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Volume 38, Number 1



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

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

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

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Cover Photo:

Julissa Garcia is a member of Central Mennonite Church, in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. This series of three watercolour paintings is called “God is good all the time”.

“I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

Word from the editor



“When the music fades, all is stripped away...” Those opening words to “Heart of Worship,” a popular 1997 worship song by Matt Redman from the UK resonate with pandemic experiences. We experienced a stripping away of rituals, spaces and/or people who seemed key to worship. Due to restrictions, prudence or incapacity, all of us had to examine what is the heart of our worship. What is integral to our meeting with God as a community?

This was a sort of *kairos* moment: an unplanned, unforeseen disruption; an opportunity to ask new questions and discover unanticipated answers; a time to examine and shift or reaffirm our values; a moment to equip us with fresh perspectives and new ways for new days.

Despite the challenges, as Anabaptist-Mennonites around the world, we did not stop worshipping. “The strength of our relationships is not found in the order of worship, nor in the time spent. The strength that sustains the life of a church and its relationship comes from the blessed presence of the Spirit of God, which has been poured into our hearts,” writes José Rafael Escobar Rosal.

We found ways to meet as a community in worship even without physical presence. We affirmed the prophetic nature of worship, speaking to our moment and reminding us of our solidarity with one another. “The force that gives life and depth to the relationships is indeed the grace and love of the Spirit of God, which produces the communion that transcends time, distance and place,” he writes.

In this issue of *Courier*, in addition to teaching on the nature of worship from “Brother Rafita” (see page 3-5), we hear stories from Guatemala, Canada, France, DR Congo and South Korea. Our churches share how their communities innovated to meet each other and meet God in spite of and/or because of pandemic challenges.

With the crisis of the pandemic mostly behind us, our rhythms of work and of gathering establish themselves again. Yet we find we are not the same as we were before. Our worship has and continues to change along with a rapidly changing world, even as we continue to follow our ageless Lord Jesus.

This issue also marks a shift in the *Courier* schedule. In the spirit of new ways for new days, we will publish four issues of *Courier* this year – two in your mailbox as you are accustomed, with two online only, taking advantage of our newfound comfort with virtual spaces, to meet in text across the barriers of time and geography. Please forward this to members of your church family who may not be signed up for the electronic mailing yet.

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



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Artwork series used on cover

“God is good all the time”

Watercolour, 30x30 cm

Julissa Garcia, San Pedro Sula, Honduras



“Even to your old age I am he; even when you turn grey I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save” (Isaiah 46:4).



“Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

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Life and faith within God's community



José Rafael Escobar Rosal and his wife Albita Castillo have served in the church for more than 30 years. “Brother Rafita” began his biblical, theological and pastoral training at SEMILLA (the Latin American Anabaptist Seminary), and later continued his studies in Bible, theology and pastoral ministry in different universities. He was ordained as a pastor by Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Guatemala (IEMG). He was coordinator of the biblical-theological formation program of the Centro De Estudios Pastorales De Centro América and dean of SEMILLA. He currently serves as professor at both institutes and is part of the preaching team of Casa Horeb Mennonite Church in Guatemala City.

We never imagined that the pandemic and its scars would affect our lives and the lives of our institutions to the extent it has. The church could not divorce itself from the difficult realities we lived through, and that still affects the “new normal” we live with today. Like society at large, the church must also learn to reinterpret our reality so that we can improvise creative responses to the needs of the family, the church and the community. It was a time filled with learning along the way as well as a time with many losses and much uncertainty.

A creative response to the pandemic

We halted physical meetings and yet our fellowship was strengthened through the creative ways we found to live it out.

It's something that we considered impossible before, though now we are beginning to uncover the power of virtual communication, especially when youth who are well disciplined apply these tools. Being able to virtually return to worship in the midst of the pandemic, and in spite of the circumstances, brought us together and recreated church which would have been possible in no other way.

Not all households were able to participate. Some people took the risk of visiting one another in person, and others made contact by telephone. Mennonite pastors ventured out in the rural areas, visiting members who lived far afield. They made sure to social distance while they prayed and read the Word.

The creative improvisation and love for the Lord attracted many people who approached our communities during times of worshipping the Lord and then worked through their problems. Hallelujah.

What is Anabaptist worship like now after the pandemic?

I think that the liturgical process is what was most affected because most people experienced the service via a screen, creating an understandable distance between them. Now the task is to work at reconnecting and fellowshiping in the Spirit to strengthen our relationships. It is important to note that the pandemic and its repercussions mostly affected meeting in person at church services. The pandemic affected us with loss and created much pain, but it did not destroy us. We discovered that the church knew how to express and live resilience as the body of Christ.

The communion of the saints

We learned that the body of Christ is real and extends beyond the four walls of church; it is all those who live in the communion of the saints. For sure the pandemic created distance because our normal was of relating were truncated and we had to “watch from a distance” as we participated in church. The churches that worked hard at emphasizing the importance of community in spite of the circumstances were better placed to maintain fellowship amongst the members.

The Spirit of God sustains and maintains fellowship, which is experienced through the synergy of uniting our hope, faith and presence. In this way, fellowship is alive and transcends time, distance and place. Worship overcomes our barriers because it depends on the power of God's grace and love, rather than on our own efforts, to foment the communion of the saints, the community of the Spirit.

Although members were unable to physically meet, they knew they were not alone. Prayers, intercession and petitions were a loving part of the Spirit-led community that gave a sense of community while worshipping at a distance. We learned a great lesson from

Worshipping in spirit and in truth is the essence of a liturgical attitude that is prophetic.



Rev. Donald Munachoonga of Chilenje Brethren in Christ Church, Zambia, preaches.

Photo: Donald Munachoonga-Chilenje BIC

the importance of communal solidarity and following Jesus under such difficult conditions because it prompted us to be more creative.

Worship as a liturgical expression of prophesy

Anabaptist worship has always been known for being a place where faith and life can be found. The churches were clear about the importance of worship as mediating an encounter between God and God’s people. Each service nourished hope and spirituality within people who were suffering. It is for this reason that professor Amós López maintains, “worship should always be an expression of adoration in spirit and in truth”. As Jesus says to his disciples: “But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...” (John 4:23).

Worshipping in spirit and in truth is the essence of a liturgical attitude that is prophetic. We are not a duality but rather a unity, writes Amós López; “humans don’t have a body and a spirit, they are body-spirits that express and realize their totality through words and gesture.” Therefore, our services should not be directed only at people’s souls. Creating a service that fails to affirm life is to create a subjective experience that defies the prophetic vision of the service.

The clearest example of this is the Lord Jesus. Resurrection happened to his body but also in his Spirit, giving Jesus a quality of liberation that transforms our reality regardless of how difficult it may be. His message shows new paths and horizons that help us imagine a dignified and abundant life. For this reason, we argue that the strength of our relationship comes from our fellowship empowered by the Spirit and not by force of habit.

Now that we are returning to in-person encounters, the church should embrace the opportunity to reimagine what a prophetic liturgy could be. Worship today must be healing, reviving, unifying, nourishing and hopeful. As such, the service should never lose the prophetic liturgical dimension as these elements provide consistency and meaning to worship. It is prophetic in that worship

illuminates the will of God through the Word, songs, etc. It is also prophetic in that it always shows us God in the midst of everyday circumstances. The people of Israel are a paradigmatic example of this.

Worship as an expression of committed love and solidarity

We are created to love. For this reason, all our gifts should be channeled towards putting love, mercy and justice into practice. In this sense, professor Jaci Maraschin considers our own bodies to be the greatest gift of all, because through them we can love. The apostle Paul, on the other hand, believes that the greatest gift of all is to love. He expresses this in the middle of his discussion of the gifts of the Spirit in his first letter to the Corinthians. He presents the gift of love as an indissoluble unity of gesture, theological meaning and life-giving attitude. That is, a form of worship that affirms life and life in abundance.

Even as physical presence was limited during the pandemic, love creatively transcended this dimension. There were many losses: life, employment, resources. And together these losses affected the life of the community. But how special it was to know that in midst of the loss, it was possible to hear someone’s voice, receive financial support, or share food across the distance, as an expression of God’s love.

What do we mean when we say “worship”?

We know that there are many ways to approach the topic. However, in our case we follow in the steps of professor Nelson Kirst who simply states, “worship is the meeting of the community of faith with the eternal God of life. Of course, this encounter is possible, not because we desire it, but because God, in grace and love, allows it.” This is why we should not view worship as an established religious routine. Worship as an encounter should be planned, yearned for, desired and enjoyed by a community that knows that it will meet the God of life who will be present with the community. To achieve this, we set times, rhythms, and places for this encounter with God and with the community itself.

This encounter has a place and meaning, not because God is waiting above when we open the doors to the church, but because each participant carries the Spirit of Christ with them. It is they who make it possible for the Spirit to be present – blessing, healing, forgiving, transforming us. In other words, worship starts at home.

We are responsible for preparing the meeting with God, using all of our heart, our creativity, our will and the gifts God has given us, and putting them at the service of others. Worship is the community of faith. Therefore, responsibility for this meeting goes beyond that of the pastor, the musicians, and the leaders; the whole community is responsible for it. The worship service is a vital part of our lives and affects how we envision and experience our daily lives.

The special character of services

Each worship service is unique.

The proposed Bible readings for a service orient the rest of the liturgy because God's Word guides the content of worship.

These days, singing and music often make up 65 percent of the service. Also, we see that the music and songs should serve the nature of the service. As such, the worship team and worship leaders should understand that worship does not belong to them; it belongs to the community of faith. They should also understand that they are there to serve the community's real and felt needs. They should remember that the songs are theology set to music. Therefore, the songs should affirm truths and principles that justify faith.

Worship should inspire service which is why each service should end with a refrain like, "Yes, send me," so that everyone is open and willing to serve the church of the Lord in solidarity.

In a nutshell, the worship service should be perfected until it is like Jesus who came to serve and not to be served.

Conclusion

What happened during the pandemic taught us great lessons that we

should treasure. The pandemic was an escatalogical lesson for a comfortable church.

Through the pandemic we learned that the church should be aware, alert and willing to adjust to the signs of the times and break from our comfort zones so that we can respond to people who are suffering, waiting, trusting and resisting in the name of Jesus. We should continue encouraging life and faith within God's community.

The church learned that it is vulnerable, and that we need God's grace, love and blessing. We learned to express ourselves with humility, not with bragging or viewing ourselves as all-powerful. Rather, we should be a church that understands that we are sustained only because of God's grace and love.

We also learned to be incredibly creative and to improvise when needed. In consequence, we found out that fixed, rigid models that worked for a time must give way when circumstances demand something different.

May God keep guiding our steps. May we never be without God's grace and love.

—José Rafael Escobar Rosal

The service should never lose the prophetic liturgical dimension as these elements provide consistency and meaning to worship.

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JKI liturgical dancers at Assembly 17 in Indonesia.

Photo: Tiz Brotosudarmo

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Always trust in God

by Jean Félix Cimbanga and Felo Gracia

May glory be given to the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his good deeds.

By the grace of God, in Congo the pandemic was not as cruel as it was under other skies. Aside from the hygiene lessons given regularly and generally by the political/administrative and health authorities to the population, there was no direct long-term link between the pandemic and worship.

Given the severity of health measures, no gatherings were possible. Nevertheless, Christians were invited to gather in their respective homes and some leaders visited the faithful and prayed with them.

During the pandemic we were asked to shorten worship times in order to avoid contamination and this practice continues to the present.

We were in the habit of embracing visitors during the time of welcome, but this practice was eliminated with the arrival of the pandemic. We no longer embrace visitors. At the end of every worship service, we had the custom of shaking hands between brothers and

sisters, but this no longer happens. These are not improvements per se, but simply things that are different.

As a result of the health measures enacted by the government, notably the closing of churches and the prohibition against gathering, contact among children was nonexistent. This greatly impacted relationships among the faithful and significantly blunted fellowship. (It is good to clarify that this situation only lasted some five to six months.)

It was this aspect of no gatherings of the children of God with its corollaries such as the absence of spiritual and material sharing as well as the impossibility of giving offerings to God that we missed the most during the pandemic.

All of the activities of members having been turned upside down, the only thing that was possible for the faithful was intercession. Indeed, the children of God who got into the habit of praying in their families prayed for others and for an end to the pandemic. When the restrictive measures were lifted, all of the activities of the church resumed normally.

It is important to note that even though the pandemic was dangerous and severe, our church conference was not affected or

shaken to the point of negatively impacting the organization of worship. We thank MWC for having given our church conferences, through AIMM, the means to inform the members concerning COVID-19 and attitudes to adopt in order to avoid it.

During our times of praise, the pandemic helped us better understand our vulnerability as humans and always trust in God. And even though we prayed for others before the pandemic, we became more conscious of the need to pray for the healing of others with the arrival of the pandemic.

The grace and peace of the Lord be with you.



Pasteur Jean Félix Cimbanga (left) is president of the Communauté Évangélique Mennonite (CEM). Felo Gracia (right) is a General Council member (GC) representing Communauté des Églises Frères Mennonite du Congo (the Mennonite Brethren church of Congo). Both leaders contributed insights to this article.



Blanket distribution to church members at Bethel Brethren In Christ Church, Zambia.

Photo: Donald Munachoonga



The CEM celebrates Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday with pomp and circumstance during a large Sunday service that brought together 13 parishes in the Mbujimayi district.

Photo: Jean Felix Cimbanga

South Korea

Journeying into the unknown, tasting goodness now

by Yongha Bae

South Korea was very successful in its response to the pandemic, especially during the early stages. The virus was contained and death rates were low although the government refrained from issuing drastic measures such as lockdowns or business closures.

However, the Protestant community was highly criticised within Korea for its behaviour during the early days of the pandemic. Traditionally, a South Korean church on average has about 10 worship services a week. Korean churches put a lot of weight on face-to-face public worship: this made the COVID-19 pandemic particularly hard. Many continued face-to-face meetings overtly or in secret. Videos of Christians violating public health codes and ignoring scientific facts in the name of “faith” went viral. The South Korean church had been already deemed selfish and ultraconservative by the public in the past decade; this led people to think of it as detrimental to society.

Megachurches were able to prepare well for online services. With abundant resources, they produced forms of online worship that were even more systematic than offline formats, and are reaching even more people than before. But for small to mid-sized churches who rely on face-to-face meetings, large portions of their congregations did not return to the pews.

Peace and Joy Mennonite Church

Peace and Joy Mennonite Church is located in the countryside of a small city called Nonsan in central South Korea. The location is somewhat isolated, and most of the congregation either live on the church premises or in the nearby villages.

Our Sunday worship had to go online for a few months in the beginning of the pandemic, and then turned offline with limitations – no eating together; masks on; seating arrangements, etc. – adhering to government regulations. Brothers and

sisters living on the same premises had to work and eat together even during the weekdays, so they still gathered, but took measures to limit as much contact with the outside world as much as possible.

Entering the “new normal” after the pandemic, most Korean churches are calling for the “revival of the face-to-face worship.” For Peace and Joy Mennonite Church, all of us have a sense of belonging and solidarity no matter where we are. The question of whether face-to-face worship service is the “true” form of worship wasn’t such a big issue for us. When we had to be online because of circumstances, we simply discussed how we could serve those in need.

For example, when we had confirmed cases in our midst or our village, we put necessary supplies and food on the doorsteps of quarantined people. We also began recording church services and uploading them on the church SNS group. We wanted to provide the sharing of the Word and the ongoing congregational context to brothers and sisters unable to attend the service. The weekly meeting of all members where all church matters are discussed and decided upon take place online during the week.

True worship

Even when you are completely cut off from the entire world, you can still worship God alone. Abraham and Jacob’s most significant encounters with God took place when they were both alone.

The Mennonite church reveals its faith in God through the relationships it fosters with brothers and sisters and neighbours; therefore the church community is of utmost importance. However, COVID-19 is not a one-time phenomenon. Human greed is getting bigger and the whole creation will suffer.

But even then, there is no reason to fear or despair. We shall not try to run away from worship, or tear ourselves away from the cord of three strands that Jesus tied us with, no matter the circumstances. If

Sundays are no longer available for worship, we will simply worship on some other day. We do not look for excuses to not worship, but we look for different ways to worship.

Peace and Joy Mennonite Church tries to make sure that everyone’s voice is heard in our church service. Instead of a sermon, the facilitator (whose role rotates amongst the members) invites everyone to share their insights into the Word of God. Bible verses, questions and commentaries relating to the text are shared during the week so that the brothers and sisters taking part in the worship service can prepare their reflection and interpretation. Worship is teeming with life and more people are undertaking the necessary steps to become a full member of the church. It could be that each person is offering a hand to the congregation’s effort to put Jesus at the centre of peace and reconciliation, in a less authoritative and more communal manner.

We do not wait for church service because that is when and where we meet God: we wait for it because we can listen to the stories of how our brothers and sisters have met God in their lives. How precious is the time when we can see each other’s face light up as we share our stories of thanksgiving? How precious is the time when we can sing in one voice the same songs of praise? How precious is the time when all or any of us offer the common prayer that reflects our communal faith? Thanks be to God that we have our brothers and sisters in faith!

Pandemics are rooted in human greed and therefore may return any time and in any form. We do not know what destruction humanity’s uncontrolled desires may bring, but Peace and Joy Mennonite Church will take the road to a community of peace, where we love our brothers and sisters and put Jesus at the centre.

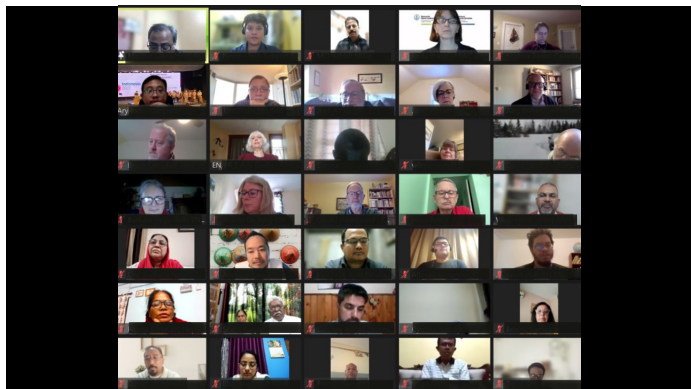
The same questions people brought in John 4:20-23 are heard in the church today: “Our fathers worshipped here, but you say...” The place and the format are not important. Jesus’ answers are the same, back then and even now: “the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”



Yongha Bae (left) is general secretary of Mennonite Church South Korea. This article was translated from Korean into English by Hakjoon (Joe) Ko (right).

France

A lunch break in the presence of God



Anabaptist-Mennonites from around the world join a bimonthly prayer hour sponsored by MWC.

Photos courtesy of MWC

by Nicole Djuissi

“Happy are those whom you choose, whom you bring to live in your sanctuary...”
(Psalm 65:4, Good News Translation).

The “pause for prayer” at the Mennonite church of Châtenay-Malabry (Paris, France) was created in March 2021 as part of the journey towards Easter in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiated by our former pastor, Silvie Hege, it took the form of a weekly one-hour meeting by Zoom during the lunch break, from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. The online gathering was to be held every Friday of the Lenten period and to end once Easter arrived.

Time for a break

This time was an opportunity to take a break in our day and in our week, to come and be refreshed/filled by the Spirit, a time to walk with Jesus. It was a time of fasting for those who wished to do so, a time set apart for ourselves, a time of sharing, a prayer break that really allowed us to feel close to Jesus in this moment and close to each other, united by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Once Easter 2021 was over, it was impossible for us to end this divine rendez-vous, this weekly meeting with the Father who does us so much good.

It is at this point that I took on the responsibility of leading this time of prayer that has continued to this day – even during vacations – with participants taking turns leading if necessary.

Although the day has been changed from Friday to Wednesday for

reasons of convenience, we have kept the original principle: to spend a lunch break together (that lasts on the average an hour and 15 minutes) to be with our Lord, to rest in God’s holy presence and to stand in the breach¹.

Praise, adoration and rendering thanks

During our meetings, the reading of at least one Bible passage allows us to contemplate our God and to pray on the basis of God’s Word. We then praise and adore God, giving thanks and interceding for the world, for the subjects of prayer shared in our church at Châtenay-Malabry and in this prayer cell.

Every member of the church is welcome. The connection link is shared every week through the different communication channels of the church. The number of participants is not large, but the blessings of God are overwhelming. We have seen a great many prayers answered.

There is a small number of people who are faithful to the meetings, making it a privileged place where trust is built up/established, allowing us to speak about prayer subjects that cannot always be shared with the entire congregation on Sunday.

Occasionally, we have had the joy of the unexpected presence of a person whom the Holy Spirit has led to connect, and this, at times, sometimes in a very unique way.

This “pause” has allowed us to see so many answers and so many signs from God that it has reinforced the idea that he is present with us during this time.

Each meeting has been a genuine moment of renewal. Be it 2, 4 or 6 people connected, we feel privileged to be able to participate in this time of prayer as it is written in Psalm 65:4.

A burden that became a benefit

The idea of this prayer time, meeting via Zoom, would probably not have seen the light of day without COVID-19. A structure that could have initially been considered a burden or a limitation has turned out to be a real asset because we can participate from wherever we are: from home, from the office, from vacation spots, with the only condition being access to an internet connection. God truly does make all things work together for the good of those who love him.

Other than the worship service, this prayer break is the only weekly meeting in our church. We truly give glory to God for this additional opportunity for fellowship and for all that we have been able to experience through these blessed times since the very beginning.

The challenges are great but we want to keep standing in the breach so that the Lord may act among the nations, in our lives, in all the situations that come upon us, so that we may see the manifestation of God’s glory.



Nicole Djuissi is a member of the pastoral team, the leader of the online prayer meeting and also head of a house group. She is employed as a digital project manager, and the mother of two children ages 13 and 17.

¹Psalm 106 :23; Ezekiel 22:30, Isaiah 11-12

Canada

Reading lessons in creation

by Wendy Janzen

Then we read Scripture out under the open sky, it comes alive in new ways.

Phrases like, “The heavens are telling the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1), “all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12) and “let justice roll down like water” (Amos 5,24) all take on deeper significance as we reflect on creation as participants in praise or harbingers of God’s wisdom.

Similarly, Jesus taught outdoors. He often drew on the natural world (water, vines, rocks, birds, flowers, etc.) to offer insights into his ministry and the kingdom of God.

God’s Spirit is continually active in the world around us. God is hiding in plain sight, and at Burning Bush we are honing our senses to be become more fully aware of God’s living presence and inspiration in our midst.

Gathered and grounded

Burning Bush Forest Church found its beginnings in an unexpected epiphany in late 2014. A seed of inspiration was received, planted, allowed to sit dormant for a while, then germinated and took root at our first official worship gathering in March 2016. The basic idea that grounds who we are and what we do is that we worship outdoors, all year ‘round, not merely *in* creation, but with creation! We engage *with* God’s good earth as our place of worship, as an extension of our worshipping community, and as one of our worship leaders.

This form of worship – inviting people outdoors to connect with Creator and creation – seems to resonate with many people in this era of multiple environmental crises.

Our gatherings are generally small and intimate (usually between 10 and 30 people).

They engage our whole bodies as we ground ourselves through our senses in the particular place where we are gathered.

Our gatherings include Scripture and prayer, but not a traditional sermon.

Participants are given time to “wander and wonder” (usually 30 minutes) to pay attention to how they are noticing God’s presence that “speaks” in a variety of ways.

There is time for sharing with one another around the circle.

Children are free to explore and follow their curiosity, and to participate along with their parents and the whole community. Their insights are welcome and often profound.

Ultimately, worshipping outdoors helps us to feel a deeper sense of belonging to God’s “community of creation.” Over the years, we have met in different public parks in our city, settling in at one with a creek and naturalized forest area as our primary location. By returning to the same spot, we have learned to know the names and characteristics of the trees, plants, birds, animals and insects around us. We have been immersed in the rhythms of the seasons as they play out. We have witnessed lessons of letting go, abundance, interdependence, death, renewal and resurrection, all written into creation for us to see.

Practical pattern

As we already had a well-established pattern of intentionally gathering outdoors for several years before the COVID-19

pandemic hit, we did not feel the restrictions as dramatically as other congregations who needed to close the doors of their buildings for a time.

We were able to continue our worship with only a few minor adjustments such as using an on-line registration tool (Eventbrite) to ask participants to pre-register. This allowed us to stay within gathering limits and have information for contact tracing should that be necessary. We also enhanced our email newsletter, adding in more resources for personal engagement and spiritual growth at home.

At Burning Bush, we did not decide to experiment with worship simply to offer something new and different, or to figure out how to pivot in a new context. We are following God’s leading to return to a way of connecting heart, mind and soul with the beloved community of creation. This is both ancient and new. It has been a journey of renewal and transformation, rooting ourselves in God’s great vision of *shalom* for all creation.



Wendy Janzen is pastor of Burning Bush Forest Church and an eco-minister with Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. She lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.



Gretta Unger Peters (right) shares a reading as Burning Bush Forest Church worships outside in nature in November 2022. Byron Weber Becker and Chip Bender are to the left.

Photo: Wendy Janzen

We are following God’s leading to return to a way of connecting heart, mind and soul with the beloved community of creation.

Ecuador

MWC member church

Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Ecuatoriana (IEME – Ecuador evangelical Mennonite church)

Total baptized members	796
Total congregations	12

Non-member church

Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME – Anabaptist Christian Mennonite church of Ecuador)

Total baptized members	25
Total congregations	3

Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador (ICME – Christian Mennonite church of Ecuador)

Source: MWC

Ecuador

Following Jesus for real

Today, there are three national Mennonite churches in Ecuador, one of which is a member church of Mennonite World Conference. They form a small but interconnected group of churches living out Anabaptist faith in a largely Catholic country.

Passion for sharing the good news

In the 1980s, CMC, also known as Rosedale (then called Conservative Mennonite Church), sent workers to share the gospel in Ecuador.

It began in Ecuador's second largest city, Guayaquil. As Elam and Doris Stauffer invited neighbours into their home, relationships developed and a Sunday service started. The first Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Ecuatoriana (IEME) congregation was established in Guayaquil around 1983. This congregation called *Jesús el Buen Pastor* (Jesus, the Good Shepherd) is a significant evangelical presence in the country.

Around the same time, a landslide that washed away several communities near the coastal city Manta brought Canadian and American Mennonites to offer disaster assistance. Robert and Mirella Miller oversaw reconstruction of some 150-200 homes for relocated families. This example of "good Anabaptists helping neighbours" made a significant impression on local people. New churches formed in Manta, Guayaquil and Portoviejo.

Fruit of an evangelist

"Our church is the fruit of Henry Klassen," says Manuel Aguagallo of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador (ICME).



A church in an earthquake damaged region of Ecuador after 2016.

Photo: Henk Stenvers

Henry Klassen of Gospel Missionary Union (now called Avant), ministered among Quechua (indigenous peoples) in RioBamba and Guayaquil in the 1990s. Walking, driving or even riding on horseback, he went from community to community, preaching and mentoring. He was known to carry a film projector to show evangelistic movies.

Today, *Monte Horeb* (Mount Horeb) and *El Pilar de la Verdad* (pillar of truth) in Riobamba, *Estrella del Sol* (star of the sun) in Guayaquil and *Camino de Salvación* (way of salvation) in Quito form a small association. From 2010-2017 was a period of consolidation and continued relating with Mennonite partners. In 2017, they adopted a Mennonite confession of faith. A period of growth followed.

A church of refuge

In the 1980s, Federation of Indigenous Evangelical Churches of Ecuador-FEINE began to look for theological training for their pastors. As a result, what is now Mennonite Mission Network sent workers to form relationships and support theological training. First, Mauricio and Sara Chenlo, ABMS-trained Argentinians, and later Colombian Mennonites Cesar Moya and Patricia Ureña fostered Anabaptist teaching. What is now Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME) began as home bible studies in Quito, Ecuador's capital city.

With their eyes and hearts open to their neighbourhood, the church members helping people seeking refuge after migrating from other countries. Outreach to children is a big part of the church's work. The church has a radical leadership style with a pastoral team comprised of four women.

"To demonstrate our beliefs, we live out those beliefs in Christ daily," say Vietnamese Mennonite pastors. "Christian faith is a 'lived-out' faith, not just a system of beliefs."

Relating to other Anabaptist bodies

Connections to the wider Anabaptist family are tangible through material aid from Mennonite Central Committee, financial aid and mission workers from



ICAME's Refugee and Migrant Peoples Project at Iglesia Menonita de Quito supports displaced people.

Photo courtesy of Iglesia Menonita de Quito

Mennonite Mission Network and Central Plains Mennonite Conference, and mentorship from IMCOL in Colombia.

During the pandemic, "We were able to share what we received from MCC (canned turkey, quilts, school kits)," says Doris Espinoza (ICAME).

ICAME leaders reached out to ask other churches about their needs were and gave generously from the aid they had received. "That's one way we were able to come together to share and to be a community as an example of the kingdom of God on earth," says Doris Espinoza.

ICAME prepared small kits to share with people who have gone through hard times. The church distributed 700 kits for people who didn't have a pound of rice or potatoes.

In May 2022, the three Anabaptist church groups held a retreat.

"It was an opportunity to know there are many more Mennonites in our country," says Fabian Buenaventura (IEME).

"We know there are differences," says Doris Espinoza, but focusing on what they have in common allows the three churches

to learn from each other. In so doing, they are better equipped to bring the message of the kingdom of God to others.

They look forward to future opportunities to build bonds between Anabaptist-Mennonite brothers and sisters.

"That has been a great blessing," says Fabian Buenaventura.

Living out Anabaptist identity

In a Catholic country, the Mennonites are different because baptism comes after declaration of belief in Jesus.

As followers of Jesus, the Mennonites are "not just someone who goes to church to worship. We are obedient to the Word of the Lord," says Vilma Cuji (ICME).

"We follow Jesus in our practice, not as a written declaration but as a way of life," says Fabian Buenaventura (IEME). "This identifies us in our communities. We need to incarnate the mission. If we don't live it out we're just one more denomination."

"We are peacemakers," says Vilma Cuji. "We believe it is better to resolve problems. Our belief in Jesus takes



Evangelical Mennonite Peace Church, Manta, Ecuador.

Photo: Henk Stenvers



Jesus the Good Shepherd Church in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Photo: Henk Stenvers

precedence over our external identities.”

The Mennonite churches have worked to respond in a holistic way. Not only with the words of the gospel, but also through soup kitchens and child care centres, schools, and a foundation for girls who have been raised on the street. “We reflect Jesus in our lives, in our actions. We are the hands and feet of Jesus for a world that needs urgently to hear a message of hope,” says Ángel Castro León (IEME).

One way ICME lived out peace convictions was by giving refreshments and sharing meals during a national strike to those who were arriving in Quito from provinces.

Anabaptism touches on structures and helps to transform society to be more empathetic, less unequal.

“We are a peace church but it is impossible to speak of peace when there is no justice; when there is violence, poverty, inequality. Jesus taught a kingdom where all humans could have a more full life,” says Alexandra Meneses Andrade (ICAME).

“We are focussed on being in the

community, not being a closed church,” says Doris Espinoza (ICAME).

The churches live out the gospel as a holistic message: not just about saving the soul but the well being of the whole person.

“One can’t speak about following Jesus if we’re up in the clouds, if we’re not inserted in the reality of society,” says Doris Espinoza.

Challenges and opportunities

The church leaders lament that Ecuadorian society has become violent and corrupt. Many people feel hopeless.

Having a peace identity may led the church to be silent, to tend to its own spaces. But the church’s challenge is to be present in society, to speak to violence with a message of reconciliation and unity among the churches, says Alexandra Meneses Andrade (ICAME).

“Let’s put all we have learned at the service of society so that we can make a contribution to holistic peace in Ecuador,” she says.

“Everywhere there is a church, we can announce that Jesus Christ is Lord – not as a religion, but as a God of hope, a God who transforms lives, a God who gives new opportunities, a God who tells us that nothing is impossible for God,” says Fabian Buenaventura (IEME).

Article contributors: Ángel Castro León, pastor of Dios Viviente (Living God church) in Guayaquil; Fabian Buenaventura Garcia, president of Iglesia Evangelica Menonita Ecuatoriana (IEME); Manuel Aguagallo, pastor and representative of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ecuador (ICME); Vilma Cuji, from Caminos de Salvación (ICME); Doris Espinoza, legal representative of Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME); Alexandra Meneses Andrade is the general secretary of Iglesia Cristiana Anabautista Menonita de Ecuador (ICAME).



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Vancouver
Fresno
(Pacific time)

17 March 2023
07:00 (UTC -7)

mwc-cmm.org/OPHmar23

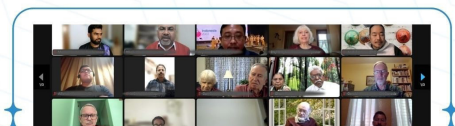


Photo: Stephanie Setiawan

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, 17 March 2023
- Friday, 19 May 2023

Share the impact

"Thank you for sending!"
"News from *Courier* will add faith and knowledge to us."

These are responses we've received after *Courier* brings you testimonies, teaching and news from the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family around the world.

How have you been moved by the sharing you read in *Courier*? How have you shared that with your wider church community?

Tell us what you learned – and what you want to learn more about!

We welcome your feedback.



✉ info@mwc-cmm.org

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[MennoniteWorldConference](https://www.facebook.com/MennoniteWorldConference)

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Executive Committee approves new Commission members

"We trust it is a joy to serve the global Anabaptist family, but recognize it takes effort. We are grateful for the officers, Executive Committee and Commission members who dedicate volunteer time and care to this work," says César García, MWC general secretary.

"Thank you to J. Nelson Kraybill and Rebecca Osiro who have finished their terms as president and vice president. Thank you to departing Executive Committee members (Alexander Neufeld, Juan Veron Aquino, Paul Phinehas) and to Commission chairs Joji Pantoja (Peace), Siaka Traoré (Deacons) and Stanley Green (Mission) who have completed their service."

After several years of meeting on Zoom, the Executive Committee (EC) gathered in person 12-14 December 2022 in Schoorl, the Netherlands, enabling new and existing members to meet face to face.

Due to truncated meetings in Indonesia (see "General Council learns about unity"), the Executive Committee made decisions on outstanding items from the General Council agenda.

The Executive Committee approved financial projections and Fair Share proposals for 2022-2025.

They approved the Peace Commission's statement "Declaration on Conscientious Objection".

Emerging networks have been operating for several years, however, the EC now approved their placement within MWC's structure:

- Global Anabaptist Education Network (GAEN) under the Faith and Life Commission
- Global Anabaptist Health Network (GAHN) under the Mission Commission
- Global Anabaptist Peace Network (GAPN) under the Peace Commission.

The EC confirmed new General Council representatives on Commissions and Andrés Pacheco Lozano as Peace Commission chair. Formerly GAPN coordinator, Andrés is research assistant to the Chair of Peace Theology and Ethics at the VU University Amsterdam and lecturer in the *Doopsgezind Seminarium* (Dutch Mennonite Seminary). Andrés is co-director of the Amsterdam Center for Religion, Peace & Justice Studies and a

post-doctoral researcher in the Center for Peace Church Theology at the University of Hamburg (Germany). A member of Iglesia Menonita de Colombia, he lives in the Netherlands.

New Commission members: Deacons

- Clemens Rahn (Asociación Hermanos Menonitas, Paraguay)
- Sue Park-Hur (Mennonite Church USA)

Faith and Life

- Atsuhiko Katano (Nihon Menonaito Kirisuto Kyokai Kyogikai, Japan)
- Desalegn Abebe (Meserete Kristos Church, Ethiopia)
- Francis Kamoto (Brethren In Christ, Malawi)

Mission

- Felo Gracia (Communauté Evangélique de Frères Mennonites en Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo)
- Hyacinth Stevens (LMC, USA)
- Simon Okoth (Mennonite Church, Uganda)

Peace

- Jorge Morales (Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia)

MWC staff continue to approach candidates to complete the Deacons and Peace Commissions. The Executive Committee will decide by email on the final candidates.

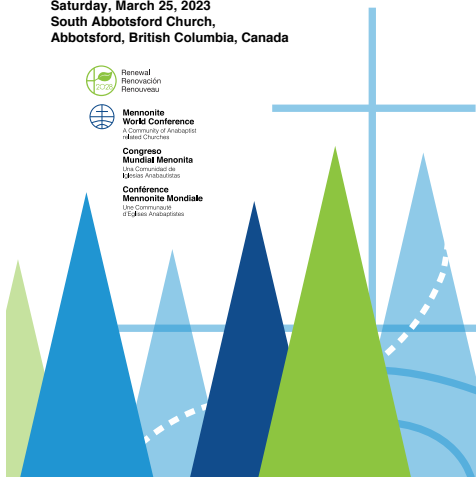
The following members were affirmed to terms on the **YABs Committee**:

- Asia: Kkot-Ip Bae (Mennonite Church South Korea)
- Africa: Isaac Nii Torgbor Gborbitye (Ghana Mennonite Church)
- Europe: Gaëlle Oesch (Association des Églises Évangéliques Mennonites de France)
- Latin America: Valentina Kunze (Konferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Uruguay)
- North America: Felix Diener Perez (MC USA)

Ebenezer Mondez is the staff mentor (2022-2028).

Jesus Christ, Our Hope
Jesucristo, Nuestra Esperanza
Jésus Christ, Notre Espoir

Saturday, March 25, 2023
 South Abbotsford Church,
 Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada



Renewal 2023

Renewal 2023 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, Renewal 2023: "Jesus Christ, Our Hope" -- time of worship, singing and testimonies from the global church -- will take place in Abbotsford, B.C., Canada, on 25 March 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

STREAM LIVE HERE



General Council learns about unity

"The unity on the conference was more important than each position," says Paul Dück, church leader in MWC member church Convenção das Igrejas Irmãos Menonitas (COBIM) in Brazil. "We agreed to create a path or a highway, not too narrow but also not too wide where both groups could live peacefully."

During online General Council resourcing sessions with former Mennonite World Conference (MWC) general secretary Larry Miller, Paul Dück shared about how the Mennonite Brethren church in Brazil learned to be one.

Each 109 MWC member church has 1-3 representatives on the General Council (based on church size). Their meetings in Indonesia were cut short due to COVID-19 infections among participants. So, General Council delegates gathered on Zoom for equipping and sharing 1-2 December 2022.

"Our consensus-based decision making is not practical with a large group on a medium such as Zoom," says César García. "However, we can use Zoom to learn and pray together, to keep nurturing our worldwide communion."

Larry Miller gave teaching sessions entitled MWC & Communion and MWC & Leadership. Both can be viewed on the MWC website.

To illustrate "receptive listening," Paul Dück told a story from his church's experience.

Some COBIM congregations were historically Anabaptist and predominantly Germanic. Others were Brazilian with strong influences from Pentecostalism. The sharp differences between the groups seemed to be headed toward a split.

However, representatives from both groups agreed to talk together. Over several days, they agreed to "recognize Christ in one another" (one of Larry Miller's points).

"We started with the definitions of what the Bible teaches about the topic. Each group had the opportunity to share about

their understanding and the practical living of the explained topics," says Paul Dück.

They entered the process Larry Miller called "learning receptively from each other."

As a result of the conversations, "those in the traditional group agreed to be more open to the moving of the Spirit while those in the charismatic group agreed that they could be more focussed on the Word," says Paul Dück.

Unity within the church was maintained peacefully, with openness to continually revising understandings.

"It should be emphasized that God's Word should be the reference for unity," says Paul Dück.

"According to [the apostle] Paul, God's unity plan is immeasurably bigger than the plan we might have in mind," says Larry Miller.



(l-r): César García, Paul Dück, Larry Miller

WATCH HERE



MWC and Communion



Leadership and Communion





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Photo: Christen Kong



Invest in the global Anabaptist family!

Join the MWC movement! Stand in solidarity with Anabaptist sisters-and-brothers from Argentina to Zimbabwe.

You can make a difference: **invest your financial gifts** in the worldwide mission of Mennonite World Conference. When we **work** together, we **learn** from each other while **blessing** the world.

When you contribute, you touch the world:

- Resource and strengthen Anabaptist leaders
- Encourage congregations to live out Anabaptist faith
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Like all **families**, we need each other to **thrive**.

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Together we build up the global family of faith. Thank you for sharing your gifts with MWC!

The Officers' column

An Executive Committee is elected from the General Council and meets annually. Two members from each continental region are elected from the Council; a President and Vice-President are also elected by the Council. The Treasurer and General Secretary are also members of the Executive Committee.

Meet treasurer Sunoko Lin appointed in 2018.



Sunoko Lin, MWC Treasurer

Photo: Christian Argha Aditya

What does it mean for MWC to be a "communion" of churches?

MWC is a gathering place for each member church to encourage and strengthen each other by sharing resources with one another.

What is your hope for what MWC will accomplish or be in the years ahead?

Our member churches have been growing steadily as faith communities embrace Anabaptist theology and practices of nonviolence, service and community. It is my hope that MWC can expand beyond the traditional Mennonite and Brethren churches.

Secondly, it is my hope that MWC's Global Youth Summit will play a more active role in recruiting young leaders and developing initiatives that meet the present challenges, like economic justice, racism and climate sustainability. That MWC will

also create space for them to collaborate in developing strategies and action plans.

What are you reading that has insights to share with the global family?

I felt convicted this statement in a survey done by a consulting firm, EY: "Gen Z want to make changes for their families, friends and communities – not just today, but for generations to come."

We often say, "Youth and young adults are the future of the church." This needs to change.

We need to actively listen to the cry of our youth and young adults. They want to make a difference in the world today. Let us work side by side with them.

How do you serve your local congregation?

I serve as a volunteer senior pastor at Maranatha Christian Fellowship located in Reseda, a suburb of Los Angeles, California, USA.

Besides serving the church, I am also engaged in the marketplace, working as Chief Financial Officer with an aviation company. This gives me access to share my faith with non-Christians. The gospel message is becoming more relevant as the world is witnessing a moral decay.

What is your professional training?

I am a Certified Public Accountant. I have also received my theological training at Fuller Theological Seminary.

How do you pray for the global church?

Info, MWC's monthly newsletter, and Courier magazine are good resources to keep me informed about our global family. What I from the news, I include in my morning prayer.

As officers, we often receive an immediate prayer request. If it happens during our meetings, we include this in our prayers. We care for the well being of our members.

As Apostle Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12:26: "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it."



MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

MWC Info

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

- English
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Courier

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Photo courtesy of Fabiola Arango Libreros



The MWC family worships together at Assembly 17.

Photo: Meeting house, Kresna Kurniawan

Unity with a purpose

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. (Revelation 7:9, NRSV)

The first time I saw a horror movie was one evening at a church. I was around eight years old when my mother took me to the premiere of a Christian film about the book of Revelation. That night I could hardly sleep. I dreamed that Christ had come for his church and that I had stayed behind to suffer what would be the Great Tribulation.

There are different ways of looking at the book of Revelation. Some of them, quite terrifying, fill people with fear. Others, in the voice of some preachers, use this book as a crystal ball to discover the future and explain the events regarding the end of humanity. Countless films and books have fed on such ways of understanding this type of literature.

Another option is to consider the book of Revelation as God's vision for creation. As such, it shows God's will for humanity and invites us to live in our present according to that will. Through the book of Revelation, we are asked, we are called to be a sign of God's kingdom here and now.

Speaking about God's vision, about God's invitation, the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) vision statement says:

Mennonite World Conference
is called to be a communion (Koinonia)
of Anabaptist-related churches
linked to one another
in a worldwide community of faith
for
fellowship, worship, service, and witness.

According to our MWC vision, worship is one of the purposes of being one, of enjoying a global community of faith, of being a worldwide *communion*. In that sense, it follows the emphasis the book of Revelation gives to worship in a multicultural setting. The sentence "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" appears several times in Revelation in the context of worship. At MWC, we want to be a foretaste of God's future by being – here and now – a global communion that worships God amid cultural and linguistic diversity.

The kind of worship exercised in such a diverse community must be centred on Jesus. That makes it possible to value multicultural diversity without privileging specific cultures but giving the same value to all cultures and languages. That kind of worship does not suppress or ignore differences. It celebrates multicultural diversity. That has been and continues to be our experience, call and challenge in MWC.

With worship being such a prominent theme in MWC circles, this first electronic-only issue of Courier addresses it from different perspectives. In particular, it touches on the challenges and points of view of various members of our global communion when COVID-19 pushed their congregations to re-imagine communal worship, an experience we also faced globally by the impossibility of celebrating worldwide encounters in person.

Does online worship replace on-site liturgies? That and other questions that emerged because of the pandemic may help us to keep our conversation going to respond to God's call to worship multiculturally and, by doing so, bear witness to the world of a God that celebrates and makes possible cultural diversity.

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