIJT, GKMI and JKI congregations.

Photo: Tiz Brotosudarmo

Together across barriers



“Our duty is to bring peace and love.” These words, relayed from Indonesian by a translator at the closing worship service of Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly 17 in Indonesia, came not from one of the featured speakers but from the governor of Central Java. “Our founding fathers gave us this mission of peace,” said Ganjar Pranowo. “The truthfulness [of peace] has been embedded in every soul.... The choice depends on us.”

His message fit seamlessly into the event’s theme: “following Jesus together across barriers.”

Nearly a thousand participants – seated one chair apart in careful adherence to local health pandemic guidelines – attended the closing ceremony. Some 600 participants took part in the full event with some 400 locals attending one or more day.

Four groups of MWC leaders including a Global Youth Summit delegate spent four of the days with a local congregation. Each community – GIJT Jepara, GKMI Solo, GIJT Margokerto and JKI Ungaran – hosted one plenary speaker along with a dozen other MWC guests. The host congregations shared their life and ministry with their guests. Evening plenary worship was broadcast from these four congregations while the rest of participants gathered at STT Sangkakala in Salatiga and untold numbers watched online – live or later.

“Only by God’s grace”

There were plenty of barriers to cross.

Wi-Fi internet was consistently unreliable; the web-based translation app was difficult to use for on-site French- and Spanish-language participants.

Disruptions and distortions in the video feed, especially the first night, discouraged some online participants from tuning in again.

Logistical challenges frustrated guests as did a scourge of lost luggage and delayed or cancelled flights.

COVID-19 cases sent some participants into isolation. “Showing regard for each other’s health is an act of loving one’s neighbour, Jesus called us to do,” says Cynthia Dück, MWC regional representative and trained nurse, who supervised care. “We are grateful for our participants who sacrificially cared for each other whether through service or quarantining.”

The General Council meetings were truncated to prevent further spread and the registration process included a COVID test.

Members of the choir and the interpreter team were affected, requiring flexibility and grace from all the remaining volunteers.

“Only by God’s grace, we could finish from one service to another while clinging our hands to each other,” says Debra Prabu, international ensemble director. It was a masterclass in trust. “I learned to be more humble, to respect my worship partners, to set aside some of my time praying for them and to forgive more.”

Incoming guests were tested upon arrival. Some, to their surprise, tested positive and had to be quarantined, missing the bulk of the event.

“We learned to have changed plans and hope and pray something good would come out of it,” said newly invested president Henk Stenvers (2022-2028) at the closing worship. “We will work hard to make MWC a stronger communion...that works together for *shalom*.”

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Courier Correo Courier



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Puppies and goats are welcome at the table

Tuesday night Timothy J. Geddert

Jesus is exhausted, frustrated probably! He recently planned a retreat with his disciples, but clamouring crowds get in the way. So, he spends a full day teaching and organizing food for 5 000 people.

Next comes a night of prayer and then a stroll across the Sea of Galilee. He sees his disciples struggling against the wind. His plan is to walk past them and reveal his divine identity, but they completely miss the point. So, he miraculously calms the storm, and sighs that they just don't understand anything!

Then comes a heated confrontation with narrow-minded religious leaders and a disappointing conversation with his *dull-minded* disciples (Jesus's words, not mine!).

He needs a break. So, he heads for the nearest resort town on the Mediterranean Coast – something like a beach resort on the coast of California, or Bali, or Tenerife or Rio. Again, his plans are foiled: (I quote) "He did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret!"

Did you notice how the human and divine aspects of Jesus intertwine in this section of Mark's Gospel? Jesus miraculously multiplies loaves, walks on water, identifies himself as "I AM." Yet he's tired, frustrated, unable to follow through on carefully made plans.

"Jesus is the centre of our faith."

- the **human** Jesus, who learned and lived and served and suffered and experienced all sorts of human limitations, as we all do.
- the **divine** Jesus, who exists from all eternity as the second person of the Trinity, creator of heaven and earth, worthy of all honour and worship as GOD!

This "divine-human Jesus" is the centre of our faith.

The faithful church has always confessed that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. That is the mystery we call "the Incarnation": God becoming a human person, uniting forever in the person of Jesus, divinity and humanity.

The Incarnation is the greatest **barrier-crossing** event in the history of the universe. In Jesus, the barrier has been crossed between eternity and time, spirit and matter, Creator and creation. And because of this, we can be confident that the great barrier still separating God and God's faithful people will one day be gone forever.

After the great barrier-crossing event we call "Incarnation," Jesus just kept right on crossing barriers: between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, male and female, sacred and secular, clean and unclean, Jew and Gentile.

Because Jesus is fully divine and fully human, we do well to explore Gospel narratives with two questions in mind:

1. What does Jesus, the *incarnate* Jesus, God in the flesh, reveal to us about what God is like? and,
2. What does Jesus, the *fully human* Jesus, reveal about how we should relate to God and to each other?

In many texts, the divine aspects of Jesus seem to be in the forefront. In Mark's text about Jesus and the Syrophenician woman, the human aspects shine through pretty clearly.

God in the flesh cannot even keep his presence secret. A woman shows up – a very unlikely candidate for Jesus's ministry. A woman, a Gentile, a Syrophenician; the nearest biblical equivalent would be Queen Jezebel! Jesus is not amused. And if we don't listen carefully, it sounds as though Jesus simply insults her! "What? Throw good food to a dog? No way!"

Wait! What? Is this Jesus talking? If that is all we hear, we are not listening



Speaker Tim Geddert (r) and interpreter Sarah Ranee Pillay (l).

This is a portrait of what God is like, hearing the pleading cries of those in need, breaking through the barriers in a response of generous grace.

carefully. It is true that Jews sometimes called Gentiles “dogs! (*kunes*).” Not house pets: wild, unclean, dogs that roam the streets. Yet Jesus here uses a different word! If your translation doesn’t make that obvious, check the footnotes. He refers to (*kunaria*), puppies, “dear little puppies,” house pets surrounding “**the kids**” who are eating at the table. The text sounds quite different already, doesn’t it? And note that Jesus does not actually *call* her a puppy; he’s using a metaphor! And did you notice that in English I just called the children little goats? (That’s what “kids” actually means!)

Jesus’s metaphor is not designed to be offensive, any more than mine was. He’s not demeaning her. He knows that one day Gentiles will be fully equal partners with the Jews in the people of God.

The real problem with this text is not that Jesus talks about puppies; it is that Jesus denies her request! “I’m on vacation! It is not a good time. Sorry, your request is denied!” But again, let’s listen more carefully. “First, let the children eat all they want.”

“First...” Jesus is not saying, “No”; he is saying “Not, yet!” Some things need to happen first! Jesus knows the divine plan for the salvation of the world, “First the Jew, then the Gentile.” First the blessing to Abraham and his descendants, then *through them* to the rest of the world. Jesus came to save *the whole world*! That is why he starts with Israel, recruiting and training those he will commission to spread the good news to the ends of the earth!

And this spunky, persistent, faith-filled woman agrees! “Yes! Yes, Lord! First, the children! So, I won’t ask for a seat at the table ... *not yet!* I’ll just wait for a tiny crumb to fall from the table *now*

already. That’s all I’ll need!” Her clever and faith-filled response is enough to make Jesus change his mind!

Martin Luther put it this way: “Behind Jesus’s ‘No,’ she heard God’s secret ‘Yes.’”

Jesus did not come to Tyre to do ministry, but he ends up doing it. Jesus did not plan to start ministering to Gentiles, not yet, but he ends up doing exactly that. Jesus has his plans in place, but he changes his mind. Or maybe we should say *she* changes his mind.

In fact, she does even more than that. She becomes the instrument through whom Jesus learns which “next step” he should take in doing his Father’s will.

Why should that surprise us? He is showing us how to be responsive to the needs of others – others whom God will often use to help us discover our own ministry calling. Jesus is showing us what our redeemed humanity ought to look like. At the same time, this is a portrait of what God is like, hearing the pleading cries of those in need, breaking through the barriers in a response of generous grace.

May we learn from Jesus what God is truly like, crafting a plan to save the world, working in time and space to bring that plan to its glorious fulfillment and pouring out grace on individuals all along the way. May we learn from Jesus what we are called to be, barrier crossers who minister God’s grace to others. And may we learn from the Syrophenician woman what it takes to cross barriers, reaching out in courageous faith to connect with the heart of Jesus, the divine-human Jesus, who is the centre of our faith.

And may all that we do in these next four days together – listening, praying, singing, worshipping and celebrating the diversity of God’s family – give us glimpses of what Jesus is doing among us, and around the world that he came to save.



Timothy J. Geddert is a professor of New Testament at Fresno Pacific University (Biblical Seminary) in Fresno, California, USA. He is a member of North Fresno Mennonite Brethren Church, California, USA.

Learning together to handle diversity

Wednesday morning Larissa Swartz

There have always been two main kinds of learning: academic and experiential. Most of us have an inclination toward one or the other, but the reality is that both are necessary for learning. Knowledge doesn’t do anyone much good if it’s not applied. Alternatively, it’s often counterproductive and wasteful to implement something without prior investigation. Navigating diverse perspectives could be understood in multiple contexts whether that relates to our global Anabaptist family, the worldwide body of Christ, or our broader multicultural society. Our ability to learn from someone is only limited by our ability to see the image of God in each person, and our openness to allow the Spirit of Christ in us to teach us through any person or situation – no matter how different, uncomfortable, or unlikeable. In thinking about what it looks like for us to learn together as a global Anabaptist family, four essential qualities that Jesus displayed come to mind: **humility, integrity, discernment and responsibility.**

Humility and integrity

Humility and integrity are equally tied to our identity in Christ. Psalm 119 starts with: “*Happy are the people who walk with integrity, who live according to the teachings of the Eternal*” (The Voice). If we know who we are as beloved children of the Father saved by grace through faith, we are able to engage in conversations with diverse perspectives humbly and without feeling prideful or defensive. Knowing who and

whose we are gives us security so that we can act with integrity in diverse settings.

Jesus is clear: if we abide in him, we will do what he commands, and our lives will show it. The more up front we are about who we are and who we follow, the less people are surprised when we behave a certain way, and they are forced to make a choice in response. In the same way, Jesus knew his identity as the Son of God and his calling from an early age, which shaped his priorities, his ministry and how people reacted to him.

To operate in our own calling as priests and ambassadors of God, we must know who we are in relation to our Father. When we are confident in who we are because of our Father's love and forgiveness, we are free to extend the same without expectations. Jesus knew he was the beloved Son of God and yet he came to serve, not be served. We are able to live in that same identity of divine sonship and servanthood that he modelled for us.

Discernment

Discernment is not so glamorous, but I've realized lately it will become more essential for the church as the noise and news and never-ending reels inundate us with information – both true and false. How – amid the clamour of voices in



Tiz Brotosudarmo

International ensemble members:
Debora Prabu (l) and Ashish Milap (r).

the world – are we to learn from others while discerning and bearing witness to what is true and authentic?

A pastor recently reframed discernment for me as being able to identify the source: the world, our flesh, Satan or the Spirit. Our ability to do this is something that only comes through the Spirit. One passage of Scripture that illustrates this is 1 Corinthians 2: “for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.... Those who are spiritual discern all things.... But we have the mind of Christ.”

One of the most difficult things to learn to trust is someone else's experience of God. Among Christians, there is a wide range of how people experience their relationship with God and discern God's direction and guidance in their lives. Sometimes we evaluate learning from others as if we are always learning directly from God. But what we learn from others isn't always from God or aligned with God's Word. This is something that is discerned by the Spirit, with whom we should always be testing everything we receive (1 John 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:21) – whether prophecy, teaching, or experiences – and measuring it against God's Word.

Responsibility

Responsibility is the most dangerous thing that comes with learning. It's a kingdom principle that with knowledge and blessings come responsibility to steward them well before God. “When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required” (Luke 12:48, NLT).

Therein lies the danger of one-sided learning: acquiring knowledge without putting it into practice. This particularly applies to the West and to those of us who have grown up in Christian environments. Even so, having less does not exempt anyone from responsibility. There is so much available in my culture to resource people from books, to conferences, to social media content, to retreats to cohorts – any kind of content you want, you can find. I wonder sometimes what would happen

As we become continually transformed into the image of Christ, may our ability to learn together in all humility and integrity lead to greater discernment through the Spirit to know the truth and display what it means to live our lives according to it.

to the church in the West if all of that was taken away. If all we were left with was the Word of God, the created world, and the people of God directed by God's Spirit, would that be enough for us to learn?

I'm not saying we need to disregard all the resources out there, but my concern, even as I evaluate my own life, is how easily I can turn to other sources for growth and knowledge than the true Source. And more importantly, what am I doing with all I have learned and gained?

This is my challenge to you, dear brothers and sisters, in these tumultuous times, to, as Ephesians puts it, “no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:14-15). As we become continually transformed into the image of Christ, may our ability to learn together in all humility and integrity lead to greater discernment through the Spirit to know truth and display what it means to live our lives according to it.

This is the kingdom Jesus initiated, and this is our calling as the body of Christ: to flesh it out for the world to see.



Larissa Swartz serves as chair of the Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee (2015-2022). Currently, she is transitioning to New York City to be a part of a house church movement.

Learning together to discern the will of God

Wednesday morning

Anne-Cathy Graber

“**L**earning together to discern the will of God”: the first Christians were confronted with this challenge from the beginning. Indeed, “learning together to discern the will of God” is not mere wishful thinking! It is not a comfortable process. In fact, it is the major challenge of Christian life; of our personal lives as well as those of our local congregations.

To consider this challenge, I suggest returning to a fundamental moment in time, an original moment: the time when the disciples were called Christians: “The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26).

To my great surprise, reading and meditating on this episode in the history of the church would force me to question what I believed I knew. This shift came when I observed that the period in which the name “Christian” was given to believers was anything but idyllic. It was not so much the context of persecution – or “distress” as described in the text – that was the most dangerous threat to the emerging Christian church. No, the most surprising thing for me was to realize that this beautiful moment, this moment when they received a “name,” moreover including the name of Christ, corresponded in reality to a situation wherein the major threat for the new believers was one of division, that of internal division.

On one hand, there is the community of Jerusalem, the mother community, the oldest and culturally Jewish. On the other, there is the Antioch community: culturally Greek and a younger and more dynamic community with greater growth and more visible fruit! So, on one side there are those who proclaim the Word exclusively to the Jews, and on the other side, those who proclaim the good news to the pagans, the Greeks.

Two styles: the elders close to tradition, and the younger ones, without a doubt more inventive and with greater freedom!

Thus, two ways of being and two evangelistic projects. In such a situation, how can they continue to learn together?

How can they discern the will of God together?

From the beginning, the first Christians were painfully confronted with this challenge. We can apply this to our situation today: What do the Mennonites of present-day Europe – where Anabaptism first got started – have in common with the Mennonites of other continents, with the younger and more dynamic churches?

Let’s return to our story of the Acts of the Apostles: what are the reasons that schism did not take place, at least not at that moment, even though all the ingredients of division were present? What were the steps taken in the process of discernment?

First, we notice that the mother church (that of Jerusalem) chooses to send a man, Barnabas, who is not a high-profile individual, at least not then. It is the attitude of this man that is the decisive factor and will make the bonds unity possible: “When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all...” (Acts 11:23)

So, Barnabas first begins by taking time to observe, not scrutinizing with judgment, but rather with a gaze of amazement. He is not afraid of newness! Without a doubt he saw all the risks that this young, dynamic community was facing, all the potential deviations, and rightly so, since otherwise Jerusalem would not have sent him. But his first impression is one of amazement of what he sees the other is experiencing, giving thanks for the fruits others are bearing.

This is the first step in the process: to have a vision of kindness and admiring the good in the other, the good in the church of the other. Wouldn’t the relationships between our countries and different cultures change if we dared to admire the other? Are Westerners ready to appreciate what is happening elsewhere and learn from others? Are we ready for this conversion of our perspectives?

Once again, let us return to our story! Barnabas is not blissfully optimistic for what is bearing fruit! True kindness, genuine goodness does not exclude the task of examining the truth which makes things firm. And so, in a second step, we see how Barnabas takes the initiative to go find Paul and bring him back to Antioch

The first step in the process: to have a vision of kindness.

so that the two of them can teach this new, young community for one year.

There is, however, a small detail, which, in reality, is not a small one: Paul and Barnabas do not only have the role of teachers. It is said that they “met with the church” (Acts 11:26) They are not afraid to be “one among others”, to be on equal footing in a relationship of reciprocity where everyone takes part in the conversation. This happens over time; a one-year period, allowing them to build relationships and become familiar with the situation from the inside. This is the second step in the process.

Let us go back to the young church in Antioch. It is not afraid to welcome someone sent by the mother church, to accept being taught by a person coming from a community that is much less dynamic and apparently bearing less fruit. It is not afraid of accepting others.

But the story is not finished. The young church would, in turn, take care of the mother church. During a time of famine, it would organize a fundraiser and send money to Judea (Acts 11:27-30). There is genuine reciprocity in this concrete care of one another!

The moment when the believers receive the beautiful name “Christian,” is therefore the moment when they accept not to remain in their way of seeing, only depending on their ethnicity, their culture, or their local reality. “To learn together” is accepting the risk of crossing boundaries, because we belong to one and very same body, because “we are members one of another” (Romans 12:5).

We are of the same flesh, that of the Body of Christ.



Anne-Cathy Graber is a Mennonite pastor and theologian and a consecrated sister in the Chemin Neuf community in Paris, France. She serves the MWC Faith and Life Commission as representative to the Global Christian Forum and the World Council of Church Faith and Order.

Practice before the storm

Wednesday night **Salomé Haldemann**

When he was 17, my grandfather was forced to fight in World War II (WWII). When I started talking about my plans to study peace and peace theology, he got a little upset. He said: “You talk about peace and war, but you don’t know what you’re talking about! When war comes, you don’t have any choice. There is **nothing** you can do!” At that time, I believed that what Western Europe was missing during World War II was good peace theology. Which we have now, so we’ll be fine. Or so I thought.

A few months ago (and about 80 years after WWII), war broke out in Ukraine. And while our brothers and sisters in Ukraine face the evils of war, many Mennonites in Western Europe are shocked by the nearness and the reality of war. Our many years of good peace theology are forgotten. We feel again like my grandfather felt: “There is nothing we can do”. Suddenly, for many peace-believing Christians, the only possible option is violent engagement. We affirmed nonviolence when our context was peaceful, but in the face of war we see nonviolent resistance as naive and unrealistic. We have many good peace theologians, but now what they were saying has become irrelevant. Today, we are afraid that war may overtake Europe. Suddenly our theology and our beliefs feel obsolete. A storm took over Europe, and our convictions collapsed. Storms tend to do that: they break the things that we thought were solid and strong.

The Scripture we read today is the closing argument of the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon is a collection of teachings of Jesus, addressed to people living in difficult times. At that time, Palestine was under Roman occupation, and the Jews struggled under the oppression of a violent regime. Heavy taxation, forced labour and sexual abuse were part of their daily life. Yet, Jesus calls them, the people oppressed by imperial Rome, to collectively love their enemies and to not resist the evildoer. And he warns them that this will be really hard to do, and that they may pay it with their lives.

Somehow, the crowds seem to like what they hear. “Wow, Jesus sure has a lot of charisma, see how he teaches!

The authority!” Jesus probably knows that many of his listeners are just curious. They’re here to see what the fuss is about, to listen, discuss, comment... and they won’t act on his teachings or practise them. But a storm is coming that will put all their ideas and beliefs to the test. For the people sitting on the mount and listening to Jesus, the war with Rome is about to get a lot worse. For Matthew’s readers, persecution will afflict those who decide to follow the Way of Christ. And these storms will break some of the opinions and beliefs that felt so very solid.

However, there is a way for beliefs to survive the storm. Jesus talks about two houses, one built on rock, the other on sand. The storm came for both. “The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house”, but one house fell and the other one did not. The difference between the two houses is their foundation. The foundation of the house is not believing or not in Jesus. Jesus tells us that the rock foundations are the **practice** of his words.

In the story he tells, both men have heard the words of Jesus, but only the wise man **acted on them**. Other translations have “put them into practice.” It’s acting on the words of Jesus, again and again, day in and day out, that prepares us for the storm. Because the storm will come anyway. There’s only one way for us to stand firm in the storm: practise! Practise the love of enemies, practise nonviolent resistance, practise disarming the oppressor without harming the oppressor. This is something we can all practise together.

If we practise together, we learn together. Before I was a pastor, I was an occupational therapist. The core idea in occupational therapy is that the brain and the body learn by doing. When we do something new, neurons in our body connect in new ways. When we repeat and practise, the connections grow stronger. After a while, we can do that new thing in different situations, without having to think about it anymore.

When we practise, we learn. That also means that if we want to learn, we need to practise. In theory, I believe I could run a marathon. But I’ll only be able to do it if I practise running. The same goes for a radical peace witness, or nonviolent resistance. In Western Europe, when

we Mennonites talk about peace, we spend a lot of time talking about how we should act in different situations. And most of the time, that’s all we do. When the war actually comes, that’s when we should start doing what we’ve been discussing. But the middle of the storm is not the right time to learn how to act.

Don’t wait for the storm to figure out if your foundation is solid. Make sure it is. How? With practice! Mennonites are used to hearing calls to nonviolent resistance at Assembly.

At the 1967 MWC Assembly in Amsterdam, Vincent Harding called on Mennonites to come alongside our Black sisters and brothers in the freedom struggle, to come alongside the many revolutionary movements around the world.

At the 1984 Assembly in Strasbourg, Ron Sider urged the church to develop a highly trained peacemaking task force – which sparked the creation of Community Peacemakers Team.

But most of us have stayed on the sidelines, where things are comfortable. In a nice little house on the beach.

What does it look like to practise love of the enemy on a collective level in our time and place? It may very well look like nonviolent war resistance. Maybe Mennonites could prepare for war resistance with an “anti-military service,” like a nonviolent resistance boot camp. Nations prepare for war with military service. There is first-aid training for emergency health care. It might be time for us to create a widespread training for regular church people to learn and practise the basics of civil resistance.

Some people do and will commit their whole life to nonviolent peacemaking, and we desperately need people like that. But we also need a foundation of practice for the whole church.

In most of Europe, we have more experience in discussion and debate than we do in activism, war resistance, revolution or social change. We need the help of the global church if we want to find our footing in the field of practice. We know that we have brothers and sisters who have experience in nonviolent resistance. Please train us. Practise with us. So we can learn together. That’s how we’ll hold fast when the storms come.



Salomé Haldemann is a trained occupational therapist and a graduate of theology and peace studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, USA. She interns as a pastor of Eglise Evangélique Mennonite de Béthel, Neuf-Brisach, France.

We are the hands of God in times of crisis

Thursday morning Ebenezer G. Mondez

A year ago, our conference leader – whom you might remember as “the Hallelujah man” – Bishop Ambrocio Porcincula died due to stroke. I want to remember him today, because he is close to me like my own grandfather. As far as I know, he never skipped the MWC Assembly ever since he started joining. I know he would be here too if he were still alive, and he would be proud of me standing on the stage today.

Three days after my bishop’s death, my father tested positive for COVID-19 and got a severe pneumonia. It was one of the worst crises we ever experienced as a church and as a family because my father is the next person to lead the conference after Bishop Porcincula’s death. During our time of mourning, my father’s life was also hanging on a thin thread.

I thought we will lose my father too, because we could not find a hospital that would take him in. But even though me and my siblings were deeply distraught, we gathered our faith and agreed to take care of our father at home. We did our best to get everything he needed as much as we could to help him survive.

I could not imagine a second death of a loved one and a church father to all; it would be devastating. But, in the middle of our struggle, we found comfort in the knowledge that God is in control. We found peace in faith that whatever happens, it is God’s will.

After two weeks of home care, my father recovered and was healed by the Lord.

I believe my family’s COVID crisis story is just one of millions. None of us are free from crisis these past two years, but despite the presence of affliction and pain, our faith is our constant source of peace.

Many people are suffering — crushed by the weight of their troubles. But Psalm 9:9 says the Lord is a refuge for them, a safe place they can run to.

Our struggles are our constant reminder that God is our help. Now, we need God more than ever.

As a communion, we are praying about the struggles of our churches in India as

they are facing persecution because of their Christian beliefs. In Myanmar, our brothers and sisters are suffering from political uncertainties that resulted in violence. And in Ukraine, many are displaced due to war.

But despite all of that, we are here: you came! For those who are online: you are showing up! (It’s either you need to wake up too early or stay up late, but you show up!)

Isn’t it beautiful to see each other again? Isn’t it beautiful to see the gathering of your brothers and sisters in this place today?

Isn’t it beautiful that despite the pandemic and war, we registered early this year and trusted that everything would be fine by July? That was a huge leap of faith!

As part of the registration team, I am amazed to see how a lot of you registered immediately as soon as we opened the on-site registration. You registered early despite the uncertainties happening around us. During that time, we didn’t even know how the war in Ukraine would turn, but still people from Europe were some of the first people to register.

Today, I want to remember our brothers and sisters in Ukraine. Many of them choose to stay in the middle of the war and help with those who are in need. Anabaptist-Mennonite churches gather whatever they can to help the people of Ukraine. War is ugly but when people choose to come together, helping each other in times of need, it is a beautiful sight.

In times of trouble, we are the extension of God’s hands. The miracles of God come through us.

That is what living together in times of crisis looks like. We forget about our differences, our disagreements, and find our common goal for peace. Peace is not a destination, but a journey and on that journey, we cannot walk it alone; we need each other.

To everyone who responds to their brothers’ and sisters’ call for help; to those who give donations; for you who volunteer; to those who help people find justice; to those who take care of people that are strangers – thank you!

You already took one step closer to peaceful world we all desire.

You are the extension of God’s arm.

Now I challenge everyone to do the same for our brothers and sisters in India and Myanmar too. Let us try to learn more about their situation and find out how we can be the physical hands of Christ in their time of need.

A year ago, during our COVID crisis, my family needed to stay in home isolation for more than a month while my dad recovered from COVID. We needed to depend on the generosity of our friends and churchmates for all our needs like food, oxygen refills and medicine. Looking back on how God used people to provide for our needs during the time we needed them most still amazes me. Even in the middle of the night, there were people who did not hesitate to offer help. Even the most unexpected person, whom you think cannot give you anything because they are also in need, would knock on our gate to give us something out of genuine care for us.

Truly, crisis and hardships bring out the best in us. We see the hands of God working through all of us.

I want to end with Romans 15:13 which says: “I pray that the God who gives hope will fill you with much joy and peace as you trust in him. Then you will have more and more hope, and it will flow out of you by the power of the Holy Spirit” (ERV).

Trust in the power of the Holy Spirit that there is hope in this difficult time. We, as a communion of churches, will be each other’s help in times of need. When the power of the Holy Spirit flows through us you cannot help but take action. The Holy Spirit is our driving force to reach out to those who are in need. And this is what living together in times of crisis look like for those who follow Christ.



Ebenezer G. Mondez is the YABs (Young AnaBaptists) Committee representative for Asia and the Pacific (2015-2022), YABs mentor (2022-2028). He is a member of Lumban Mennonite Bible Church, Philippines.

Living the good life is good and even necessary

Thursday morning

Adriana Belinda Rodriguez Velasquez

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.” Psalm 133:1 is an affirmation of how the biblical David delighted in the company of his brothers. As a social species, humans need the fellowship of others. Through fellowship, we witness to and live out our faith; it is where we receive mutual support because we all depend on others in one way or another for material, emotional and spiritual support.

Fellowship, the opportunity to share life with others, is a gift from God. From birth, we seek acceptance from others and we depend upon the loving care of family. Sibling relationships and friendships encourage and guide us, making our lives easier, especially in those difficult moments we all must face.

Living in fellowship is God's gift to us.

We were created as social beings to share with others; this is part of God's plan for us – and God's plans are good and perfect.

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us that God's plans for us are to prosper us and not to harm us. We can realize that living with others produces many benefits that we ignore and therefore sometimes we work against ourselves and others.

Research has proved that fellowship is good for our physical and mental health just as Ecclesiastes illustrates in chapter 4:9-12: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For



Tiz Brotosudarmo

At the Global Church Village, Assembly participants had space to express creativity through drawing and colouring.

if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to the one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

In another example, when Jacob met Esau again after a lengthy separation due to their differences, his face displayed his joy of knowing that they could count on one another and he said: “... truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God” (Genesis 33:10). This anecdote is evidence that being able to count on one another is a gift from God.

According to the Apostle, Paul, this is a Christian obligation: Hebrews 13:16: “Do not neglect to do good and share what you have” ... Sharing is an indispensable characteristic of living with or in fellowship and implicates other people with different ways of doing so.

We need to understand that as children of God, we are predestined to live well and we must do so while interacting with everyone else – in communion. This lifestyle that includes relationships with other people happens in a special way that overcomes all the barriers that can come between us. The Holy Spirit manifested powerfully during Pentecost when people were together in unity (Acts 2:1-2).

In the book of Mark 2:1-12 we find the story of the paralyzed man who benefited due to the efforts of friends, neighbours, siblings (I don't know; there aren't a lot of details). There were many barriers they faced, among them the great crowd that blocked the way, and they had to carry him.

Can you imagine how much effort it took to get him onto the roof of the house, make a hole in it, and then lower a dead weight? It took enormous strength and commitment. It is redundant to say that without the effort of those who carried the paralyzed man, he would not have experienced the miracle.

We can identify the characteristics of these people (the paralytic's friends) that enable effective fellowship – love, service, unity, empathy, kindness,

patience and faith – without which it would not have been possible to attain the final victory for this man.

Throughout the Bible there are stories that help us identify the advantages of learning to practice healthy fellowship with others: the beautiful friendship between David and Jonathan; or Mary, Martha and Lazarus with Jesus.

It is important to note that time spent with friends, conversing about our projects, creates emotional bonds; improves our self-esteem; releases stress; is therapeutic. We laugh and this produces positive reactions within our body, we share our concerns which lightens the load, and people enjoy being sociable creating healthier lifestyles as a result.

It is important to highlight that we build life through life-giving messages and actions. A positive attitude makes us likeable, sought after, followed.

If we want to be peacemakers, a positive attitude should be part of our daily lifestyle. Our world needs these peacebuilding actions that create healthy fellowship, tolerance and solidarity. We need to commit ourselves to doing good, to the divine project of love and at times give more than is expected of us. As children of God, we must make manifest the divine plan of abundant life, seeing the face of God in the face of our neighbour.

These characteristics have to do with harmonious relationships, mutual support, sharing time, laughter, agreement and even disagreement. That is life.

What is the key to living this way? Approach others with empathy, love, solidarity, willingness and faith. It will always be necessary to know how much life we have to offer others, how connected we are to the well of life so that we can definitely transmit it to others.



Adriana Belinda Rodriguez Velasquez is a psychologist, counsellor, wife and grandmother, and a member of MWC's Peace Commission. She is a member of Caminando con Dios, part of the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Hondureña.

We do not lose heart

Thursday night **Jeremiah Choi**

In April, I received an invitation of sharing on the topic “living together in the hostile environment.”

The title really stirred my heart.

And I think one of the reasons of my invitation is that they know we Hong Kong people were living in a hostile environment in the past few years, an environment that was not favourable to us.

And the Scripture that caught my eyesight was 2 Corinthians 4:1.

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not” (KJV).

As a man of 60-some years, I grew up in a very good environment, I would say. Before all these changes, when people asked me how good Hong Kong is, I would say that Hong Kong is very good. If you live in Hong Kong, you’ll feel safe – let’s say you can walk on the street even at midnight; you’ll enjoy freedom of speech; good education system; good and low-priced hospitals; access to a job if you’re willing to work. And most of all, things work in Hong Kong.

However, it has changed. The Hong Kong I’m living in now is not the Hong Kong I used to know. Some people will say that it started in the year 2014. For me, the significant changes started in 2019.

On 4 June 2019, more than 180 000 people gathered at Hong Kong’s Victoria Park to commemorate 30 years since the Tiananmen Square crackdown.

On 9 June 2019, more than 1 000 000 people went out to the streets: they struck, they sang hymns.

It was basically a peaceful protest. However, one day after, there were clashes between police and anti-extradition bill demonstrators.

On 12 June 2019, Hong Kong faced more protests against the extradition law change. This time, many church leaders came out and spoke to the government. Some brothers and sisters prayed and sang hymns in the spot. Christians were caring for peace and nonviolence in all the actions. Many people followed the Christians to sing the chorus: “Sing Hallelujah to the Lord” on the streets.

This time, more than 2 000 000 people came out to protest for their freedom.

Since then, protest and demonstrations never ceased. As time goes on, both the police and the demonstrators have gotten more and more violent. I have never seen this since 1968.

The slogan of the demonstrators changed from “Hong Kong people: add oil” to “Hong Kong people: protest” to “Hong Kong people: revenge”

For some time, there were protest almost every day. By the end of 2019, more than 7 000 people had already been arrested by the police.

“Where should we stand?” People outside the church want to know the church’s position. People inside the church ask their church leaders on which side their churches are standing.

In fact, Hong Kong people are divided into the Blue and the Yellow. The Blue are those who are for the government and the police. The Yellow are those who are against them.

There are conflicts in this society, in the families and in the churches. There is *no peace*. Our challenge is that: how to be a peacemaker when others choose to be violent? And how to live together in a hostile environment?

What positions are the churches taking?

I will never forget this: On 12 June 2019, I was standing in the middle of the road next to the Hong Kong government headquarters. On my right hand, there were Christians singing hymns and praying for Hong Kong, while on my left hand, there were protesters trying hard to block the main road outside.

In Hong Kong, some churches choose to stand on the Yellow side, and some choose the Blue. However, we Mennonites, as a Peace Church, we choose standing on Jesus’s side. We want to be a bridge between the Yellow and the Blue, a bridge between the peaceful and the violent, a bridge between the people and the government, a bridge between the protesters and the police. We have the obligation to promote peace. We regard that this is a way to fellow Jesus and “Here we stand!”

Right now, people are leaving Hong Kong. In our church, Agape Mennonite Church,

10 percent of our members already gone, mainly immigrated to England. And people are still planning to leave Hong Kong, to seek for a place of freedom, a place of hope.

Many years ago, I wrote a song inspired by a poem.

The title is like this: “Running away from famine – 3 million refugees leaving their hometown painfully.”

The poem was written in the year 1933. It describes the situation and feeling of refugees who moved to the northeast of China from their motherland because they had nothing to eat.

However, by that time, the northeast of China was under the control of the Japanese army. For me, they were running away from a place of hopelessness to a place of hopelessness. It touched my heart, and so I wrote a 13-minute chorus.

For these people, they did not know what their fate will be. They would not know what would happen after they went to the northeast. One thing they did know was that if they didn’t leave they would die.

Many people describe the immigrants from Hong Kong as refugees. If you immigrate, you’ll make good plans. If you don’t have any plans or if it is not your plan to immigrate, then you are a refugee.

Why do they leave Hong Kong? They are afraid of tomorrow. They have lost their hearts for Hong Kong.

In 2 Corinthians 4:1, the apostle Paul encourages the church:

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” (KJV)

Paul encourages them not to lose heart. Why? Paul says that it is because “we have this ministry.”

Brothers and sisters, I’m telling you now that I’m not going to leave Hong Kong. We pastors are at high risk. We are the ones who need to leave. But I’m not going to leave because I am called to stay and to build the Mennonite churches in Hong Kong until I have finished my task and until I receive a new call from my boss, my heavenly Father.

Brothers and sisters, if you are in time of darkness, if you are facing an unpredictable tomorrow, if you are

If you are in a time of darkness..., just lookup to God and look back to your calling.

disappointed with people, just look up to God and look back to your calling.

At the end, I would like to draw your attention to the prayer of apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:17-19.

Paul asks God to open the eyes of the Ephesians in order that they will see three things:

1. the hope of his calling,
2. the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,
3. the exceeding greatness of his power.

May our heavenly Father open the eyes of the Hong Kong Christians.

May Jesus open the eyes of you and me.

May the Holy Spirit bless us all.

Because “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21, KJV).



Jeremiah Choi serves as pastor of Agape Mennonite Church, Hong Kong, and as Mennonite World Conference regional representative for Northeast Asia. He is also trained as a composer.



Peleka Jonathhan

GYS delegates visit GKMI Puri Anugerah church.



Madhur Lakra

Assembly staff dance Ethiopian style to the Amharic song “Geta, geta, geta.”



Kus Darianto

Participants cross barriers by meeting new friends from around the world.



Winchi Ansari

Though the children’s program, children learn about each other and Jesus in a fun way.



Sushant Rajat Nand

At the Global Church Village, participants put their hand prints on a collaborative mural that was later presented to the governor of Central Java at the closing program.

United in the defence of life: water more precious than gold

Friday morning Oscar Suárez

Once the laws became progressively more flexible during the lockdown we all experienced in 2020, I was able to cycle through the mountains in my home city. Although we were not allowed to mill about on the street, we were allowed to go out and do sports for a few hours at a time.

During the pandemic that so radically changed our lives, the best thing I could do to remain grounded was go cycling. I enjoyed every outing, not only for the physical activity but also for the opportunity to take in marvellous views hidden within the mountains of the beautiful city where I was born, Ibagué, Colombia.

Each morning, despite sometimes feeling sleepy, I got ready to go for a ride, anticipating discovering more of the beautiful work of our Creator. I was looking for a new, colourful scene to photograph, a new view from the top of the mountains, simple peasant families waving and urging me on along the route, and of course, a new physical challenge. I realized that, more than the physical exercise, it was like therapy, giving me peace of mind.

Each outing confirmed for me what the superlative emphasizes in Genesis 1:31: “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, *it was very good*”. God’s creation is perfect! He put everything in its place, including us as human beings. This verse is included in the account of the sixth day on which God created humanity.

The scenery that I was able to take in, the vegetation, the animals and also the humans are all part of God’s creation. All of it together is included within the adjective used only at the end of the sixth day “God saw that it was good”.

After seeing these great wonders, I asked myself: *Why do we want to destroy God’s perfect work? Why do we, as humans, expend so much effort in destroying it? Is this a reflection of our sinful nature?*

I am convinced that a large part of

the damage is due to the ambitions of powerful people. And yes, ambition and envy are what prompt them to ride roughshod over others and creation itself without considering the damage being caused for the benefit of only a few.

I have already told you that my city is surrounded by majestic mountains that harbour beautiful views and a wealth of natural diversity for all to see. Well, almost, but not quite all. In addition to peasants, indigenous communities and cyclists, a multinational company has discovered the wealth hidden beneath the soil.

They requested a licence to explore and then exploit open pit gold mines. This spectacular place – brimming with diversity – is a source of life not only because of the water that springs up there, but also because it produces a great quantity of food for the region. This is being put at risk, all for the sake of gold.

Naturally, the peasant, indigenous and civil society communities joined together to put a stop to this unprecedented ecocide in the region. My church community did not stand by idly on this problem. The Ibagué Mennonite Church joined the movement that slowly but surely turned into a symbol of resistance and love of creation. As part of our commitment to steward creation, we joined with other movements and expressions of faith that diverge from our own. We joined because of our love of the natural beauty and life itself.

In his book, *Anabaptist Essentials*, Palmer Becker reminds us of three core values that he says define us as Anabaptists. We are probably all familiar with them.

Can you recall them?

1. Jesus is the centre of our faith.
2. Community is the centre of our life.
3. Reconciliation is the centre of our work.

I can see these three values reflected in the Ibagué Mennonite Church’s experience I just told you about.

Jesus is the centre of our faith, guiding us in love for one another and for Creation.

Community is the centre of our lives, reflected in who we care about and as we help one another to defend our territory.

And, **reconciliation is the centre of our work**, bringing together people around a shared problem in spite of their divergent thoughts and beliefs.

Beyond this, though, is the task of not only being reconciled to God and our neighbour, but also with nature – our sister and the work of our Father; *Pacha Mama* (Mother Earth); the source of life.

Thanks to God, and the unity of the people, a public consultation managed to stop the exploration and the exploitation of gold in our mountains. The project tried to sell the idea of development for the region, but the people came out on the side of water and life in place of gold.

I am aware that this does not make up for the suffering of our planet at this moment, but it is an example of the change that can be achieved when we work together as a community, caring for creation. Of course, small actions are also valuable and count, and even more so if each one of us practices caring for the environment.

So, I would like to conclude with a question.

- If all of us have heard of reduce, reuse, recycle, what are we doing to leave a small mark for the better in our environment?
- What changes are we bringing about in our communities?
- Are we impacting our contexts with the Anabaptist value of reconciliation with God, our neighbours and nature with the utmost of love?



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Interethnic and ecumenical work in violent contexts

Friday morning

José Rutilio Rivas Domínguez

Ephesians 2:14-17

“For he is our peace, in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near...”

The varied global contexts characterized by polarized ideologies, culture, ethnicities, religions, technologies and economies – with their power structures that oppress societies – are what lead to war and all kinds of human rights violations. The hope of creating more just societies is frustrated, making reconciliation with God, nature and ourselves more difficult. In such circumstance it becomes possible to see the deep resentment in all its daily forms that occupies our human realities.

This reality demands that the Anabaptist church and other confessions and religious expressions urgently reconsider the importance of Christ’s gospel. The

kingdom of God needs to be built in such contexts through reconciliation strategies that cross ethnic, economic, technological, religious, and cultural boundaries.

The apostle Paul was able to read the socio-political and religious situation between Jews and other first century societies well. He did so by virtue of his Judeo-Christian worldview informed by an understanding of Jesus’ ministry as the Son of God: **breaking down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us... thus making peace.**

Social dialogue becomes an essential tool for transforming society that has been forced to put up with incomprehensible wars for decades. The intentional and thoughtless practice of war has destroyed the social fabric and placed people’s ethnic and cultural identities at risk. War leaves ethnic, cultural and faunistic genocide in its wake that primarily affects the most vulnerable communities.

For instance, in Colombia, the groups most affected by the armed conflict have been Black and Indigenous communities in ethnic and collective territories. They have been coerced into abandoning their amicable relationship with their environment and social context. When this happened, the conflict led to drastic changes in how differences are resolved between people. The use of weapons became the only tool for handling differences. This

context has forced sectors of society to use develop a shared vision for building peace through the use of social dialogue.

Social dialogue entails finding common ground that allows for finding practical solutions for living together peacefully, with the goal of embracing the humanity and reciprocity in each other. This idea flows from the Bantu word used in southern Africa and popularised by Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu: *ubuntu*, which means “I am because you are”. We exist because of a community.

In Colombia, we have a strategy that seeks to respond to these challenges. We have begun interethnic and ecumenical work from a collective worldview that is more than a theological and religious posture. We start with various processes that are community-based, using local know-how and capacity, with a respect for autonomy. In this way, we work toward concrete actions.

We serve as a space where inter-ethnic organizations and churches can connect and be strengthened as we support them in building and making their life-giving plans for peace visible in their territories.

Our work is centred around reconciliation processes, ethnic peace and local development, through strategic alliances between churches, government bodies, the private sector, regional peace platforms and international organizations.

Core strategy

Work in favour of holistic and sustainable ethnic community development in ethnic regions that facilitate linkages between base communities and regional organizations and peace agendas through dialogue that focuses on resolving conflict in local areas.

We use the following lines of action:

- 1. Victims’ rights: Life, dignity and justice.** Holistic reparation for victims of the armed conflict (includes truth, justice, reparation, assurances of non-repetition), full enjoyment of their rights, safe return to their local communities with dignity (education, health, shelter, security).



Barbara Hege Galle

The Solo delegation visited a site representing the five state-recognized religions in Indonesia.

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2. **Peace education: Spiritualities, cultures and territories.** Training in citizenship, human rights, cultural identity and democratic participation, development of shared visions for the region, and nonviolent social and political conflict transformation.
3. **Citizenship participation guarantees. Local autonomy and self government.** Strengthening direct, participative and representative democracy; consolidating multi sectoral citizen pacts and moving towards an inclusive political climate that respect the ethnic, social and cultural pluralities present in the nation.
4. **Production: Ethnic development and creation care.** Guarantee food security and sovereignty from an ethnic and environmental sustainability perspective.
5. **Reconciliation: Spirit of dialogue and social collaboration.** Reach agreements based on justice and social inclusion; open a path to the future through building relational networks of trust amongst diverse social actors, the private sector and government bodies. Justice, peace, development and reconciliation all require space for transforming conflict through dialogue, participation and social agreement with respect to policies that deliver well-being to communities.
6. **Peaceful communication:** This proposal is oriented toward strengthening the network of popular communicators so that they share, build and strengthen processes and communication skills rooted in afro, indigenous and mestizo communities that inhabit subregions of the country. Also, these communicators make actions related to peace building, historical memory, resistance, forgiveness, reconciliation and protection of the regions and their development visible.



José Rutilio Rivas Domínguez is a Mennonite Brethren pastor, theologian, social enterprise entrepreneur and peacebuilder in Colombia, and a member of the MWC Mission Commission.

Let us mutually care for one another

Friday night Cindy Alpizar Alpizar

Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus' message in this passage is so relevant and necessary today since, one way or another, we all suffer from pain, death and consternation. This message from our Lord is true and generous for all of us who are carrying sorrow, pain, anxiety, fear, guilt and so many other accusations. Now more than ever, life circumstances exhaust us as they weigh on our hearts and prevent us from living the abundant life that Christ offers us in his Word.

This is a universal promise of rest, full of

grace and open to all who approach the well that is Jesus Christ, the one who is able to free us from the unbearable of our situations. The rest Jesus offers is hidden from the wise and intelligent, and revealed to infants, according to Matthew 11:25, to those who are like children in their ability to hope, who are innocent and vulnerable. It is for those who have understood the good news, redemption, reconciliation with God, ourselves and others. We are expected to share this charismatic gift of rest composed of comfort, restoration and rebirth with others as a sign of God's protection.

The passage invites us to put on Christ's yoke, a crossbar that joins us to Jesus but also to those who need support to make their burden light and easy to bear. This yoke unites us in love that is free of pretense, showing a true interest, empathy and willingness to share with others, thus becoming God-made-flesh once again.



Volunteers (pink t-shirts) and participants in the children and youth program enjoyed the Global Church Village.

Kus Darlanto

Bring healing and relief

As a church, we are called to present to the Lord those who have been surprised by fear, guilt and shame so that they might receive healing and relief. We are not to be like those who were filled with rage and took the sinful woman before Jesus that he might condemn her to death by stoning in which they planned to gleefully participate (John 8:1-11). Jesus makes them face their own sin and recall their fallen human nature and they withdraw, overcome.

Today, we are not to be informants who judge and exclude; we are to be therapists who bring rest and relief to those who are trapped in spiritual prisons, recalling the moments in our own lives when we traversed the valley of the shadow of death, trapped by yokes of various kinds of slavery that were destroying us. However, Jesus stood before us, looked us in the eyes with understanding, stooped down and untied our shame, thus releasing us to salvation.

That historic salvation offered to us at that precise moment is the same salvation that starts here with Jesus' Word and Spirit. That presence is alive and well among us, and all who are part of the body of Christ, as a tangible sign of the kingdom of God and God's *shalom*.

Following two years of pandemic, spiced with wars, ethnic and racial conflict, mass migrations and human protests, there are many survivors (some less scathed than others), but many of whom have lost almost all their material possessions in the fight for survival. They walk in grief for their lost fathers, mothers, siblings and children. They have lost their stability – mental, emotional and even spiritual. Entire towns have been razed and destroyed. Human greed incessantly consumes, sowing hopelessness wherever it goes.

The church was also shaken to the core, jolted out of its passivity that kept it at a distance from many sad and painful truths; it was forced to redefine its mission, re-read the Word of God through new eyes, and work beyond its walls.

Break the paradigms

Now continues to be a perfect moment and opportunity to break the paradigms that accuse, build walls and keep us apart. May we allow the God of patience and consolation to give us this same sentiment

of Christ so that we may unanimously give the glory to God (Romans 15:5-13) knowing that it means nothing more and nothing less than loving our brothers and sisters, receiving them as Christ received us.

Through friendship, hospitality and applying a balm to the wounds, shifting the gravestone where death once lay and untying the bandages, we can stabilize and affirm all those whom we should receive with open arms filled with the hope and promises of long ago that are made manifest here and now through men and women who do the will of God.

May we rejoice with praise, singing out God's name in the midst of all the people present, that we may be filled with joy and peace while we wait.

Let us not continue wearily along our way; rather, let us be clothed with new energy so that we may also offer relief to those who have no idea how to continue.

Clothed with new energy

Yes, it is time for rest to be restored. We should proclaim this today in spite of what we see and experience because for a long while now we do not walk by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) but by faith in what Jesus, our Sabbath, has proclaimed. Jesus calls us to stop, surrender our anxiety and pain to him, knowing that Jesus is able to care for us. Let us not continue wearily along our way; rather, let us be clothed with new energy so that we may also offer relief to those who have no idea how to continue. Let us pray that the Lord's peace reign in our heart (Colossians 3:15-17), being one body that is grateful for the presence Jesus left with us.

May we not abandon the little ones, the most vulnerable, those who have been left along the wayside. Oh Lord, may your



Kus Darlanto

Under the guidance of Yeanny Moestkasari Soeryo, participants used tried their hand at the batik techniques for cloth designs.

Word abundantly abide in us, that we may be motivated to wisely care for one another while giving thanks, because we can say "*Ebenezer*, you have helped us."

In this beautiful country and this meeting of brothers and sisters from so many different backgrounds, let us celebrate life, our faith, our Anabaptist and Mennonite traditions, while not forgetting the point of this meeting: **crossing barriers** means going out to meet the other, discover who they are, and meet them in their otherness with love, just like the father who waited full of hope, day and night, for his son to return no matter his condition when he arrived home.

To conclude, in this Assembly, more than ever, may we stop and examine our faith and how we live. May God help us to promote life, justice, mercy and lots of compassion. May our faith communities, our ministries and our own lives provide rest to those who are weary and burdened so that their burdens may be light and bearable. Amen.



Cindy Alpizar Alpizar serves as a pastor and administrator at Discipulos de Jesús los Lagos, Heredia, Costa Rica, and with the national church (Asociación de Iglesias Cristianas Menonitas). She is passionate about serving people who live on the streets.

Intergenerational solidarity relationships

Saturday morning

Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube

When we think of older generations, we think of those who came before us, the ones whose shoulders we stand on. However, when we think about the solidarity of our relationship with those generations, there seems to be a gap.

Intergenerational relationships are of utmost importance. There is immense value in passing on wisdom from one generation to the other. We can learn from the mistakes of those who came before us, but that can only happen if we choose to stay connected. A strong connection allows for mentorship, advice and direction. Older people have lived through experiences and circumstances that younger people have not. This is the surest way to share wisdom.

Bridging the gap between one generation and the next is also a vital way of preserving the core values of the church and of passing on the baton to the next generation.

From a biblical perspective, intergenerational solidarity can bring about blessings or curses. In Deuteronomy 28, there is a list of blessings and curses.

“But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you....

The Lord will send upon you disaster, panic, and frustration in everything you attempt to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.” (Deuteronomy 28:1-6) “But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees, which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you....

The Lord will send upon you disaster, panic, and frustration in everything you

attempt to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 20)

“All these curses shall come upon you, pursuing and overtaking you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God, by observing the commandments and the decrees that he commanded you. They shall be among you and your descendants as a sign and a portent forever.

Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lack of everything. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.” (Deuteronomy 28:45-48)

In Deuteronomy 28, we can see how both blessings and curses can be passed on from one generation to the next. Examples today include but are not limited to remnants of colonialism, racism, injustices, wars, violence, the merciless killings of minority groups or innocent people and jealousy.

We can see the negative impacts all these acts have had on different generations and different races. All these sins bring about curses which can destroy intergenerational relationships.

One generation may ask the other: *Why didn't you stand up for what is right? When black men or women were being killed, why did you remain silent? During the time of the Holocaust, why didn't you stand up for what is right? When war was erupting, why didn't you speak up?*

To this day, my question to older generations concerning injustices of the past is still: Why didn't you stand up for what is right?

How can we be sure that God will bless us and bless the ones who will come after us? By living the life of obedience that God has called us to.

What are actions we can take to create, nurture or repair intergenerational relationships?

1. Repent

We can ask God to forgive our forefathers and -mothers for the sins they committed knowingly or unknowingly. Sins that have brought upon curses on their generation, and the generations to come.

According to 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We must confess our sins and that includes confessing the sins of the generations that came before us.

God will release a blessing over our lives and our future generations. It is one thing to ask for forgiveness, however it is important not to continue in those old ways or continue living in sin. If we have chosen to follow the way of Christ, then there is no room for malice, violence, racism or injustices.

2. Pray

We can seek God's face concerning the future of the church. We can pray that God will bridge the gap between generations and for meaningful relationships to be created. We can also pray that God reveals God's divine will and purpose for our lives. The Bible encourages us to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17, NIV)

3. Act

We can be intentional about creating spaces for different generations and age groups to interact. We can find ways to build intergenerational relationships through our families, the church and our communities. We can also create mentorship programs between young people and older adults. “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead” (James 2:26).

Intergenerational solidarity can also strengthen our relationship with God. “One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness. They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant



**International ensemble (l-r):
Nohemý García, Bhavana Masih, Akke-Clara
Thimm-Stelwagen.**



International ensemble: Josue Damiao.

goodness, and shall sing aloud of your righteousness (Psalm 145:4-7).

Faith can be passed on from one generation to the other. When we reflect on the wonderful acts of God in our lives, we can trace it back to generations before us. We can only have a strong appreciation for God's work when there is good relation between one generation and the other. Sharing our testimonies with each other can strengthen our faith in God.



Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube is the YABs (Young AnaBaptists) Committee Africa representative (2015-2022) and a member of the Brethren in Christ Church Zimbabwe. She currently lives in Canada where she pursues her passion for environmental science the God-given responsibly to steward the earth's resources well.

How can I celebrate?

Saturday morning

Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle

“**A**nd David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.” (2 Samuel 6:5 ESV).

Even though I had only a short time to prepare for this, the idea comes from my heart that I was thinking about for a very long time.

I am tired of war, conflict, hunger, poverty, division, hatred, gun violence, black and white class difference, the oppression of women, slaughter of children and women, fake news, liars and unjust authorities and leaders and so many, many issues that you all are aware of.

COVID-19... during the high point of it in the news: we were counting numbers and when the number goes down, we feel happy that it's getting down. Yet, we missed that those are not just numbers, but people, Humans, created in the image of God. It's sad!

In the middle of all of this turmoil around me, around the globe, how can I celebrate in a situation like this? When I am told that I can't cross over because I am black from a poor country? when I am interrogated like a criminal in most of the immigrations in most countries? when I am treated as burden and a problem? when I am treated as a terrorist? My uniqueness is being treated as a threat, my choices have been rejected: when I live in the mercy of my superiors, how can I celebrate?! Where there is no hope, why and how do I need to celebrate! How can I enjoy?

I paused and asked myself what do we mean when we say celebrate? So, I decided to consult my dictionary.

Celebrate: in one of the definitions, it is an acknowledgement with a social gathering or enjoyable activity a significant or happy day or an event.

Okay! So, Celebration is an acknowledgment!

It's being together.

It's to see significance in others.

Unless you are significant to me and I am significant for you, there is no celebration of togetherness.

Seeing significance in others crosses barriers. It helps you and me to celebrate our togetherness regardless of what.

I can forget my pain if I am significant to you.

I can pass the storm if I am significant to you.

I leave my superiority if I am significant to you.

I learn from my mistakes if I am significant to you.

My being rich or poor won't be a hindrance anymore if I am significant to you.

If I am significant for you and you for me, I can celebrate at any time and any place.

As David celebrated before the Lord with songs and shouts of joy, let us celebrate our togetherness in a time like this. As we celebrate our togetherness ... let us do it with the understanding of our significance to each other, with exuberance came from the heart, doing it in a genuine act of celebration and without exhibitionism or despising.

One way of the many we can celebrate our togetherness always in MWC is through the Deacon Commission work.



Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle is a youth leader with Debu Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia. She is completing her term as YABs mentor (2015-2022) and will take the role of secretary of the Deacons Commission.

“Very good” in troubled times

Saturday morning **Jürg Bräker**

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. This is what Genesis tells us when God had created heaven and earth.

God is celebrating the goodness of all creation.

Is this still true? Is this “very good” still there in these troubled times? Where is it in the horror when a mother has to watch her children being killed by soldiers?

When women are raped, when terrorists attack villages? Sometimes this “very good” seems to sink back and disappear into deep darkness.

In Mennonite World Conference, I serve as a deacon. We visit people to stand with them to say that the global body of the church is here with you. We visit where the church celebrates in joy, like when a new church building is opened. We visit people in suffering, like in DR Congo, in Burkina Faso. And I have discovered: Yes, the beauty of God is still there dwelling here among us in these dark hours.

In DR Congo, an MWC Deacons delegation visited some of the churches that had opened their homes to displaced people fleeing from the war zones in the east. The visitors listened to stories of unimaginable horror, to women who had been forced to watch their husbands and children killed, to women who had been raped and had barely survived. Many of them just sat silent, unable to tell what had happened to them.

As a visitor, what words can you find to comfort? The visitors often just sat, wept, helpless, left without words to respond.

And it was these women who found the strength and words to comfort their visitors left speechless when faced with these horrors. These women were standing alongside, comforting those who came to comfort them. I see the beauty of God the Creator in them in this deep embrace. The “very good” of God shines up out of all this darkness.

We visit each other like the friends of Job came to visit him in his sorrow. They came and sat in silence with him for seven days and seven nights. Sat with him in his darkness. They sat with Job who struggled to find the justice of God, struggled to find a God he can love.

The word deacon originally means ‘acting in the place of the one who sends you.’ A deacon is the presence of the one who sends the deacon. Close to those special envoys are the angels who bring with them the presence of God, bringing to light the “very good” of creation.

Yes, there were angels present in these visits in the Congo. I hope sometimes they entered with the deacons. But in those moments of speechless tears, as they who had suffered terrible violence comforted their visitors – these women were the angels. In their faces, I saw the goodness of God shining out of darkness. We had been visiting in houses of angels.

So let us enter these houses of angels in this broken world, sit with them in sorrow, silently, sometimes with tears, and then, maybe much later, even with shouts of joy. Let us celebrate the goodness of God visiting among us.



Jürg Bräker serves as general secretary of *Konferenz der Mennoniten der Schweiz/Conférence Mennonite Suisse* (the Swiss Mennonite conference) and as elder and theologian for *Mennoniten Gemeinde Bern (Alttäufer)*. He also serves on the MWC Deacons Commission.



Rizalee Pilare

Speaker Barbara Nkala (r) and interpreter Daniel Nugroho (l) were broadcast from JKI Ungaran to the main audience at STT Sangakakala in Salatiga.

Saturday night **Barbara Nkala**

In Africa, when we talk about celebrating, we are unpacking robust and unfettered joy, loud and heartfelt singing, vibrant dancing to music and drums, ululating, whistling, stamping of feet and clapping of hands. Celebration denotes a merry heart! We celebrate when there is love, joy, peace and happiness.

In Southern Africa we have a concept called *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* says, “I am because you are ... a person is a person because of other people.” This concept embraces all sorts of values such as love, respect, togetherness, forgiveness, kindness and others. I believe that the *Ubuntu* concept is strongly akin to Christianity, because it says, “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12a, NIV). It is, after all, the Jesus way.

Having said that, *Ubuntu* does not always function perfectly. We live in an ailing planet, where people are broken, hurting and miserable as individuals; as families; as church and communities; as nations and globally too. Love, peace and joy are a far cry from many of us in a society filled with

God's love, forgiveness and reconciliation

pain. Strife is rife within and without. There is need to rebuild destroyed relationships.

The story of the prodigal son has always been an excellent illustration of how we leave the comfort of God's goodness and push for our own way as our hearts direct. When we hit brick wall after brick wall and begin to suffer, we then come to our senses and plan to go home to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. And our loving Father is, in essence, always waiting to slaughter a fattened calf and call for celebration and jubilation.

I wish to share a testimony, which might be a reflection of what happens in families, in communities, in any nation and also world over. Though it happened a long time ago, I have witnessed similar happening all the time in families and in my community.

This is the story of a prodigal daughter, spiritually, and a prodigal father.

I was brought up in a home that espoused the Lord God deeply, a legacy of my paternal grandfather, further nurtured by my devout mother. Life was good. My father was brilliant, well respected and he had a very good and well-paying job that cared for the family well. But in my youth, things began to change. Sin had been crouching at the door, and as Peter says, the enemy is forever prowling around like a roaring lion seeking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:7).

Father strayed from home, then on his return, he decided to kick my mother out of her matrimonial home. I was the eldest child in the family. I began to see my siblings suffer at the hands of the new woman brought into the home. I was away from home at college most of the time, but I kept getting disturbing and stressful reports of how my siblings were being abused. So, I decided to keep a little diary where I recorded each negative action committed. Each time I made an entry, my heart became more bitter, and resentment created a cold hardness within. The wrongs recorded filled pages and pages. My heart was filled with venom and the wall of hostility toward a man I had loved and revered as a father grew thicker and taller.

It took one uncle that I highly respected to try and talk me out of that bitterness. He reminded me of the commandment that comes with a promise: "Honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12, NIV). I thawed somewhat, but I still planned revenge. The very following weekend was Passion weekend. On the Friday, I attended a sermon where the pastor really nailed it as he emphasized Jesus' words when he hung on the cross. He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34a).

I was not hearing that Scripture for the first time, but that day it pierced my heart. Jesus was wounded for me and was nailed on the cross for me. Jesus forgave me. So, who was I to hold a deep grudge against my one and only father who brought me to this world? What did I mean when I said the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us" (Matthew 6:12, NLT)? I wept. I repented. I sought forgiveness from God. I could not wait to seek forgiveness from my father as I had become rude and disrespectful to him, negatively influencing the brood behind me.

When I got back to residence, I fished out the vile diary, shredded the pages and made a bonfire outside. As the soot particles blew away in the wind, I felt the heaviness lift off my heart and my shoulders. Sweet relief. When vacation came, I sought my father's forgiveness. It was a meeting of both the prodigal daughter and the prodigal father. There was rejoicing at the reconciliation. We became the best of friends from that time, and I even cared for my father when he was terminal with cancer until he passed on. Christ is our peace... He "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility..." (Ephesians 2:14, NIV).

It is good to have the love of family members, which does not depend on feelings and circumstance. That love should be like that of God, who says: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I

will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands ..." (Isaiah 49:15-16). This is deep love, unfathomable, without depth or breadth or height.

People are not really separated by race or creed or colour. We are separated by sin that grows and festers, spreading like a cancer within our hearts. In any one country in Africa, people are separated by barriers of ethnicity and tribe. Evil thrives when people focus on their own tribal groupings at the expense of those who are considered outsiders. The same applies anywhere else in the world. We need Christ, the Great Reconciler. The Word says, "... if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." The Word goes on to say, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:17,18, 21).

It is when we believe and live in Christ that we experience love, forgiveness and the joy of reconciliation. Those we considered enemies and foreigners before become "... members of the household of God ..." (Ephesians 2:19c).

In conclusion, there really is no love, joy and peace or any other spiritual gift when people dwell in sinful ways. Sin begets loneliness and strife. Only in Christ can we celebrate together true love, forgiveness and reconciliation. Hallelujah!



Barbara Nkala is an experienced leader in education and publishing. She served as MWC Regional Representative for Southern Africa (2016-2022).

Returning home

Sunday morning Nindyo Sasongko

Ruth is the only book in the biblical canon named after a foreign woman. The book centres on Ruth, a Moabite, and her mother-in-law, Naomi, who return to the land of Judah. Calamity, displacement, barrenness, death and survival can be found in the first five verses of this book. It opens with a famine in Bethlehem, a crisis which forced Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their sons to migrate to Moab. Then, Naomi's sons took Moabite wives. As the story goes, the three men of the family died in this foreign land. Three women survived: one Israelite mother and two Moabite daughters-in-laws.

Our global Anabaptist family also faces these predicaments today. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to postpone MWC's Indonesia Assembly. These past two years, we have witnessed the horror of death because of the raging virus, a horror which we cannot see its end to this day. We heard deaths every day during the heights of the pandemic. Indeed, we have good vaccines, but the problem is not over. New outbreaks still take place in different countries, and these brought about shortages of food and daily needs. The virus separated us from our loved ones and isolated us from each other.

In the book of Ruth, the three vulnerable, disenfranchised women are at the frontier of strange lands, standing on the borderland

between Moab and Israel. Moab is a still a strange land to Naomi and so she decides to go home to Bethlehem. But the land of Judah is a strange land to Orpah and Ruth. These childless widows cannot know if they will find a place of security or a home in a new land.

Naomi admonishes her daughters-in-law not to follow her to Bethlehem. They must return to their homeland to find husbands. Orpah yields to Naomi and kisses her mother-in-law goodbye. Ruth, however, persists to follow Naomi wherever she goes.

Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth are us. Today, many people live like these vulnerable widows. This book is rich in depicting problems shared by our Anabaptist family: women and children who live under the trauma of domestic violence, the dire effects of climate change, hostilities toward immigrants, injustice toward people with disabilities or who are gender minorities and consequences of colonialism. As we conclude the Indonesia Assembly 2022, we are ready to depart from the island of Java. But where shall we return?

Naomi's return with her daughter-in-law Ruth is not only a story about the survival of two worthless women. Indeed, this story can be seen as one of the greatest stories of reconciliation in human history. In the Bible, the story of Moab and the Moabites is full of scandal and malice. For the Israelites, the Moabites were hostile pagans and thus forbidden from entering Israel's religious

gatherings, even to the tenth generation. Foreign wives could be expelled among the Israelites in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The book of Ruth presents a different story, however. Biblical scholar Eunny P. Lee opines that Ruth offers "an alternative vision of a caring community." Moab is thus "a theologically evocative space, the boundary to the promised land," a liminal space at which "cultural negotiations and identity (re)construction take place." For Naomi, returning to her place of origin is a negotiation of identity and destiny. Together with her daughter-in-law Ruth, a barren widow from Moab, the challenge could be more intense. Ruth's commitment to follow Naomi shows a profound courage to break the boundaries of ethnicity and race, nationality, religion, and age. Reconciliation cannot be achieved when there is no commitment to cross boundaries.

Ruth's commitment to her mother-in-law is depicted in an astonishing way: Ruth clings to Naomi (1:15). The Hebrew verb (*dâvaq*) expresses Ruth's deepest commitment. The same word can be found in Genesis 2:24 to describe a man's union with a woman in marriage. In leaving his father and mother, the husband clings to his wife and the two become one flesh. Ruth thus chooses to be "one flesh" with her mother-in-law over her family of origin. By venturing to a strange land and to an unknown people, Ruth refuses the status of a worthless woman based on heterosexist patriarchal definition of family and childbearing.



Assembly team leaders in JKI Holy Stadium, Semarang.

Tiz Brotosudarmo

But there is more in this story. This unconventional bond between two women is between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, a relationship which often filled with tension and rivalry in many cultures. In some Asian cultures, this relationship can be downright oppressive. Ruth's first words demonstrate her independent character: a marginalized woman who shows fidelity and solidarity with another woman. If fidelity and solidarity can be found among us, the seed of reconciliation has been planted in our midst.

As we conclude the Indonesia Assembly 2022, where shall our global Anabaptist family go?

Yes, we must follow Jesus across barriers, ones created by human structures which separate us from our neighbours. I recall one event in my teenage years through which I was called into the ministry of the Word. In 1993, David W. Shenk of Eastern Mennonite Mission visited my home church GKMI Kudus and gave a message. In the past, Christianity was spread from West to East. Today, mission has changed its direction. The West, said Shenk, also needs missionaries from the East, thus breaking barriers between West and East.

The old paradigm of Christian mission, one centred on evangelism and church planting, cannot be sufficient. Spreading the gospel must not simply mean offering the good news for non-believers. The goal of Christian mission must be living fully in a new family, a kinship in which the loving presence of God can be experienced

within, among and between all. In the gospels, this is called the kingdom of God. Indeed, in Christ we find new siblings from around the world. We are all loved by the Lord and, as Pastor Saptojo Adi of GITJ puts it in a hymn, we come together "whether from West or East." As such, living in a new family must encourage us to revisit our ministry. Ministry must mean a commitment to living out the good news with those on the margins of power.

Today, we are not only called to celebrate our faith together, but to dismantle the long repercussions of Western colonialism, resulting from the doctrine of discovery in the Americas, the imposition of chattel slavery on people from Africa and genocides of indigenous peoples. Today, migration to foreign lands because of climate change, war and poverty can be found in many parts of the world. Those immigrants are vulnerable to new surroundings. They often face intolerance and appalling hostility from the host country as they try to assimilate to new contexts and cultures. Today, we are challenged by young people who join hands, raising global awareness to the climate crisis. In Kenya, says MWC vice president Rebecca Osiro, young people of her local congregations know that creation care must begin with them.

Today, women are still living in a highly patriarchal and sexist society. As valiant survivors of sexual abuse are calling out the duplicity of religious leaders, entertainment stars, sport heroes and politicians, we

are challenged to raise our voice together with these survivors. We must revisit our discipleship through the "wisdom of women" in their everyday struggle – *en la lucha* as Elizabeth Soto Albrecht says. "Through the eyes of women," theologian Darryl W. Stephens writes, "we are reminded that the personal is political, that peacemaking pertains to the home as well as to the war and that the good news of Jesus Christ proclaims not suffering and docility but liberation and justice."

Siblings in Christ, as we look forward to the next General Assembly in Ethiopia 2027, let us continue to follow Jesus together. Let us proclaim the gospel of liberating peace, breaking barriers and crossing boundaries set up by the unjust powers to isolate us from each other. May we find a home wherever Christ's light will lead us, a home shared with those deemed worthless by the world.

Amen.



Nindyo Sasongko is a teaching fellow at Fordham University, theologian in residence at Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship and a member of MWC's Creation Care Task Force. Originally from Indonesia, he served as a minister in Gereja Muria Kristen Indonesia (GKMI).



Tiz Brotosudarmo

John D Roth (l) and Christen Kong (r) spoke on Renewal 2022 with Lewinna Aguskin interpreting into Indonesian.



Tiz Brotosudarmo

New MWC president Henk Stenvers presents the collaborative peace mural from the Global Church Village to Central Java Governor H. Ganjar Pranowo.

Continued from page 2

Barriers defeated

Thankfully – together – many barriers were crossed: from 58 countries around the world, Anabaptist-Mennonites came to worship and fellowship. Despite continued reverberations of the COVID-19 pandemic, friends – old and new – met face to face in Indonesia while many more joined online.

Participants cared for each other. They cheerfully complied with required mask wearing, although face coverings usually came off for photos.

Some volunteers became very familiar with the halls of the hotels, walking back and forth to deliver food to quarantined guests. “This service allowed me to share the love of Christ with people from different cultures, different languages and different ages,” says Gracia Felo from DR Congo.

The very identity of the church

A highlight of the plenaries for many was the 8-minute contemplative dance by Sufi dervishes to music by local church members at GITJ Jepara. The congregation works hard to build interfaith relationships that cultivate peace. “Relating to another faith or religion is not just a church method to make peace; it is a part of the very identity of the church, without which the church will not fulfill its own mission,” says pastor Danang Kristiawan.

Plenary speakers courageously named challenges for the church on mission.

Salome Haldemann reprised Ron Sider’s call to train – and practice – for active peace work and nonviolence (page 7).

Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle named the pain of racism and inequality (page 17).

Nindy Sasongko challenged Anabaptists to address injustices in the world like colonial, racism, misogyny, climate change, sexual abuse (page 20).

Meet Indonesia

In this majority Muslim country, both hosts and guests shared stories and teaching in plenary sessions, workshops and conversations about interfaith friendships.

The hospitality of Indonesian hosts covered over the logistical blips with smiles, good food – and a lot of dancing. Numerous performances of traditional and collaborative styles of Indonesian music and dance demonstrated that Anabaptist-Mennonites not only know how to sing but also how to move.



Jeanette Bissoon

At GITJ Margokerto, one of the satellite worship sites, the local congregation performed songs and Wayang Orang, traditional Indonesian theatre.

“I am amazed at how things just fell into place in spite of everything and how our Indonesian brothers and sisters took care of everything, even going the extra mile to make sure things work out the way they should,” says Jessica Mondal, coordinator of the Global Church Village (page 32-33).

On half-day tours, participants encountered Indonesian history and culture (page 28-29). Learning continued in workshops on Bible study, creation care and interfaith dialogue (page 26-27).

Watch parties

For the first time, an MWC Assembly was fully hybrid. Participants could register for an online experience that included not only exclusive access to the full plenary sessions, but also a chance to join workshops on Zoom, view vlogs from the Global Church Village and satellite sites and chat spaces to interact with other participants.

“I think this type of “hybrid” connectedness has great potential for strengthening the communion of Mennonite-related churches around the world,” says Ray Brubacher. The former MWC event planner organized daily inter-Mennonite watch parties in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. A different church served as host for each event, sharing worship singing from their own community and streaming the plenary sessions on a large screen.

Return to Jesus

The closing service highlighted all aspects of the Assembly program, including the children’s & youth programs (page 30-31). The morning’s emcee pastor Lydia Adi called up “The most important people in MWC” to share songs they had learned in the children’s program.

John D. Roth of the Faith and Life Commission and Christen Kong, Mennonite Church Canada delegate from the Global Youth Summit (GYS) spoke on Renewal 2022 (marking 500 years of Anabaptism).

“I invite persistently people into God’s Spirit. Jesus calls us to suffer together, to carry burdens, to journey together in a return to Jesus,” said Christen Kong.

And all too soon, it was at an end. Host pastor at Holy Stadium, Tina Agung continued the challenge in her closing prayer for MWC to “Be a messenger of truth to all nation sand a bearer of truth to all the world.”

Amen.

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



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday Worship Resources

Prepared by the
MWC Regional
Representatives
in Africa for
22 January 2023,
or at any time
convenient for your
congregation.

1 Theme and texts

a. Theme:
**Jesus
Christ:
Our Hope**

**b. Why this theme
was chosen:**

Even in the midst of deep troubles, we come together from around the world to follow Jesus, who gives us hope. This is also the theme for Renewal 2023 in Mennonite World Conference.

**c. Biblical texts
options:**

Old Testament:
Isaiah 40:28-31

Psalm:
Psalm 62:1-6

Gospel:
Luke 18:35-43

New Testament:
1 Peter 1:3-6

**d. Relationship between
the theme and biblical texts:**

- Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
- Rest and hope come from God alone.
- The blind beggar knew hope in Jesus.
- Praise for a living hope.

2

Prayer requests

Prayer Requests from Africa:

- Give thanks and praise for the vibrancy of many African churches, where so many members are youth and young adults. Pray for church leaders to be well-trained, and faithful in ministry.
- Pray for peaceful solutions to those experiencing violent conflict, especially in eastern Congo and Burkina Faso.
- Pray for the many people in Africa who are experiencing hunger and drought, due to the impacts of climate change and the war in Ukraine.

Prayer Requests from MWC:

- Give thanks and praise for the generous hospitality of the Indonesian churches in hosting a joyful global Assembly in 2022.
- Pray for the newly appointed leaders in MWC, the six new people on the [Executive Committee](#), and the three new chairs of [MWC Commissions](#).
- Pray that as each church grows in understanding what it means to be a communion together, this will help each member church to also deepen their understanding of the depth and breadth of the love of God.

3

Song suggestions

Songs from MWC 2022 International Songbook

- #14 *Geta, Geta/You are Lord/Kaulah Tuhan* (Ethiopia)
- #19 *Bon berger, ton people t'adore/ We your people sing your praises/ Kami Umat-Mu Memuji* (Rwanda)
- #21 *Kwake Yesu nasimama/ Here on Christ the Rock I Stand* (Kenya)
- #6 *Sapagkat Ang Diyos/ Because God is Love* (Philippines)
- #7 *Tapaiko Cheuma/I am Your Child* (Nepal)

4

Multimedia resources

See mwc-cmm.org/awfs

- [Video greetings from around the world](#)
- [Scripture texts read in multiple languages](#)
- [Song videos from the MWC Assembly in Indonesia](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Interactive map](#)
- [MWC speaker's bureau](#)





5

Offering

- In African churches, the offering time is as important as the sermon. Go to page 13 to learn more about offering practices in African churches.
- MWC invites congregations to take a special offering for our global Anabaptist communion on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. One way to do this is to invite every member to contribute the cost of at least one lunch in their own community to support the core ministries and Commissions of MWC. This is a manageable amount in every MWC member church around the world.



6

**Additional
Resources**

In this package

- Suggested liturgies for gathering and benediction
- Biblical background for sermon content
- Stories and testimonies from Africa for sermon content
- Anabaptist historical context
- Children's story and activity
- Tithes and offering ideas from Africa
- Cultural suggestions from Africa



General Council members visited local churches in Kisumu, Kenya, after Renewal 2018.
Photo: @realfoto_Kenya

The biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions, sermon ideas and other resources in this package have been prepared by members of MWC out of their experience in their local context. The teaching does not necessary represent an official MWC position.

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Please send your photos and testimonies regarding your celebration to 📷 photos@mw-cmm.org



Barbara Hegge Galle

With Ary Rusdianto providing interpretation into Indonesian, Sadanand Hembron from Nepal reflected on “Living Together” and how it leads to transformation through the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Interpretation “We speak the same language”

“I cannot be grateful enough that even though we are a large and diverse group, we speak the same language: the language of love for Christ and his people,” says Daniel Nugroho. He was part of the team that made it possible for all to understand.

Up to four interpreters from a team of 21 served from the stage at each worship plenary, interpreting all the speakers into Indonesian. Meanwhile, two interpreters from a team of eight served in the French and Spanish booths.

Interpreters experienced extra challenges in Indonesia with COVID infections and internet glitches affecting the listening headsets.

“Simultaneous translation is a particularly demanding exercise, requiring a great deal of attention, especially as you have to adapt to the accents and speech patterns of the different speakers,” says Karina Derksen-Schrock, MWC interpretation coordinator.

And understanding is not only about the words used.

“Being an interpreter, we get the chance to be a bridge not just for language but also with culture and connect people too,” says Sarah Pillay, interpreter from English to Indonesian.

Interpretation coordinator for Indonesian Ary Rusdianto worked behind the scenes for years. He oversaw translation of MWC stories and worship materials into Indonesian to help fellow Indonesians become familiar with MWC before the event. One of his challenges was finding interpreters for Indonesian and Spanish.

“It is God’s blessing because he provided many Indonesian interpreters to help at the Assembly,” says Ary Rusdianto.

“It is God’s blessing because he provided many Indonesian interpreters to help at the Assembly,” says Ary Rusdianto.



Madhur Lakra

In pairs, multilingual volunteers interpret from English to Spanish or French, and Spanish to English or French. Indonesian interpretation was given consecutively on stage.



Satriadinata Ratmanto

Valentin Dos Santos from Switzerland interprets sessions from English into French.

Workshops

A good kind of infidel

“We were far away from peace, but now we are friends with Christians. We are working for peace and humility.” Through an interpreter, Commander Yanni Rusmanto from Solo, Indonesia, spoke at the “Mennonites in Indonesia and Radical Muslims making peace” workshop at Assembly 17 in Indonesia.

This was one of several workshops on interfaith relationships with a focus on Christians and Muslims. In total, more than 50 workshops took place at Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly 17 in Indonesia, with many of them recorded to watch later.

Yanni Rusmanto is a leader of Hezbollah, an Indonesian paramilitary group. (“Hezbollah” means “party of God” and is the name of many Muslim groups with no relation to each other.) They monitor the community for drunkenness and lawbreakers, offering warnings and liaising with the police when there are street fights.

In the workshop, GKMI pastor Paulus Hartono and Yanni Rusmanto talked about their cooperation.

After the 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami that devastated part of Aceh, it wasn’t enough for Solo-based Mennonite Diakonia Service to respond alone. MDS founder Paulus Hartono reached out to invite the local Muslim commander to join with MDS in the aid efforts.

“Why does this infidel want to dialogue?” Yanni Rusmanto wondered when Paulus Hartono approached him. He was afraid he might be converted. He tried to rebuff, but Paulus Hartono kept asking.

“He spoke to me about humility and about the earthquake in Aceh. I started to open my heart,” says Yanni Rusmanto.

The two groups worked side by side in Aceh for 15 days, living under the same roof. “We started to know each other. We respect each other though we are very different in many things. But that doesn’t mean we can’t work together,” says Paulus Hartono.

Yanni Rusmanto still regards Hartono as *kefir* – an infidel. But “Paulus is a good *kefir*. I want to be friends with Paulus, and I want dialogue.”



Tiz Brotosudarmo

Shantkumar Kunjam of India led a workshop on “Building A Life Of Anabaptist/Mennonite Faith On The Rock”



Windhi Aisari

Saulo Padilla delivered his workshop on Christian hospitality: the church and global migration to live participants and people on Zoom.

For Paulus Hartono, peacebuilding and humanitarian aid work hand in hand. MDS responds to disasters, builds environmental sustainability and conducts interfaith dialogue. The three are inseparable, even indistinguishable at times.

People ask Paulus Hartono for the secret to his thriving congregation and groundbreaking ministry: “We must do Jesus’



Tiz Brotosudarmo

Michelle Herberger of USA led a workshop on connecting Bible stories into one story.

mission: not our organization’s mission or our church’s mission. We live out kingdom values: mission, peace, truth, justice and love, guided by the Holy Spirit.”



GKMI pastor Paulus Hartono (foreground) and Yanni Rusmanto (inset) give a workshop about their organization's interfaith cooperation.



Madhur Lakra



Winchhi Arsari

Ani Widjaja of Abundance of Love in the Family (ARK) centre guided workshop participants through love transformation through theological reflection on personal experiences.

“We see the hearts of the Mennonite people. In humility, they make peace. They build good relationships with the other religions – even for us with Hezbollah,” says Yanni Rusmanto.

Yanni Rusmanto now puts Paulus Hartono into a third category: a kindness infidel.

“Peace is better than violence. The world is full of violence including war. This is the time for us to make peace together,” says Yanni Rusmanto. “Hezbollah serves God and the world: with Paulus, we serve the world. In the end, I say to you all my Mennonite friends in all the world, to love peace, humility and nonviolence.”

Read more about MDS

mwc-cmm.org/mds-practicalwork-spiritualtransformation

Find workshop listings here

<https://mwc-cmm.org/resources/a17workshops>

Discover: Assembly tours and service projects

Connecting with people is at the heart of MWC Assemblies. Participating in local tourism and serving with local ministries provided another chance to connect.

“I get a lot of value and joy out of helping people,” says Daniel Beachy, who signed up for a service activity. “It was a lot of fun planting trees knowing that they will grow to feed future people that attend the seminary”

Others went to an orphanage where “Singing together with actions helped to bridge the language barrier,” says Gerald Neufeld. Participant Hakjoo Ko (“Joe Ko”) taught a Korean song with actions that urged children and volunteers to learn something new.

“I learned from young volunteers that whatever work is done, it has to be done happily. All of them were always smiling and discharging their responsibilities,” says Ranjana Nath.

Some tours encountered barriers in seeing the sites, but “We met new people from US and Canada and had a great feast together, sharing our views and culture,” says Arpan Nath of India.

Sharing Indonesian food in a little café with mothers and their children from India was “the best part of the trip” says Carla Rupp from the USA who was also attending with her son.

Felo Gracia from DR Congo crossed cultural barriers on the tours. “I was the only black person in the two trips, but I felt that I was among family,” he says.

“The tour helped me in bonding with new people,” says Subhashini Biswas. “It was really heart warming to feel the same devotion and blessings and love we have for each other even though we all belong to different culture and country. I was able to see the deep connection that people have with the Almighty even when the world in general is undergoing the hardships of war, pandemics and political turbulence.”

“The tastes of durian and selabi were totally new for me”, says Didier Bellefleur from France. “The tours helped me to better discover the culture, history and countryside of Indonesia.

“I take away a more observant and open mind to evaluate things, both in my national church and my local congregation,” says Clemens Rahn of Paraguay.



Service project volunteers pose with children at Rumah Yatim Piatu “Pak Jacobus.”



Indian, Canadian and American families shared food and friendship on a half-day tour.

Ranjana Nath



Participants enjoyed coffee tasting at Banaran Coffee Plantation.

Satriadinata Ratnanto



Tour participants learned about the history of Indonesia at Fort Willem in Ambawara.

Rizalee Pillare



A boat ride on Rawa Pening, a lake in Ambarawa surrounded by Mount Merbabu, Mount Telomoyo and Mount Ungaran, offered participants an idyllic mountain village atmosphere.

Christian Bastono

Experience: Assembly satellite locations

An Assembly first was the use of four “satellite” sites in Indonesia. Four local congregations hosted a small delegation of MWC guests, including the evening plenary speakers for testimonies and sermons. This allowed local congregations to get to know international guests on a deeper level.

“We believe in the incarnation; in person gatherings remind us that our faith is not abstract,” says Cesar Garcia. “As a family in Christ, we need to be together at least some time. It broadens our horizon, reminds us of our brothers and sisters and helps to overcome nationalism.”

“I never before experienced anything like talking to people from around the world, learning about their culture, and many more,” says Timotius Andre from Indonesia. He helped host guests at JKI Maranatha Ungaran for four days. “It will affect my prayers, knowing new people, learning about their life, how they live their faith is awesome and life changing.”

“Through this decentralization, the Assembly moved toward the communities,” says Siaka Traoré, regional representative for Central West Africa (2022-2028). “The satellite assemblies allowed those who were together to be closer, to know each other better and to understand our contexts. This hospitality was more accentuated in the satellite assemblies.”



Ariil Klassen

The MWC delegation at JKI Maranatha Church in Ungaran feasted on local food prepared by volunteers from the church.



José Arrais

With GITJ Jepara, MWC guests experienced the good relationships the church has with the local Muslim community. “That was very evident when we visited a Sunni school and we had a time to dialogue and interact between both confessions of faith. We felt very welcomed there and surely it gave us a wonderful perspective that, even if we have differences it’s always possible to love each other,” says José Arrais, regional representative for Europe.

“I really appreciated the social cohesion between the different religions that seek to live in peace in their country. Each of them knows the value of peace and works to maintain it. We visited official inter-religious structures in Solo that encourage dialogue between religious denominations,” says Siaka Traoré, regional representative for Central West Africa.



Joji Pantoja



Bruce Campbell-Janz

MWC President (2015-2022) Nelson Kraybill lays flower petals on the newly restored grave of Tunggul Wulung. The Javanese prince and warlord established Christian villages that thrived and became part of the Anabaptist movement in Indonesia.



Bruce Campbell-Janz

With GITJ Margokerto, MWC guests took a breathtaking drive to the mountain village of Tempur where an Anabaptist-Mennonite church and a mosque face each other arm’s length apart across the street. The good relations between the worshipping communities is symbolized by an awning between the buildings.

Creative approaches Children's program

The Assembly is not only a place that caters to adult participants' spiritual needs, but also the children's.

Held at Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Sangkakala Salatiga (STT Sangkakala), children's program emphasized learning.

"The big idea was Jesus invited others to learn from him to be disciples," says Jennifer McWilliams, acting children's program coordinator. Through this, the children learn to understanding that the church is bigger than they think.

Through creative approaches, the program is a perfect place for the children to learn about each other and Jesus in a fun way.

—Windhi Arsari is a teacher. She is a member of GITJ Kelet, Indonesia.



Tiz Brotosudarmo

At the closing ceremony, the children sang and did actions along with songs they had learned.



Windhi Arsari

A high volunteer to participant ratio meant children had plenty of attentive minders to engage with.

Youth program

"With the cross-cultural barriers, the age barrier, by serving with teenagers at Assembly, I was reminded that the kingdom of God is like those who are like children: curious, open, innocent, simple and always learning," says Jardely Martínez, youth program coordinator.

A core group of international participants in the youth program (ages 13-17) was augmented by different local participants each day.

Global Youth Summit participants Valary Otieno (Kenya), Christen Kong (Canada), Floyd Sieber (Argentina) and Deepson Masih (India) led Bible study and learning activities on daily themes. "We tried to maintain a simple structure that would be interactive, fun, and conversational," says Jardely Martínez.



Kus Darianto

At the "Menno fun fest" station, participants played with archery, stilts, croquet and henna (mehndi).



Kus Darianto

Each day, youth could draw, paint or write on the "freedom wall" what they had learned.



Tiz Brotosudarmo



Global Youth Summit (GYS)

Life in the Spirit: Learn, Serve, Worship,

34 delegates:
 4 from North America,
 4 from Europe,
 11 from Asia,
 6 from Africa, and
 9 from Latin America.

In delegate sessions, some common challenges for young people that surfaced were loneliness and the need for belonging, the need for good leadership, bridging the generation gap and the need to redefine church in a way that the function of it can shift to the spaces where young people are present.

Delegates also brainstormed solutions so they could be a part of bringing change by building relationships and sharing resources.

More than just discussing, the delegates and participants enjoyed their time learning from their different cultures, sharing snacks from their countries, sharing words of encouragement and strengthening, and praying for each other.

“One of the most impactful moments of GYS was after the delegates shared their conclusions with the participants and we spent time praying for each other’s countries on a large floor map, as well as for each other personally. The Spirit was very present as we united in prayer, and people authentically prayed for the change they wanted to see in the world and in themselves,” says Ebenezer Mondez, YABs Committee representative for Asia (2015-2022), YABs mentor (2022-2028).

Tiz Brotosudarmo



Meek Christian Cavili

Closing worship at GYS with the band from Jakarta Praise Community Church (a JKI congregation) filled STT Sangkakala.



Tiz Brotosudarmo

Akansha Milap and Deepson Chandra Masih from India share with delegates on Asia day.

YABs delegate for Argentina Floyd Sieber spoke to the youth program about following Jesus as teenagers.



GYS delegates and participants stand in prayer over the world.

Global Church Village

The Global Church Village is a celebration of what each Anabaptist culture represents. Each continent has a booth to host activities, display photos or videos of their churches, and share their perspective. A stage hosts a variety of cultural performances and storytelling about faith journeys. Everyone could participate in a collaborative art project to make a peace mural.



Audience members prayed for Okoth Simon after he shared about the joys and struggles of the growing Mennonite church in Uganda.



Ranjana Nath, Archana Netam and Anushka Bjorn Netam of India presented skits on the Global Church Village stage and shared their culture in the Asia tent.



Indonesians captivated Assembly participants with their rich musical skills in both traditional and Western music.



In the Indonesia tent, volunteers shared information about the Javanese roots of the GITJ church and the interconnected three focuses of the work of Mennonite Diakonia Service of Indonesia (disaster relief, creation care, interfaith dialogue).



Kkotip Bae engaged participants with games at the Global Church Village stage area.



Madhur Lakral



Kus Darianto

Archana and Ayushi Masih invited others from India to join them with a dance from India. “That’s how we crossed barriers and worshipped together. It was fun, exciting and to be honest the audience was really supportive.”

“I consider myself a hydro-evangelist,” said Doug Kaufman from the USA. He spoke from the Global Church Village stage about the desire to do river baptisms and how he shares his love for creation with the church and community by leading an effort to clean up a local river and monitoring contamination levels.



Kus Darianto

Indonesian dancers invited audience members to learn the steps and dance along.



Sushant Rajat Nand

Volunteers in the India tent shared mehndi, the tradition of henna tattoos.

“The house of God is never finished”



Tiz Brotosudarmo

MWC president (2022-2028) Henk Stenvers speaks with Central Java Governor H, Ganjar Pranowo during the closing ceremony at Holy Stadium.



Nelson Okanya

The shepherd’s staff was gifted to J. Nelson Kraybill in Pennsylvania by Calvin Greiner, a charismatic preacher who walked around the Assembly 16 host city praying. “After a number of trips, Calvin Greiner learned that the Mennonites were about to have an Assembly there, and that a Pennsylvania native would be installed as president. Then it made sense to him why God sent him to Harrisburg so often!” says J. Nelson Kraybill. Pictured: Hens Roesita Sara Dewi (Interpreter: English-Indonesian), Maria Hoffscholte Spoelder, Henk Stenvers, J. Nelson Kraybill.

Timo Doetsch, youth pastor at Evangelisch Mennonitsche Freikirche, Dresden, Germany, and General Council member for Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brudergemeinden in Deutschland (AMBD), interviewed former Deacon Commission secretary and new MWC president Henk Stenvers.

How was it for you to lead the Deacons Commission?

I’ve been in secretary of the Deacon Commission for 10 years. It was an inspiration and I always enjoyed the work. Although it sometimes was a lot, it is wonderful to be able to visit so many churches, sometimes very small, sometimes in very rural areas.

Not only do you do the work of the Deacons Commission, you don’t only bring, let’s say, greetings from Mennonite

World Conference, you also let people feel that they are part of the family.

But also for me personally, it was enriching. It changed my faith in good ways. I guess I’ve gotten more faithful.

How did Online Prayer Hour begin?

The Deacons Commission came together with MWC Communications in the first period of the lockdown in 2020. So many people were affected by this. We thought, it might be good to organize an online prayer just to pray for coping. The first time, there were immediately 60, 70 people. And it got such a positive response that we said we’ll do it again in September.

Then we got 90 people. Okay, then we’ll do it in November again. And all the time it was done by Arli Klassen coordinator of the regional reps, and by me (for the Deacons) and by Karla Braun of the communications team.

Then, MWC decided to make it an official international event. We had a wonderful time organizing this with the whole Assembly tech team with Liesa (Unger) and everybody. So, it became a steady event every two months.

After the Assembly, the tech team will not be there anymore, but we have already decided that we will go on.

Could you describe some of the Deacons Commission projects?

Well, the first thing that comes to mind is of course the COVID-19 task force.

The Deacon’s Commission is responsible for the Global Church Sharing Fund together with the general secretary. This is for member churches in the Global South to apply for money for projects. We decided in 2020 to turn it into a COVID-19 task force, in cooperation with Mennonite Central Committee. And that was really, really successful.

We supported something like 54 COVID-related projects in many countries. We disbursed more than \$500,000, while we never gave one project more than \$10,000 US.

And the response from churches, from individuals, from funds was really encouraging.

So in the end, we could support all projects that fulfilled the criteria.

And it was a great cooperation. That task force brought together all the different Mennonite relief organizations

in Zoom meetings just to inform each other what they were doing in relation to COVID-19 so they could also coordinate some of their projects.

I think it was wonderful how MWC can be the connecting organization between all those organizations that do all those projects.

Do you see a connection to the other Commissions?

Well, that is strong, especially to the Peace Commission. In the course of the years, we have done several projects together. Two times we did [solidarity] visits together. We have written letters together when a national church is having problems, especially with wars or conflicts.

Every month, we have a meeting between the secretaries of the Commissions. We discuss very openly and have very good cooperation.

You're stepping back from the Deacons Commission. What do you think are future challenges and key issues for the Deacons?

Well, of course the creation care challenge.

Also you see in more and more countries there is either violence or division or polarization. In the coming years, there will be more work for the Deacons Commission, especially with delegation visits to encourage and just let the member churches know that they are part of the global church.

For example, we visited the Wounaan, an Indigenous people living in the forest between Panama and Colombia. Many of them are Mennonite Brethren. They have problems with illegal logging on their land. They asked us to come, but they said, very seriously, 'we don't ask you to solve our problems, because you can't. We ask you to pray for us and to tell the world what is happening.'

That's exactly what it's about.

Can you share one of your most favourite Scripture passages?

Well, that's always a difficult question because it depends on the situation. 1 Corinthians 12 – about the body of Christ – for me at the moment, that's one of the most important.

Also Sermon on the Mount because those are key passages about trying to

be a peacemaker, to work for peace, reconciliation, to have attention for the ones who are having less chances.

And Philippians 4:7: there is a peace that we cannot understand and don't need to understand, but it guards our hearts and minds.

Can you recommend a book, a song or a movie?

Jonathan Sachs, former chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, has written wonderful books about the books of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. It was really an eye opener to read how from the Jewish tradition he looks at all those stories that sometimes we find confusing.



Henk Stenvers at Holy Stadium.

You will be in the new president of MWC. What thoughts on your mind about it?

It feels like a big responsibility; however, after four years of being president elect, I don't know if I'm ready, but let's begin. In MWC, we work as a team: the officers, Executive Committee, staff – we all work together.

I feel honoured and humbled to stand in that line of presidents.

You come from the Netherlands and among the MWC churches, the European church is tiny. What is your take on this?

In MWC, it is typical that it is not important where you come from. The people don't choose you because of your country. They choose you because they know you.

I think people chose me because they know me. I've been in global life since 2003. Being a General Council member, I became secretary of Deacons Commission

in 2012. I have been Europe representative at the same time from 2014 to 2020. So I have been in many places and met many people in the global church.

MWC is a platform where we should be able to talk about anything. If not in official dialogue, then person to person, with respect, without judging, without splitting. That's important, I think, if our desire to be a peace church is real, then we should not solve problems by splitting. Accepting that people are coming from different contexts and start reading the Bible together and try to explain what you read and what they read, and then maybe you could come to better understanding.

What will be important for you during your presidency?

Well, I think one of the things we see more is problems with leadership in churches. And I think that MWC can play a role in trying to resource people for church leadership. We want to foster leaders who are not glued to their chairs, but ready to give over to somebody else without a conflict. Those things will be important.

You've used the image of the Sagrada Familia cathedral for the church. Can you explain more?

I like the idea of a cathedral as the house of God.

The people that started to build a cathedral never saw it ready. So you have to have a lot of trust to start building. It is said that architect Antoni Gaudí really didn't want to finish it. He wanted to keep building all the time.

I think that's a wonderful parallel. The house of God is never finished. It's solid, but you have to keep building.

But then the other thing is that when you walk around the Sagrada Familia, you see first a part that was designed by Gaudí. It's wild with all kinds of interesting images. You go around and then you see the part that was designed after his death. Totally different. And there are more parts that are designed by other architects.

This is a very diverse building; still, it is one. It reaches up to God and it's never finished.

Irma Sulistyorini

General Council meeting

Shortened meetings study unity, affirm new members

As the Muslim call to prayer wafted on the air through open doors, the General Council worshipped, prayed, and considered the global fellowship of churches in Mennonite World Conference.

The in-person triennial meetings of leaders of MWC national member churches in Indonesia 1-4 July 2022 were cut short as COVID-19 positives put leaders into isolation.

After an unscheduled day of rest 3 July, the members affirmed the new Commission chair appointments, new members on the Executive Committee (selected by regional caucus meetings) and the appointment of Lisa Carr-Pries as vice-president to finish the term of Rebecca Osiro who stepped down due to family commitments. The General Council authorized the Executive Committee to decide on the remaining proposals, with one member noting lack of support.

Earlier, the General Council affirmed the reception of two new national member churches (Communauté Mennonite de Kinshasa, DR Congo and Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi).

This brings global membership from 107 (in 2018) to 109 national churches and one international association.

“We cling to your prayer”

Each evening, Sunoko Lin led “life in the global church” where leaders shared and the body prayed.

“We feel that we are the forgotten people and the forgotten country,” said Myanmar church leader Amos Chin when it was his turn to share. “The most difficult time and turmoil in Myanmar is the great door that God has opened for evangelization. This is the most rewarding time of our mission field. We don’t request financial support, but we believe...prayer can make a difference. We cling to your prayer.”

Former MWC general secretary Larry Miller offered a resourcing session on church unity based on Ephesians 1:9-10. “Nothing is outside the unity that will result from God’s grace – no person, thing, nothing,” he said. “May we in MWC be instruments contributing to rather than stumbling blocks impeding the unfolding and fulfillment of that divine plan.”



Karla Braun

General Council delegates Butsaba Saenwangthong (Thailand), Hanna Soren (Nepal), Sipra Biswas (India), Cynthia Peacock (India).

A strong rope

“Many small strings make a strong rope,” said Arli Klassen, regional representatives coordinator, in her report on Fair Share, MWC’s membership fees adjusted to national income levels and church size. Proposed changes to Fair Share include lowering the assessed amount for large national churches and no longer counting individual contributions toward Fair Share.

“Negotiation is always possible,” said Arli Klassen, “but it helps the churches’ feeling about the amount when commitment is not too far away from assessment.”



Cynthia Dück

General Council delegate: Amos Chin.

For example, she said: “Like other member churches, Vietnam always met the Fair Share amount that they negotiated and promised, which was not quite the assessed amount for this term.”

MWC’s work is not primarily project-based, said Jeanette Bissoon, chief operations officer, in her report, therefore administrative costs tend to be high in comparison to other expenses. In this triennium, development staffing was increased with a new strategy to raise more funds.

“Increasing the strength of MWC allows us to better support our churches to allow them to grow,” says Jeanette Bissoon.

Commissions proposals

“[The Declaration on Conscientious Objection shaped by the Peace Commission] arose from petitions from churches regarding the struggles they face in their contexts,” said Andrew Suderman, Peace Commission secretary. “Conscientious objection is not foreign; we have a long history of Mennonites declaring themselves as conscientious objectors to war, to [military] service, to conscription.”

“It shows a historic connection to another body,” says Glen Guyton, executive director of MC USA, who withdrew from the military after becoming a Mennonite. “If I had something like that at my disposal, I would have put it in my packet. It helps.”

Faith and Life Commission commended the reception of the baptism report from the 2013-2017 trilateral dialogues with Lutherans and Catholics. “You have a job,” César García, MWC general secretary, said to the General Council delegates. “Study this document in your communities.”

John D. Roth, Faith and Life Commission secretary, reviewed the name change proposal. “There was positive response from the churches that asked for name change when MWC explained this process,” he said. General Council delegates are instructed to take the suggested name: Anabaptist-Mennonite World Communion to their church leaders and direct feedback to the Executive Committee. The name will come before the General Council in 2025 for final discernment.

Executive Committee

Executive servants take up the towel

“As a worldwide community of faith in the Anabaptist tradition, people in ministry are key to Mennonite World Conference,” says César García, MWC general secretary. After Assembly 17 and associated meetings, there are new people serving this global family of churches.

The General Council selected new continental representatives for the Executive Committee for 2022–2028:

- Sindah Ngulube, a bishop from Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe (Africa);
- Amos Chin, a leader from Bible Missionary Church in Myanmar (Asia);
- Francis Pérez de León, a leader from Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Boliviana (Latin America);
- Doug Klassen, executive director of Mennonite Church Canada (North America).

Linda Dibble, moderator of Mennonite Church USA, will serve until 2025, finishing a term that was vacated. A representative for Europe will be appointed at the Executive Committee meetings in December, which will be held in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

The **Executive Committee** is elected from the General Council (GC) and meets annually. (During the coronavirus pandemic, these meetings took place over Zoom. Instead of several days in person, the Executive Committee met over two days several times throughout the year.)

Two members from each continental region are elected from the GC; a president and vice president are also elected by the GC. The treasurer and general secretary are also members of the Executive Committee.

At Assembly in Indonesia, the presidency of MWC transferred from J. Nelson Kraybill to president-elect Henk Stenvers from the Netherlands (2022–2028). Lisa Carr-Pries of Canada became vice president (2022–2025) to complete the term of Rebecca Osiro of Kenya, who stepped down for family reasons.

New chairs were appointed to two Commissions:

Andi O. Santoso



(GKMI – Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia – pastor from Indonesia and now regional administrator for Asia with Mennonite Mission Network) becomes Deacons Commission chair

James Krabill



(retired from Mennonite Mission Network) steps into the Mission chair (having served as Commission member 2009–2015)

At December meetings, the Executive Committee will confirm the following appointments: chair of the Peace Commission, new General Council appointments to the Commissions and new YABs Committee members.

“MWC is called to be a global communion,” declares the Mennonite World Conference Reference Notebook. “This implies that our focus is not only on the goals we want to achieve, but also on how we achieve them and what type of community we are as we move toward them.”

Online Prayer Hour

God’s Spirit knits us together as a family around the world. In our prayers, we support each other in joy and pain, whether gathered or scattered.

Visit mwc-cmm.org/online-prayer-hour-registration to register for the next online prayer meeting.



Next events

- Friday, 18 November 2022
- Friday, 20 January 2023
- Friday, 17 March 2023
- Friday, 19 May 2023

Renewal 2023



Renewal 2028 is a series of events commemorating the 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement. Each year, local churches host the event in a different region of the world.

Postponed in 2020 due to the pandemic, “Jesus Christ, Our Hope: Intercultural Conversations and Celebrations” will take place in Abbotsford, B.C., Canada on 25 March 2023 for **Renewal 2023**.

Mark your calendars for the special **Renewal 2025** in Zurich, Switzerland, on 29 May 2025: “Baptized into One Body: Following Jesus Together.” The first Anabaptist baptisms took place in Zurich, Switzerland, on 21 January 1525.



Read more

Courier Correo Courier



More Courier in your inbox

In 2023, we want to offer you more opportunities to relate with Anabaptist-related churches worldwide as a global family of faith together.

Courier will come to you four times in 2023:

Readers will receive April and October issues in print or via email, according to their subscription preferences.

However, new issues in February and July will be available electronically only.

If you aren’t already receiving a e-notification about *Courier*, please visit mwc-cmm.org/email-signup to ensure you receive the news when the electronic issues are available.



All issues of *Courier* can also be viewed on our website: mwc-cmm.org/courier

Assembly statistics



Loyce Tiwonginwe

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi (STT Seminary)
Sangkalakala, Salatiga.



Karla Braun

Hotel d'Emmerick, Salatiga.



Windhi Arsari

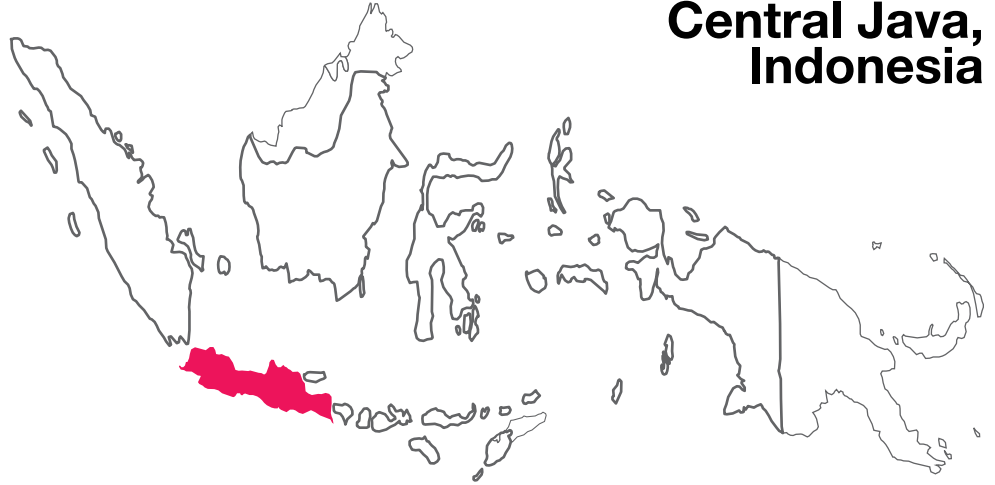
Hotel Laras Arsi, Salatiga.



Tiz Brotosudarmo

JKI Holy Stadium, Semarang.






Assembly 17 Central Java, Indonesia



482 total full time on-site participants
116 GYS participants at Assembly
422 daily participants

total **720**

Top five participant countries: Onsite






-  144 Indonesia
-  98 USA
-  43 Canada
-  42 India
-  15 France



Total online registrations
(may represent multiple viewers)

781

Top five participant countries: Online

-  195 India
-  171 USA
-  108 Canada
-  40 Germany
-  36 Indonesia



52
participants in 6 "Assembly Scattered" (post-event hosted tours)



473
full day tours + afternoon tours

Watch Party



Ray Brubacher

Meheret Evangelical Church, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.



Mennonite Church Rajnandgaon

Mennonite Church India in Rajnandgaon.

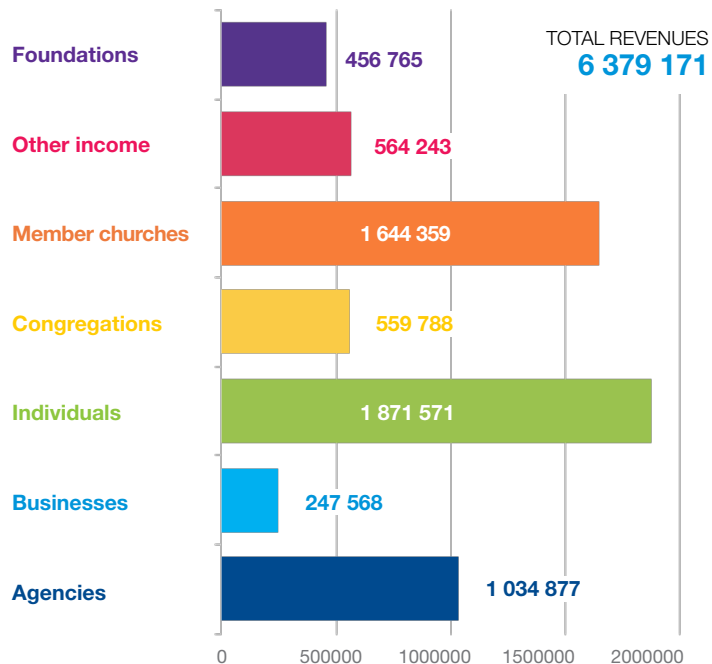
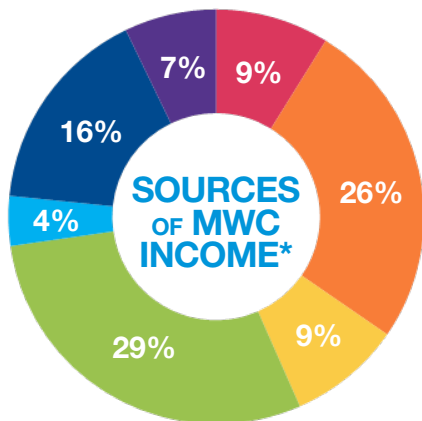


Photo: Karla Braun



MWC & Money 2019-2022

Assembly. Giving to MWC restricted funds such as the Global Church Sharing Fund and the Delegate Resourcing Fund as well as various Networks are included in the overall revenues and expenditures for MWC.

Thank you! Your contributions make a difference, whether they come from member churches, congregations, agencies or individuals all over the world. Giving from member churches has remained relatively stable during the last triennium, while giving from individuals and congregations has increased significantly. Other Income includes registration fees for the 2022

MWC uses a fair share approach for membership contributions. This means member and associate member churches contribute to MWC's operating budget in relation to their size and the relative wealth of their country.

Be a part of MWC's work

You make a difference in the Mennonite World Conference family through your prayers and financial gifts.

Your contributions help to

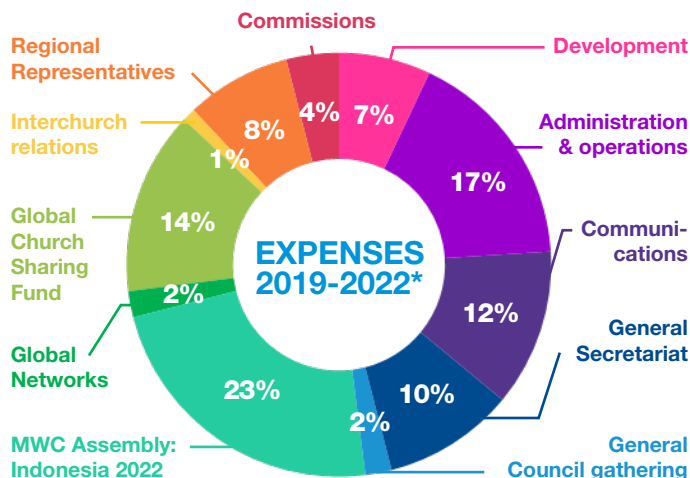
- support and sustain the worldwide community of Anabaptist churches grounded in Jesus
- grow a thriving global communion through MWC commissions, networks and gatherings
- uphold service and witness in our faith communities

Visit mwc-cmm.org to get involved.

Or Send your cheque and share your story by mail to

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17606 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA

Thank you for participating in the MWC global family!



*Note: above numbers include projections for 2022 and are in USD. Annual audited financial statements will be provided upon request.



MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

MWC Info

A monthly email newsletter with links to articles on the MWC website.

- English
- Spanish
- French

Courier

Magazine published twice a year (April and October)

- English
- Spanish
- French
- Electronic Version (pdf)*
- Print Version



*Avoid mailing delays: subscribe electronically

Did you know? Subscription to Courier/Correo/Courier is free, but it costs around \$30.00 to produce it, print and mail around the world. Your gift to cover costs is welcome.

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50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1 Canada



Photo: Irma Sulistyorini



Christian Argha Adhitya

GYS delegates display flags from their countries of origin at d'Emmerick Hotel.

A fruitful event

Following Jesus together across barriers

Mennonite World Conference (MWC) global Assemblies are the equivalent of a Sunday meeting at a local congregation.

Through the liturgy, we declare the sovereignty of Christ in our global church, challenging nationalism, racism and other false ideologies that claim our obedience and following.

Through teaching, workshops and preaching, we affirm our Anabaptist identity and facilitate character building in our churches by exposing them to different perspectives and biblical emphases shaped by the context of many different cultures.

In informal activities, we appreciate the importance of each individual and their community, share the gifts we have received and mutually enrich ourselves with the new relationships that arise.

Through moments of prayer, we support those facing persecution, violence, extreme poverty and natural disasters.

We discover that we are not alone, that we are a living organism and that we are part of the body of Christ.

These are just a few reasons why MWC Assemblies have been an essential part of our global community for decades. In 2022, we celebrated the second world Assembly in Asia and the 17th since the inception of MWC in 1925.

When we started planning Assembly 17, we never imagined the magnitude of barriers we would have to cross. Indonesia 2022 will go down in history as one of the most complex and challenging events we have ever developed. In addition to differences in culture, social class and theological perspectives, some barriers we had to overcome included the following:

- **Finances:** Moving the event from 2021 to 2022 due to the pandemic resulted in substantial financial costs.
- **Health:** A significant number of people had to quarantine – myself included – due to COVID-19 and other viruses. That prevented the full participation of many attendees.
- **Technology:** With this being the first officially hybrid Assembly, many activities were planned to facilitate online participation. However, technical failures hampered the live broadcast and prevented reception of simultaneous interpretation on site, despite many tests and the apparent certainty of the experts that the technology would not fail.

The leadership of the Assembly prepared for seven years to carry out a successful event. The evaluation that we develop after the Assembly and the participants' experience will reveal the event's success level. However, as a church, it is worth remembering that we are called to have fruitful events more than just successful events.

It is in the sense of fruit that we can appreciate the value of the Assembly in Indonesia.

Thanks to varied barriers, disciples of Christ from many nations learned to practice patience with one another. People from many different cultures mobilized to work in unity and seek the welfare of those sick and needed support. The love and concern for others, in many cases, were evident. Misunderstandings and unexpected conflicts led us to practice the ministry of reconciliation in our midst. We discover again the importance of vulnerability and the confession of faults committed. We understood how crucial it is to humbly ask for and receive forgiveness.

Consequently, the Assembly in 2022 deepened the intercultural relationship of many members of our churches and facilitated unity amid diversity. Admittedly, Assembly 17 may not have been the most successful in human parameters that measure the quality of events. Still, it has been one of the most fruitful to grow in our call to be a global communion in the Anabaptist tradition.

César García, MWC general secretary, originally from Colombia, lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.