

Courier Correo Courier

April 2015
Volume 30, Number 2



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

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

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

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Cover Photo:

Members of the Open Door Mennonite Church in Jackson, Mississippi, USA, greet each other in a warm embrace. A Mennonite World Conference member church, Mennonite Church USA is among many denominations that comprise the Anabaptist mosaic in the USA. To learn more about Mennonite Church USA and other USA Anabaptists, see the country profile beginning on page 12. Photo by Vida Snider and used courtesy of Mennonite Church USA

Correction:

In the February 2015 issue *Courier News* (p. iii), a quotation by Adi Walujo was incorrectly paired with a photograph of Paulus Widjaja. The correct photo appears here.



The *Courier* staff apologizes for the error.

From the Editor's Desk



"Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way." (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

By the time many of you read this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier*, we'll be less than three months away from the opening of the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015. As a resident of this Assembly's hosting city – Harrisburg, Pennsylvania – I'm looking forward to welcoming my sisters and brothers from around the world to my backyard! What a joy and a privilege to fellowship with Christ-followers from around the world.

As we continue to prepare for Pennsylvania 2015, this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier* provides us with an opportunity to reflect on an important question: Why do we need a global church? This question is foundational to the work of MWC. And it's a question that's relevant not just during times (like Assembly) when the global church gathers together in one place. We also need to know why we need a global church when we're spread around the world, separated into our different nations, denominations and regional conferences.

The question "Why do we need a global church?" is the focus of both the "Inspiration and Reflection" and "Perspectives" sections of our magazine. In her article "It Takes a (Global) Village," MWC Chief Development Officer Aarli Klassen argues that the global church is necessary because it provides us with a space in which sharing about our differences can strengthen us and make us better followers of Jesus. In Perspectives, Anabaptist leaders from very different cultural, political, social and religious contexts – Canada, Kenya, Germany and India – each provide an answer based on their experiences in their homelands. Taken together, these articles offer useful reflections leading up to Assembly.

And to further prepare for Assembly, this issue features a new issue of Pennsylvania 2015 News, featuring updated information about the global gathering, as well as a country profile of the USA, which is hosting this year's Assembly for the first time in more than a quarter-century.

I can hardly contain my excitement about the upcoming Assembly! As I continue to wait expectantly for the once-in-a-lifetime chance to gather in my home country with brothers and sisters from around the world, I continue to remind myself of the words of the Apostle Paul, who told us that we will be shown "a still more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31). May MWC be one body in which we all learn that more excellent way.

Devin Manzullo-Thomas is editor for Mennonite World Conference.

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Courier/Correo/Courier is a publication of Mennonite World Conference. Six times a year it is published as a four-page newsletter – with the subtitle "News/Noticias/Nouvelles" – containing current news and updates. Twice a year, the newsletter becomes one section in a sixteen-page magazine, which carries inspirational essays, study and teaching documents and feature-length articles. Each edition is published in English, Spanish and French.

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Courier/Correo/Courier is available on request. Send all correspondence to:
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www.mw-cmm.org

Courier/Correo/Courier (ISSN 1041-4436) is published six times a year. Twice a year, the newsletter is inserted into a 16-page magazine. Mennonite World Conference, Calle 28A No. 16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia. Publication Office: Courier, 451B Pleasant Valley Road, Harrisonburg VA 22801 USA. Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg VA. Printed in USA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Courier, 451B Pleasant Valley Road, Harrisonburg VA 22801.

It Takes a (Global) Village

Being the people God wants us to be



by Arli Klassen

When someone asks you to use a few words to describe yourself, what words do you use? Would you change those words to describe yourself when you are with your family? At work? Travelling to some distant place?

I discovered that the words I use to describe myself change, depending on my cultural context. When we lived in Toronto, the two most basic words I used to describe myself were “Christian” and “woman.” Those were the two parts of my life that made the most difference in how I lived. Imagine my surprise, then, when we moved to southern Africa and those words didn’t really matter as key parts of my identity! Everyone we interacted with defined themselves as Christian, so that was taken for granted; and it was far more important that I was a mother than that I was a woman. By contrast, in southern Africa, the most important thing was that I was white – an aspect of identity I had taken for granted in Canada.

A Christian woman – those were the important parts of my identity in Canada. A white mother – those different parts of my identity became the most important in Lesotho. My self-understanding of my identity changed, even though I had not changed.

This change illustrates the first point I want to make: Culture matters, because culture defines who we are.

The second point I want to make is that language matters. I have learned a little bit of several languages, and I am fascinated by words that exist in one language and have no direct translation into another language. In Sesotho I learned that there is actually a word for a body part that heals badly after a break or a wound – we have no such word in English. And in Spanish and French there is the lovely word *animateur* or *animador*, someone who plays a facilitating and encouraging leadership role in a group of people, a concept that just does not make it into English. And in German we have the lovely word *gemeinschaft*, a word that English speakers have translated into “brotherhood” and “community,” though these translations fail to capture the depth of meaning that word has in German. Each of these examples underscores the fact that language matters, because language gives us the concepts that are important in our culture.

There are some deep differences among all our various languages and cultures around the world, differences that go far deeper than we sometimes realize. Culture, shaped by language, impacts our worldview, our self-understanding and our sense of identity. And this is particular

Three Mennonite women from different countries share together during a Mennonite World Conference gathering in Ethiopia. Photo by Merle Good

challenge for Christians, whose beliefs and practices are shaped by culture and language even though our faith transcends those categories.

Biblical examples of difference

The Bible gives us some images and stories to explain and understand our differences in language in culture – and to show us how these differences can in fact be part of God’s plan for building the Church.

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, tells the story of the Tower of Babel. This story gives two reasons for all the different language groups. One reason is that unity based on sameness leads to pride, and the other reason is that unity based on sameness is a response to fear. In Genesis 11:4-6, we read that the people wanted to be famous and that they were afraid of being scattered. Both impulses are rooted in dependence in oneself instead of depending on God: “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do.”

The theologian Walter Brueggeman says this is a story of people who wanted to be great because of their cookie-cutter sameness – same language, same food, same clothes, same culture. There is a lot that can be accomplished in a homogeneous culture. Brueggemann suggests that God scatters the people to show them a better way. The unity God wants for the human race is diverse people drawn together by common faith and values, not drawn together by sameness in language and culture. Brueggemann says that the many languages and the scattering in this story are not a punishment, but are actually an opportunity to live up to the much greater potential God wills for the earth. God gave the people of the Tower of Babel the opportunity to experience difference in order to learn to depend on God and to be drawn together through faith rather than through culture. It takes a global village to be who God wants us to be.

Another biblical image of difference occurs at the other end of the Bible – in the last book, Revelation. In Revelation 7:9-14, we read about an uncountable number of people, from every nation, every tribe and every language, all singing and worshipping God together. This is the opposite image to the Tower of Babel. This is a little glimpse of heaven!

This image comes to us as part of the story in Revelation of the opening of the seven seals – seven events with terrible consequences for the people. This image is actually in between the opening of the sixth seal and the seventh seal, like a little break in the story. Here we have this image of the people of God, from every culture and language, together worshipping God, regardless of the ordeals, persecutions and tribulations that they are experiencing.

In the previous chapter (Revelation 6:17), a question is asked: “Who is able to stand in the midst of all these ordeals?” The answer is given in this image: it is the multicultural people of God who together worship and praise God from every country and every language, and who are able to stand throughout persecution and tribulation. It takes a global village to be the people God wants us to be, and to be able to stay strong through persecution.



Anabaptists from around the world share in a communion service during the 2012 MWC General Council meeting, held in Basel, Switzerland. Photo by Merle Good

Becoming God's multicultural people

For the Jewish people in Israel who thought they alone were God's chosen people, this image of a multicultural people of God is a drastic shift in thinking. In Ephesians 3, Paul very directly states that once the Gentiles were not only foreigners and aliens but uncircumcised, and therefore not part of Israel, not part of God's people. But now, he concludes, through Christ they belong – fully belong. Paul's commentary was an immense shift in thinking for Jewish Christians. Only then could they begin to understand that there could be different ways of worshipping God than their own Jewish traditions, particularly the practices that gave them identity, such as circumcision and food laws.

For those of us who think our ways of worshipping and understanding God are the right ways or the best ways or even the only ways, the image of God's multicultural people in Revelation 7 is also an immense shift in our own thinking. It takes a global village to be the people God wants us to be.

We are cultural people, and our own cultural traditions and languages are the

means through which we understand and worship God. There is much to celebrate in many of our ways of worshipping and understanding God, wherever it is that we live and worship. But our own ways are not the only ways! Our ways are comfortable and familiar, and our leaders can even usually give extensive biblical explanations for why we think our practices are the right way.

Like the people at the Tower of Babel, we are too often afraid that differences will create disunity and will scatter us. We are too often ready to depend on language and culture and tradition to hold us together, instead of depending on God's ways to hold us together across our differences. We need to become like the people in Revelation, a

multicultural group praising God together, who are able to withstand all persecution. It takes a global village to be the people God wants us to be.

A glimpse of heaven on earth

Having studied sociology, I know that every group works hard to create its own identity and its own way of doing things, and that those ways of belonging are important. We all want to belong to a group with whom we share identity; that is normal human nature. Belonging is a good thing! However, these stories in Genesis, Revelation and Ephesians help us to see that God intends for us to share our primary identity with other Jesus-followers, rather than with those who share our language, culture or nationality. We belong to a people whose worldview is shaped by God, the Bible and our faith community. Our primary identity is as Christians. We belong to a local church and a global church. This identity and belonging should be the primary influence on who we are.

Our congregations are places where we belong, where we know each other and where we enjoy similar styles of worship and following Jesus. Belonging to a local congregation where we like to sing the

same songs or pray in the same way is a good thing. Many of us also belong to regional or national conferences – another setting in which we share customs and traditions that bind us together in common identity. And yet I know that even within congregations and conferences there is always just enough difference to bring conflict and tension. Those differences are magnified when we put a large number of congregations and conferences together within one country, and then across cultures, languages and countries.

Mennonite World Conference is different from belonging to a local congregation or conference. MWC is our global Anabaptist church community, where we come together because we share convictions about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the church. It is our place to catch just a little glimpse of heaven on earth – a glimpse of what it is like to worship God together with a multitude of others from different nations, different cultures and different languages. It is a glimpse of being the people God wants us to be – a people bound together by more than language, culture or local customs and traditions.

MWC is a place for us to learn from our cultural diversity about what it means

to follow Jesus. I believe that we can best answer the question, “What does it mean to be an Anabaptist Christian in my cultural context today?” by finding out how people in other cultural contexts answer that question. MWC is the place where we walk this journey of faith with others who are different from us – different cultures, different countries, even different types of Anabaptists in different conferences. MWC is the place where we are bound together by our shared convictions as Anabaptist Christians. Together, we are a bit of heaven here on earth. Together, we are strong enough to resist persecution and temptation.

Together with all the saints

Let us look back again at the passage written by Paul to the Christians in Ephesus – not to the Jewish Christians, but to Gentile Christians. He reminds them in chapters 2 and 3 that they are fellow citizens of God’s people, full members of God’s household and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus. That was an amazing, new, yet controversial idea way back then, and it continues to transform our understanding of God’s actions in our world today. We are all full members of God’s household, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus, across all the differences that so easily divide us.

Paul offers a prayer for this Gentile church in Ephesians 3:14-21. He prays that they might comprehend the immensity of the love of God – the breadth, length, depth and height of the love of God. And he prays that they might know it “with all the saints.” I love that little phrase in there. I read it to say that we cannot really know the immensity of God’s love without all the saints. It is only in the messiness of difference – cultural and linguistic and political and theological and economic – with all the saints, that we can begin to grasp the love of God. It takes a global village to begin to understand the immensity of God’s love, and to be the people God wants us to be.



Two Mennonite women, one from North America and one from Indonesia, converse. For Anabaptists, MWC is the place where such intercultural contact is possible. Photo by Merle Good



Arli Klassen is chief development officer for Mennonite World Conference.

Global Communion and Why It Matters

Exploring our shared commitment to being a worldwide family

As Mennonite World Conference, we share a commitment to being a worldwide communion (*koinonia*) of faith and life. Together, we seek to be a fellowship that transcends boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. Yet because of our diversity, each MWC member church brings a distinct understanding of the importance of global communion to its participation and investment in MWC.

This issue of *Courier / Correo / Courrier* seeks to discern the variety of reasons why Anabaptist communities from around the world come together to form MWC. In the articles that follow, writers reflect on the question: Why does my local or regional fellowship need a global communion?

Jesus With Skin On

by Darrell Winger

“Late one stormy night, a small voice was heard from the bedroom across the hall. “Mommy, I’m scared!” Mom responds sympathetically, “Honey, don’t be afraid, I’m right across the hall.” After a short time, with thunder snapping in the distance, the little voice says again, “I’m still scared!” Mom replies, “You don’t need to be afraid. Close your eyes and pray. And remember that Jesus is always with you.” The next time the pause is longer—but the voice returns along with a little child standing next to her bed: “Mommy, can I get in bed with you and Daddy?” As Mom is just about to lose her patience, her little boy catches her eyes and says, “Mommy, I know that Jesus is always with me, but right now I need Jesus with skin on.”

Every time I hear some version of this little story, I smile at the humorous way that its simple truth is conveyed. There are critical times in life when we need the presence of another person to serve as the physical presence of Jesus—someone to be “Jesus with skin on” for comfort, strength or some other significant need we have in that moment. I imagine many can relate to this child’s desire!

In a similar manner, there are other spiritual truths that need some “skin on,” some concrete embodiment, in order to become real to us. For Brethren in Christ (BIC) congregations in Canada, the Mennonite World Conference provides this embodiment of the important truth that we belong to a church family that spreads around the world. We know that followers of Jesus everywhere are made one through faith in him; however, we can experience this precious truth in a practical way since MWC puts “skin” on it for us. As MWC embodies the reality of our global fellowship in Christ, our BIC Canada congregations are strengthened in important ways.

First, our witness for Christ is strengthened. Canada is one of the most multicultural countries in the world. As you spend time in our cities, walk our streets, visit our shopping malls or go into any number of our schools, you will soon observe a rich mosaic of people groups, languages, faiths and cultures. With hundreds of thousands of new immigrants coming from every region of the globe each year, this diversity only increases. As we lovingly reach out to our neighbours and co-workers with the message of Jesus, our BIC congregations are increasingly reflecting this diversity. The truth that the

“As Mennonite World Conference embodies the reality of our global fellowship in Christ, our Brethren in Christ Canada congregations are strengthened in important ways.”

Gospel bridges all ethnic and cultural divisions is made real and visible through congregations that actually reflect the demographic reality surrounding them.

Our engagement with MWC expresses this same commitment: in Christ we become one global family. MWC provides our congregations a concrete avenue by which to realize and reveal this truth. In turn, this strengthens our witness to the peace possible in Christ. Those coming into our congregations from various backgrounds can see that the reconciling message of Jesus is more than mere words.

Second, as we engage in the programs and activities of MWC, our process of discipleship is also strengthened. In BIC

Canada we are convinced that a core way to become more like Jesus is to cultivate mutual, compassionate relationships locally and globally. MWC provides the opportunity to be in proximity with others that otherwise might seem distant. The spiritual formation that comes through being in community with others – hearing their stories, learning of their joys and sufferings and seeing truth from their vantage point – is provided through MWC. The global family is often more seasoned in kingdom truth than those of us who have only lived in Canada.

One of our congregations recalls the visit of Anabaptist friends from southern Africa that helped them discern aspects of spiritual warfare the congregation was experiencing and then encouraged them through intercessory prayer and worship. Our sisters and brothers who have had to wrestle much more with suffering, with poverty and with persecution have so much to teach us as we share life together. This interaction allows for a course correction, on a personal and congregational level, as we align with realities that are discovered through friendships within our global family.

The way we live our lives, spend our time and money, invest our energies and embrace the suffering that comes into our lives changes as a result of coming close to and being family with those from around the world. The more we engage in global fellowship, the more natural it seems to embrace the deeper change that needs to happen in our lives, and in our churches, in order to be more like Christ.

We are blessed to belong to MWC – “Jesus with skin on” for the congregations of BIC Canada.



Darrell Winger served as bishop/ executive director of Brethren in Christ Canada from 1997-2004 and 2009 to 2013, and the general secretary of Brethren in Christ North America from 2004-2006. For several years, he also served in leadership with the International Brethren in Christ Association. Currently, Darrell is pursuing a PhD in political theology at Toronto School of Theology.

A Glimpse of the Universal Church

by Rainer W. Burkart

I pastor the Mennonite congregation in the town of Enkenbach, near the city of Kaiserslautern in the Palatinate area in southwest Germany. Our church has 260 members and an average attendance of about 100 persons at a regular Sunday service.

The congregation was founded after World War II by Mennonite refugees from east and west Prussia (now Poland) who had to leave their homelands because of the war. (By contrast, other Mennonite congregations in the Palatinate area date their origin back to the 17th century, when Mennonite refugees seeking refuge from persecution migrated from Switzerland.) In Enkenbach, non-German young men serving in Europe through Mennonite Central Committee's PAX program, a post-war relief effort, erected houses for Mennonite refugees here as a settlement, allowing our congregation to flourish. Today's members are either refugees who came here at a young age or first generation "Palatinate" Germans.

Our congregation is one of the larger ones in Germany, much larger than the average Mennonite congregation in the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden* conference (not counting the larger congregations from Russian-German background).

The local congregation plays a very important role in our German Mennonite tradition. Early Anabaptists emphasized the centrality of the local congregation, and this emphasis helped the movement survive in times of persecution. Throughout the years, though, this congregationalism has led to weaknesses, including a sometimes-too-strong sense of self-sufficiency. For example, many members of our congregation think of themselves not only Mennonites, but "Enkenbach Mennonites" who are not so much interested in other Mennonite traditions. In the years of its origin our congregation had around 500 members and over the decades that large membership sustained many programs, making the congregation quite independent from other Mennonite groups. This has changed over the decades, due to declining membership numbers. Still, a real danger exists: the possibility that congregations will lose sight of one another, developing a mentality of "we are we and others do their own business."

Fortunately, many people in Germany – including many people in our congregation – have a vision for ecumenism. (This probably developed as a

result of German history, which includes the major Protestant-Catholic split of the 16th-century Reformation era.) We value close cooperation with other denominations for a better witness to the world. In our town, which has Catholic and other Protestant (United Church) congregations, we have good fellowship. We have a sense of the unity of the Christian church.

At the same time, our congregation needs to realize that our Anabaptist-Mennonite family is larger than our local congregation. That expanded worldview comes through our involvement with Mennonite World Conference.

Involvement with MWC offers several tangible benefits. First, it helps to

“Surely the biblical understanding of the Church is more than just the local congregation. . . Mennonite World Conference offers us a glimpse of the universal identity of the People of God.”

strengthen our common identity as Anabaptist-Mennonites. In our local congregation, we organized two small groups that read and studied the shared convictions of MWC, using Alfred Neufeld's book *What We Believe Together*, a book from the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature, recommended by MWC. Currently, another small group reads another book from MWC's bookshelf: Bernhard Ott's *God's Shalom Project*. Both books help us to "stay in conversation" with each other about our faith and practice as well as with the thinking and believing of the wider Anabaptist tradition. We read them not as prescriptive documents; instead, we desire to be part of a wider process of thinking and believing. We find these recommended books helpful.

In addition, involvement in MWC offers a reminder that the Anabaptist-Mennonite family has grown way beyond the ethnic German (Swiss or Prussian) cultures in which Anabaptism was first nurtured. For instance, we observe the annual World Fellowship Sunday (WFS) in our congregation, and as a result we regularly receive interesting information on the life

of MWC brothers and sisters. Moreover, at every WFS observance we collect a special offering for MWC in addition to what we give through our conference for the MWC Fair Share. In 2012, when the MWC General Council met in Europe, we invited two guest speakers – women theologians/pastors from Japan and Democratic Republic of Congo – into our worship services. This was unique and gave us an important glimpse into the growth of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition into a global, multicultural phenomenon. A year before, in 2011, we were fortunate to have MWC General Secretary César García visit our church to give a presentation on the work of MWC. His time with us also helped to show our people the reality of global Anabaptist faith.

Furthermore, we have been fortunate to host individuals from North America through the Intermento Trainee Program, an exchange initiative that invites young people to live in Europe and gain firsthand experience with European culture and languages. Moreover, we have hosted Paraguayan volunteers who have served in our midst. Some have even stayed and got married here.

Beyond these ventures in the local congregation, a considerable number of our members who can afford to travel have attended MWC Assemblies over the decades, including the gatherings in India (1997), Zimbabwe (2003) and Paraguay (2009). In each instance our people have come back enriched and impressed, and have given reports on their experiences.

Surely the biblical understanding of the Church is more than just the local congregation. Christians from many tribes and nations are bound together by more than just local identity. From a biblical perspective, the Church is a communion of believers who transcend labels of nation, ethnicity and race. It is a universal (or catholic, in the truest sense of the word) body. To make this known and to help experience its truth at the local congregational level, we need MWC. Ultimately, MWC offers us a glimpse of the universal, even ecumenical, identity of the People of God.



Rainer W. Burkart is pastor of the Enkenbach Mennonite Church in Enkenbach, Germany. Beyond his local congregation, he has served on the MWC Executive Committee and Faith and Life Commission, and co-chaired the Lutheran World Federation/Mennonite World Conference International Study Commission (2005-2008), which laid the groundwork for an of reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptists.

The Interdependent Existence

by Rebecca Osiro

Growing up, my late mother had a grass-thatched kitchen with an *orundu* – a small garden containing all sorts of vegetables – located behind the kitchen. *Orundu* would also serve as a “testing ground” where any new seed could be planted to verify its ability to germinate and mature. Having been tested, the new crop could then be planted in the larger *puodho*, or farm.

A well-maintained *orundu* is not sufficient for the family; yet *puodho* draws from *orundu* in many ways. During my childhood, the family was fed from *orundu* as we waited for crops to mature in *puodho*. *Orundu* was easier to tend as it was within proximity than *puodho* that was larger but not close to the homesteads and required greater effort to tend yet gave greater yields.

When thinking about the connection between the local congregation and the global church family, *orundu* and *puodho* offer compelling symbols, offering clearly not only the necessity but also the essence of the global in relation to the local. Most importantly, the imagery speaks to the ways in which the global depends on the local, and vice versa – what I call the interdependent existence.

The terms “global” and “local” are inherently interdependent, particularly within the church as a community of believers brought together by faith in God. As a pastor and Mennonite World Conference regional representative, my spheres of *orundu* are twofold: the Eastleigh Fellowship Centre (EFC), a small Mennonite congregation in the eastern part of Nairobi, Kenya, and the Eastern African Mennonite community. My tasks are challenging, taking into account that both are voluntary roles. However, the beauty of fellowship in Jesus Christ and the interdependence of local and global fellowships supersedes all the challenges therein.

At the EFC congregation, for example, we worship through songs of praise, fellowship, visitations, teachings and Sunday school classes in a setting where the majority of people are predominantly Muslims of Somali origin. This context is not only challenging but, at times, heart-breaking. Although we appreciate the composition of our region, recognizing that all people are God’s creation, in faith issues we need the fellowship of the larger community – a global community that transcends our local area in which we are religious minorities, a community in which we connect with brothers and sisters in

Christ from around the world. Our *orundu* stands to run dry unless we constantly draw courage, strength and comfort from God through the existence and strength of and encouragement from the larger community.

Our regional affiliations with the Eastern African Mennonite community facilitate our global connections. We share at the regional level so that we can better identify with the global community and participate effectively in it. Without the global community, the regional caucuses would have no meaning. They provide effective intermediaries between the local and the global. They are the glues that hold the global and the local firmly together. The Keyna Mennonite Church and *Kanisa la Mennonite*

“ Our local community stands to run dry unless we constantly draw courage, strength and comfort through the existence of and encouragement from the global community.”

Tanzania (Mennonite Church of Tanzania) bishops, executive offices and various departments at national levels play pivotal roles in shepherding believers towards a common goal – being one body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27).

What are some of the benefits yielded by the connections between the local and the global?

One benefit is harmony. Sociologists have identified the concept of “other” or “otherness” as a force that divides people. This otherness is not innate but constructed. People decide what is “different” and exclude them. This can be very destructive in the body of Christ. As believers, we share a oneness in Jesus Christ, and that should be our focus regardless of differences in geography, culture and race, or at times of economic imbalances and political crises. We should embark on deliberate efforts to deconstruct any forces of “otherness” within the church so that the “oppressed other” can find space among us Christians as being the “gracious other.” For example, EFC’s existence in harmony with the predominantly non-Christian community should not go unnoticed.

As a global church, let us stand with the struggling minorities in areas where the gospel is threatened. It is time that we re-examine the relationship between theology and economics. The global church should steer its objectives towards the well being of its members. This is definitely a huge responsibility but Jesus made it clear that it is not easy to enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3-4; Mark 9:47; Luke 18:24-25), yet we can do all things through Christ who enables us (Philemon 4:3).

Another benefit is identity. Having attended and participated in a number of MWC forums, I can attest that great effort is being put into cultivating a common identity. Formulation of theologies and theological terminologies that will instill unity rather than homogeneity is of paramount importance. By participating in the global church fora, we are enabled and subsequently find the need to re-shape our social categories in order to enhance a common identity as the body of Christ. A common identity does not compel us to strive for homogeneity. Instead, it gives us room to rise above our comfort zones to a meaningful and worthy fellowship. We can meaningfully identify and attempt to positively reshape our social categories when we participate together as a global community.

Agreements, disagreements and negotiations are all healthy components in re-shaping our identity. We should not keep away from the fellowship in fear of these healthy conflicts, for doing so would be tantamount to closing doors to the very fellowship with God that we desire to cultivate. Ultimately, we adjust our behaviours and self-image based upon our interactions and our self-reflections about these interactions.

In conclusion, as we approach and continue to prepare for the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly this year, neither liberal, conservative nor middle-ground perspectives should linger in our minds. Instead, our watchword should be “fellowship of the Body of Christ.” We need both *orundu* and *puodho*, local and global. We need one another.



Rebecca Osiro is a pastor-theologian and the first woman ordained to ministry in the Kenya Mennonite Church. She is the MWC Eastern Africa regional representative and a member of the MWC Faith and Life Commission. In addition, she has represented MWC in the trilateral dialogue between Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans.

Strength in the Gathered

by Cynthia Peacock

Recently, I had the opportunity to travel to all nine Mennonite/Anabaptist and Brethren in Christ conferences in India and Nepal. These conferences have congregations (including house churches) in mostly rural areas where the non-Christians significantly outnumber the Christians. Often, membership numbers are very low. The pastors are few in number and, due to geographic limitations and lack of sufficient resources, they are unable to visit with and provide spiritual nourishment for each member. As a result, many of these congregations have succumbed to a minority complex, with feelings of loneliness, fear, mistrust and even abandonment.

In this situation, it is difficult to know what it means to be a part of a larger family of God. Though these congregations are aware of the regional or national conference to which they belong, they have no sense of a global communion.

This reality led to my recent tour of the Indian and Nepalese conferences, which I undertook alongside a number of other global Anabaptist leaders: Madhukant Masih, the new director of the Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI), an inter-Mennonite agency that provides a forum for the nine Mennonite-related denominations in India to relate to each other for fellowship and in service to their society; Henk Stenvers, secretary of the Mennonite World Conference Deacons Commission; and César García, MWC general secretary. One goal of our tour was to share information on MCSFI and MWC and to explain the different roles and programs of each organization. Another goal – and perhaps the most important one – was to help each conference understand our global connectedness. We wanted them to understand that, through MWC, we are linked as brothers and sisters in Christ.

During our tour we noticed that very few people knew about MWC. (Those who did had attended the MWC Assembly in Calcutta in 1997.) We began our explanation with the local and moved to the global. We used statistics and photographs to explain the work of MWC and how it connects conferences around the world for fellowship, worship, witness and service. As we spoke, ears perked up. Eyes widened.



A musical group performs at one of the workshops held across India and Nepal for Anabaptist/Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Christians. Photo by Carol Zook

Those who listened enjoyed learning that they belong to a much bigger family of God. By the end of each visit, local conferences wanted to know when the next visit would occur! Churches big and small desired to know more and experience greater fellowship with Christians around the world. Many expressed interest in participating in the One Lunch Offering that will be raised during the annual World Fellowship Sunday. Learning about the needs of people all over the world makes even the poorest church want to share whatever little they have.

Throughout India and Nepal, our churches desperately need to know what it means to be a peace church. MWC has provided the resources and training needed to achieve such an understanding. In October and November 2014, MWC co-sponsored (with MCSFI and Mennonite Central Committee) a series of workshops throughout our conferences aimed at strengthening Anabaptist identity. Around 500 pastors and leaders – including women and youth – benefitted from excellent teaching provided by global church leaders. (For more on these workshops, see the February 2015 issue of *Courier News*.)

The much-needed understanding of “peace with justice” is now becoming clearer in the context where our churches are located – a context of poverty, injustice and violence. Local church leaders have committed to extending the teachings provided in these workshops, sharing Christian truth and wisdom to a wider group of people in our conferences’ rural regions.

Another need in our conferences is fellowship. These churches’ “minority complex” has sometimes been a barrier to

spiritual growth. Yet the feelings associated with this complex seem to disappear as church leaders and members discover the global Anabaptist community. Increasingly, these believers know that they are on a journey with brothers and sisters around the globe – a journey to know each other, struggle together and bring hope in the midst of hopelessness, injustice and violence.

Investment in the work of MWC has brought positive change to the minds, attitudes and actions of the churches. Those involved in local ministry must continue to do whatever necessary to grow this newfound sense of global communion. MWC creates the space in which diverse believers can come together to connect, learn and share. In such contexts, we gain a better understanding of how God is working among all people in all circumstances – an expanded understanding of God’s kingdom at work in the world.



Cynthia Peacock is the MWC South Asia regional representative. She also chairs the MWC Deacons Commission. Prior to retirement in 2006, she served as a social worker with Mennonite Central Committee for 38 years.

The United States

Diversity, dynamism and paradox



by Steven M. Nolt

When Anabaptists from around the world come to the United States this summer for the sixteenth Mennonite World Conference Assembly, what might they expect to find?

The United States is a large and diverse nation, and so are its populations of Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, Amish and Hutterites. By one count there are at least 68 distinct Anabaptist groups in the United States with more than 400,000 members in about 4,600 local congregations. Anabaptists in the USA live in different types of communities, emerged from different histories and express their faith in quite different ways. Some of them know very little about one another. Some will attend

MWC and others might never learn that the Assembly is taking place. But most would recognize in MWC's "Shared Convictions" some reflection of what they believe.

A context for Anabaptist witness

The United States was formed, in 1776, as the first modern republic. Its founders believed they were engaging in a pioneering political experiment and granted relatively generous freedom of conscience to diverse Christian groups. It was also a nation in which, until 1865, at least 12 of every 100 people were enslaved men and women of African descent. The USA is also shaped by a history of immigration so that today people from all parts of the globe call the United States home. It has a highly complex economy, renowned research universities, a tradition of civil liberties and an extraordinarily large and globally active military. All of these factors provide a context in which U.S. Christians – including Mennonites and other Anabaptists – live.

Members of the Open Door Mennonite Church in Jackson, Mississippi, USA, greet each other in a warm embrace. The congregation reflects the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ in the U.S. Photo by Vida Snider and used courtesy of Mennonite Church USA

Like other countries, the USA is also a nation of national myths. There is, for example, the myth of the "melting pot," by which many U.S. Americans believe that assimilation is inevitable or benign or both. Perhaps more important has been the myth of "individual transcendence," a promise that people can leave all tradition behind and start over anew, that the future is better than the past and that new equals improved. Americans in the USA are much more apt to deal with discontent by leaving a product, group or situation behind and starting over again rather than sticking with

something old and working to improve or adapt it. This faith has animated U.S. society, influencing even its churches. The United States has birthed an unrivaled number of denominations and “independent churches” across the theological spectrum.

Two broad groupings

One way to think about Anabaptists in the USA, in very broad strokes, is to consider two groupings: those Anabaptists who are fairly integrated into mainstream economic and education patterns, and those Anabaptists whose daily routines clearly set them apart from their neighbors. The first group would include most members of Mennonite Church USA, the U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren, the Brethren in Christ (BIC) in the U.S., the Conservative Mennonite Conference and others. (All those listed above are Mennonite World Conference member churches.) While these sisters and brothers generally strive to live their faith in ways that make a difference in their local contexts, those contexts are very often professional, middle class and urban or suburban. These Mennonites and BIC typically get their news from conventional media sources, own private automobiles, believe that doing well in school is central to their children’s economic future and assume that health care should be better than it was for their grandparents.



A “brush-arbor tabernacle” constructed for Brethren in Christ evangelistic meetings in Leedy, Oklahoma, in 1919. The BIC represent one U.S. Anabaptist community shaped by numerous spiritual renewal movements. Photo courtesy of the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives

In contrast, the Old Order Amish – the largest Anabaptist group in the United States with almost 120,000 baptized members – as well as Old Order Mennonites and a collection of related groups generally do not share these assumptions and values. From how they get dressed in the morning to the way they get to work and what they hope for their children, these Anabaptist are purposefully out of step with what the vast majority of U.S. citizens think is central to the good life. Tens of thousands travel with

horses, reject higher education and refuse to put their trust in commercial insurance plans.

There are, of course, exceptions and variations in this broad pattern. Members of acculturated groups are likely to say that they go against the grain as pacifists and as people who champion high moral standards. And some Old Order Anabaptists are becoming more integrated into the national economy. Still, some of the first things observers from afar may recognize are differences between those who have adjusted to the basic contours of U.S. society – or, in the case of new immigrants and communities of color, are trying to gain greater access to those basic contours – and the so-called “plain” groups who resist in striking ways the national myths of assimilation and individual transcendence.

Stories of immigration and renewal

Mennonites first came to what would become the United States in small numbers in the 1600s. Larger waves of Mennonites and Amish emigrated from Western Europe in the 1700s and early 1800s, and Mennonites and Hutterites from the Russian Empire arrived in the 1870s. Slowly – sometimes very slowly – these Germanic churches opened themselves up to people from other backgrounds, including Native Americans on whose land Mennonite settlement had depended. Strict immigration laws locked out most newcomers in the mid-1900s, but since



Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) service worker Michael Sharp visits with Elizabeth Namavu and her children as part of his work in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. Many Mennonites and BIC from the U.S. have developed global connections, sometimes through service with MCC. Photo by Jana Asenbrennerova

Anabaptists in the United States

A snapshot of Mennonite World Conference member churches

Brethren in Christ (BIC) U.S.

Membership	22,120
Congregations	262
Headquarters	Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania
Presiding Officer	Alan Robinson

Conservative Mennonite Conference

Membership	11,616
Congregations	107
Headquarters	Rosedale, Ohio
Presiding Officer	Bob Yoder

Mennonite Church USA

Membership	103,245
Congregations	921
Headquarters	Elkhart, Indiana Newton, Kansas Harrisonburg, Virginia
Presiding Officer	J. Richard Thomas

Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference

Membership	4,387 (Canada) / 425 (USA)
Congregations	22 (Canada) / 4 (USA)
Headquarters	Winnipeg, Manitoba
Presiding Officer	Jake Thiessen

Sinode Jemaat Kristen Indonesia

Membership	600
Congregations	8

U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

Membership	35,488
Congregations	196
Headquarters	Wichita, Kansas Bakersfield, California
Presiding Officer	Steve Schroeder

Source: MWC World Map
www.mwc-cmm.org/maps/world
Accessed January 2015

1970 the USA has again received millions of immigrants each decade, including Mennonites from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some Anabaptist immigrants have brought their church conferences with them. For example, the *Sinode Jemaat Kristen Indonesia* now has eight congregations on the West Coast of the USA; the Honduras-base *Amor Viviente* has churches in several Southern U.S. states. Similarly, when Mexican members of the Canada-based Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC) immigrated to the USA, they started EMMC churches here (now known as Active Mission Conference).

The USA has also been a place in which spiritual renewal movements have spawned dozens of new Anabaptist church bodies. The Brethren in Christ emerged in the 1780s in Pennsylvania among Mennonites who warmed to Pietism and to a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification. In the mid-1800s, the Old Order renewal movement emphasized the practices of humility and contentment, along with a communal approach to faith and a belief that church discipline strengthened rather than hindered an individual's relationship with God. In the twentieth century, the Conservative Mennonite Conference found renewal as the mission-activism of American evangelicalism leavened CMC's Amish heritage. Pentecostalism has been a source of spiritual empowerment for segments of the U.S. Anabaptist world, too.

Paradoxes of growth

Today the U.S. Anabaptist world is simultaneously becoming more urbanized and ethnically and racial diverse and

becoming increasingly rural and white. On the one hand, the growing edges of many Anabaptist bodies are congregations such as *Casa del Dios Viviente* BIC in Pompano Beach, Florida, or Hmong Mennonite Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. Half of Mennonite Brethren churches nationwide have a clear Latino, Asian-American, Slavic or African-American character. Calvary Community Church in Hampton, Virginia, with more than 2,200 mostly-African-American members, is the largest congregation in Mennonite Church USA.

At the same time, the largest numeric growth in the U.S. Anabaptist world is among Amish and Old Order Mennonite groups. Evangelically-oriented Mennonites and BIC often dismiss these groups' growth since it virtually all comes from the ranks of their own offspring. Nevertheless, culturally conservative Anabaptist churches do a remarkable job of attracting and retaining their youth. The size and increase of these churches – although generally off the radar of most mainline Mennonite and BIC members – means that the U.S. Anabaptist population, as a whole, is slightly whiter and more rural, in percentage terms, than it was 30 years ago.

Contemporary realities and arenas of witness

1. *U.S. Anabaptists are a very small part of a very large country.* The United States positions itself as a global superpower and its economic and military choices affect the lives of people around the globe. U.S. Anabaptists are part of this superpower complex. But they do not command as much cultural attention as, for example, in Canada. Nor have they had much economic or political influence as, for example, in Paraguay. Being a tiny minority in the heart of a latter-day empire has often left Mennonites uneasy about their relationship with the state.

For some, including Old Orders, the major concern has been the state's coercive powers of assimilation. They not only resist patriotic display and military participation,



During World War I, many Mennonite and BIC men were imprisoned for refusing, because of their commitment to the gospel of peace, to enlist in the military. Here, several Mennonites sing hymns while in prison. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Church USA Archives

but also (in most cases) public education and public health programs. For other Mennonites, the oversized role the USA plays in world affairs and its frequent military adventures abroad make them deeply uneasy and, for some, call forth regular public protest. Either way, the size of the Anabaptist community vis-à-vis the nation has often resulted in a defensive or prophetic stance on public matters rather than, say, seeking to partner with government agencies to advance an Anabaptist vision of the world.

2. *Anabaptists in the USA live in the midst of material abundance.* Regardless of how comfortable they feel wearing the label of U.S. citizens, many Mennonites and BIC are, generally speaking, well off financially. The abundance that characterizes most Mennonite lives expresses itself in positive ways through charitable giving to church and civic causes, Mennonite and otherwise. Indeed, studies of philanthropy tend to rank Mennonites as generous givers compared with many other U.S. Christians. In addition to giving to global causes, acculturated Mennonites and BIC are also spending more money on themselves, building or renovated church structures often at a cost of a million dollars or more for a single project.

3. *Predictable legal and financial systems in the U.S. have allowed Anabaptists here to create a host of institutions,* from mission agencies and retreat centers to



In the early 1950s, women from the First Mennonite Church in Bluffton, Ohio, USA, can meat for Mennonite Central Committee relief programs to distribute worldwide. Photo courtesy of Bluffton University Archives

investment funds and retirement homes. The work of these large, professionally-staffed institutions receives a good deal of coverage in the Mennonite press, but it should not obscure the many, many ministries that operate with volunteers and limited resources – and make a tremendous difference in the people they touch. For example, hundreds of Mennonite and BIC congregations host preschools and childcare centers, ministries run by women that benefit thousands of families each year but receive none of the attention that Mennonite colleges and universities do.

4. *Anabaptists in the USA live in a*

pluralistic society that shapes their worship and witness. Many Anabaptist churches sing hymns and contemporary songs written by Protestant and Roman Catholic musicians. Meanwhile, the style and spirituality of the charismatic movement has flavored worship in sizable numbers of congregations. Other congregations have adopted the ecumenical Revised Common Lectionary and the calendar of the Church Year to order their life together. Some Mennonite and BIC peacemakers work with Catholics and evangelicals to end the death penalty or support unwed mothers. Still others have joined with interfaith groups to address environmental concerns.

5. *Anabaptists in the USA are connected to the world in many ways.* Some links are through business or the work of Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Economic Development Associates or Christian Aid Ministries. Other connections come through travel, adoption, marriage or hosting international students. Some congregations have formed sister-church relationships with Mennonite or BIC congregations in other parts of the world. U.S. Anabaptists have much to learn from the world family of faith. May the next Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015, allow even more connections to form and flourish!



Overflow, a worship band comprised of young adults from Latino/a Brethren in Christ congregations in and around Miami, Florida, perform at a 2014 church conference. One third of all BIC in the USA speak Spanish. Photo by Will Teodori/BIC U.S. Communications



Steven M. Nolt is professor of history at Goshen College (Goshen, Indiana, USA), and the co-author (with Canadian Royden Loewen) of *Seeking Places of Peace—North America*, the fifth and final entry in the Global Mennonite History series.



Mennonite World Conference Assembly at a Glance

Pennsylvania 2015 is happening in just a few months. Will we see you there? Join Anabaptist brothers and sisters from around the world 21-26 July 2015 at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA for the global Assembly of Mennonite World Conference. MWC's Assemblies are held every six years, rotating through the world's continents. This is the first time in 25 years that the Assembly has been located in North America. Here are a few snapshots of what to expect. For more information, visit mwc-cmm.org/news6



Worship & Music

Do you enjoy music? Then you'll be energized by the worship led by an international choir as well as performances by music groups from around the world. And if the music during our worship services isn't enough, head down to the Global Church Village, where, every afternoon, gifted musicians and artists will be sharing their talents in song, dance, storytelling, and more.



Young Adults

We believe that young people are not just the future of the church—they are the church now! So our Global Youth Summit (for those age 18+) will provide space for our young leaders to meet, share, and cultivate their gifts and relationships. GYS will be held 17-19 July at Messiah College.



Friendship Groups & Workshops

One of the advantages of participating in a global body of Jesus-followers is the opportunity – through morning Friendship Groups – to learn from others who come from different cultures, life experiences, and faith expressions. Afternoon workshops offered in several languages on topics ranging from gender issues in ministry and Anabaptist history to non-violent communication and faith in politics will allow you to learn, make new friends, and see Jesus through new eyes.

Photos (clockwise from top): Ray Dirks, Ray Dirks, Lowell Brown, Wilhelm Unger, Merle Good

Speakers & Theme

What does it mean to “Walk with God” with brothers and sisters from around the world? Nzuzi Mukawa from the Congo (shown in photo) will be one of over a dozen speakers sharing on the Assembly theme – “Walking with God” – from Kenya, Mexico, Canada, Indonesia, India, the Netherlands, Zimbabwe, Colombia and United States. Although the stage language will be English, be ready to hear many languages and dialects both from the stage, in music, and in conversation.

Register Now
mwc-cmm.org/pa2015



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



Children & Youth

Pennsylvania 2015 is not just for adults; bring the whole family! Children (age 4-11) and youth (age 12-17) programming includes joint times of worship with the adults as well as special activities geared toward each age group. And as a fun bonus, youth groups can stay at Messiah College and participate in late night games and activities.



Sports, Tours, Service

At Pennsylvania 2015, we won't just worship together—we'll also play together! Join with other football (soccer) players and fans from around the world in a global expression of teamwork and fun at MWC's first Anabaptist World Cup. And if football is not your sport, afternoon sessions will also include a variety of activities for all ages including other sports, service projects, tours, and learning opportunities.

Photos (clockwise from top left): Lowell Brown, Lowell Brown, Liesa Unger, Wilhelm Unger, Merle Good



Registration

Did you know that we already have registrations from more than 70 countries for Pennsylvania 2015? Come experience a week with the global church ... and consider creative possibilities like registration sharing! For information on other registration options such as part-time rates, go to www.mwc-cmm.org/news6. The website also has information on prices, lodging and shuttle options, and travel or visa logistics.

Register Early

If you need a visa to enter the US, it is important to register early. Early registration is not just for international participants because **rates will increase 21 June.**

How Can I Help?

- Join our prayer network to pray for staff, volunteers, and those trying to get visas to travel to the US
- Partner with other congregations to provide scholarships for low income participants in North American and worldchurches.
- Beds are needed in private homes for Assembly guests. If you live in Central Pennsylvania, please offer your home by applying at www.mwc-cmm.org/hostfamily



Assembly Scattered

The North American church welcomes you to see what God is doing among them! Either on your way to Assembly or on your way home, you'll have the opportunity to travel to exciting locations in North America like Texas, Alaska, or New York City to see for yourself how God is working through churches, non-profits, and ordinary people like you.

Go to:
mwc-cmm.org/news6
for quick links for more details on these stories



Have questions?
Contact us!

mwc-cmm.org/pa2015

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April 2015
 Volume 30, Number 2



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Congreso Mundial Menonita
 Una Comunidad de Iglesias Anabautistas

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 Une Communauté d'Églises Anabaptistes

News Briefs

Japanese Mennonites protest government's pro-war proposal

Hokkaido, Japan/Elkhart, Indiana, USA – Reacting to a proposed change in Japan's ban against making war outside of its borders, Japanese Mennonites issued a statement reaffirming its anti-war stance.

The protest issued in September 2014 was in response to the Japan Cabinet's decision in July to reinterpret the country's pacifist postwar 1947 constitution that limits the use of force to defend Japan. The proposed change would allow the East Asian nation to take offensive action outside of its borders to help defend allies "in close relationship."

A statement sent by the Peace Mission Center of the *Nihon Menonaito Kirisuto Kyokai Kyogikai* (Japan Mennonite Christian Church Conference), the conference of Mennonite churches of Hokkaido, Japan, protests this governmental change. Addressed to the administration

of Japan Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the statement outlines the Christian peace position and urges the government to reconsider its recent decision. The government has not responded to the statement.

Earlier, in May 2013, fourteen Mennonite and Brethren in Christ leaders in Japan issued a call against this same proposed constitutional change.

Within Christian and outside Christian circles, Hokkaido Mennonites are letting their convictions be known and encouraging others to do likewise. Yukari Kaga, pastor of Obihiro Mennonite Church and Peace Mission Center board member, said that unlike large denominations, the small conference is united in the stance that "the peace of Jesus is foundational in our faith."

As a result of the anti-war controversy, young people are also speaking out, taking a stand and becoming aware of free-speech issues and the free exchange of ideas. "For the school newspaper, they

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Pennsylvania 2015 Assembly Update

Creative tensions at the centre of Assembly program

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA – Mennonite World Conference is putting "the creative tensions found in several important topics we face daily" at the center of its program for the next Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015.

That's according to Liesa Unger, international events coordinator for MWC. She adds, "As Christians, we tend to think we should conquer or resolve these struggles. [Instead, for Assembly,] we've asked a pair of speakers each morning to explore how we live faithfully within these tensions."

"Walking with God" is the guiding theme for PA 2015, to be held 21-26 July 2015.

Speakers will address these subjects during morning worship services:

- "Walking in Doubt and Conviction," Wednesday, July 22
- "Walking in Conflict and Reconciliation," Thursday, July 23
- "Walking in Autonomy and Community," Friday, July 24
- "Walking in Receiving and Giving," Saturday, July 25

Confirmed speakers for the mornings include Rebecca Osiro (pastor from Kenya), Tom Yoder Neufeld (professor from Canada), Nancy Heisey (professor from the USA), Shant Kunjam (bishop from India) and Hippolyto Tshimanga (mission director from Canada).

"We've also invited young adult speakers from around

Continued on page ii



Morning speakers at PA 2015 will include Rebecca Osiro (top), a pastor from Kenya, and Tom Yoder Neufeld (middle), a professor from Canada. Among the young adult respondents is Marc Pasqués of Spain/Australia (bottom).

Read more about Pennsylvania 2015, the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly!

The next MWC Assembly will be held 21-26 July 2015 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA!

To learn more about the event and to read updates on Assembly preparations, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org/article/pa-2015-articles



Pennsylvania 2015

Continued from page i

write about what they perceive as odd, and their comments are read by the whole student body,” said Yasuko Momono, a high school teacher and newspaper advisor, who is a member of Furano Nozomi Mennonite Church and a Peace Mission Center board member.

The Japanese government’s former stance emerges from its decision, after World War II, to no longer initiate war and to support only domestic and narrow military support operations. Some Japanese politicians and citizens want the self-defense limits to be lifted, for fear of aggression from neighboring countries in northeast Asia.

– Adapted from a news release by Mennonite Mission Network by Wil LaViest



Evan Knappenberger, one author of the new curriculum that seeks to build bridges between peace churches and veterans. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Creating connections between American veterans and peace churches

Akron, Pennsylvania, USA – Several North American agencies have collaborated to produce a new Sunday school curriculum focused on building bridges between peace churches and military veterans.

“Returning Veterans, Returning Hope: Seeking Peace Together” was created by Mennonite Central Committee, the Peace and Justice Support Network of Mennonite Church USA (MCUSA) and Mennonite Mission Network (MNN). MCUSA is a Mennonite World Conference member church,

while MCC and MMN are linked to MWC through its Mission Commission – MCC through the Commission’s Global Anabaptist Service Network and MNN through the Global Mission Fellowship.

Released in late 2014 on a U.S. holiday that honors military veterans, the six-week course focuses on biblical reflections and insights about trauma.

Evan Knappenberger, an Iraq War veteran studying at Eastern Mennonite University (Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA) spent part of 2014 researching and writing as part of a nontraditional course.

“I did a lot of coordinating with veterans in the Mennonite world,” he said. “In almost every little Mennonite community there is one or two, if not more. There are a lot more in the Brethren in Christ church in Pennsylvania.”

Curriculum creators see the materials as a relatively new field for North American Mennonites – addressing how Christian pacifists can embrace returning warriors.

“There are a lot of potentially good things that veterans can offer churches,” said Knappenberger. “There are good qualities of soldiers and veterans. Gandhi was a veteran; Tolstoy was a veteran. The people who teach us nonviolence, many of them wore a uniform.”

– Adapted from a *Mennonite World Review* news release by Tim Huber

In Memoriam: Edward Sahani

Dhamtari, India – Edward Sahani, a delegate to the Mennonite World Conference General Council for the past six years, passed away 13 December 2014 at the age of 65. He represented the Mennonite Church in India Dhamtari. Sahani was a member of Sunderganj Mennonite Church.

A medical doctor, he worked in Dhamtari Christian Hospital Dhamtari and Jagdishpur. He also served Shantipur Leprosy Hospital (Leprosy Mission) Shantipur and Leprosy Hospital Champa. In addition to his medical work, he was active in education leadership. He

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Additional young adult speakers who will respond to morning presentations at PA 2015 include Rodrigo Pedroza (left) of Mexico, and Tigest Tesfaye Gelagle (right) of Ethiopia.



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the world to be full members of our platform team at PA 2015,” comments Unger. “A young adult leader will give a response each morning to the presentation.” Confirmed are Tigest Tesfaye Gelagle (Ethiopia), Remilyn Mendez (Philippines), Rodrigo Pedroza (Mexico) and Marc Pasqués (Spain/Australia).

Further explaining the decision to focus on “creative tensions,” Unger says, “God has given us such a rich variety of experiences, cultures, and settings – and we want to learn from our different lives while we’re together in July. So often we only see a narrow wedge of God’s Kingdom among us. Each of us, in our particular settings, is up against dilemmas that feel threatening. So why not explore the Bible in the company and support of each other and together commit to greater faithfulness?”

César García of Colombia, MWC general secretary, reflected recently about the idea of “walking with God”: “I like the idea of understanding the Christian life as a way of living that’s under construction, a process that isn’t static or finished. I really believe that our conversations at PA 2015 will transform us because we’ll be discovering together the implications of following Christ in our home communities.”

In addition to these presentations and responses, morning sessions at Assembly will include international Friendship Groups that meet daily to discuss the topics. According to Unger, these Friendship Groups are “a fellowship experience, as well

as a chance for give-and-take in a fairly intimate setting about matters we care deeply about. We don’t want anyone going home and saying they never talked with anybody except friends they knew before.”

Finally, each morning will feature an international music group to lead all who gather in rousing singing.

Evening services, according to Unger, “will include stories and witness, prayer, sharing of gifts and encouragement.” Worship planners are currently in the final stages of putting together the evening program.

The PA 2015 program also includes programming for children (ages 7-11) and youth (ages 12-17).

More details about all this programming – from morning sessions, to evening worship, to activities for children and youth – can be found on the MWC website: mwc-cmm.org

– Phyllis Pellman Good

Resources about PA 2015 available on MWC website

Bogotá, Colombia – As excitement continues to grow for the next global Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015, Mennonite World Conference has created a variety of free resources for congregations and communities to use as they talk about and promote PA 2015, all available on the MWC website.

Church leaders can find a downloadable Microsoft Word document with ready-made announcements to use in church bulletins. (These are only

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“Why are you an Anabaptist?”

Members of the MWC community share their reasons for embracing an Anabaptist identity.

Rainer Burkart

Member, MWC Executive Committee Germany



“I am an Anabaptist because I hold to adult baptism, the priesthood of all believers and the decision making of all church members.”

Sandra Baez

Assistant to the General Secretary Colombia



“I’m an Anabaptist because it’s an adventure... to go against the current.”

Edgardo Sanchez

Member, MWC Executive Committee Argentina



“I am an Anabaptist because I have been forgiven and God has called me to proclaim Jesus Christ.”

Ron Penner

Member, MWC Executive Committee Canada



“I am an Anabaptist because it is seeking to follow the teachings and example of Jesus. Also it ties me in with

the global Anabaptist body of Christ.”

Danisa Ndlovu

President Zimbabwe



“I am an Anabaptist because Scripture is foundational for my faith and conduct, and because Christ is the model for my spiritual journey in this life.

Markus Rediger

Member, MWC Executive Committee Switzerland



“I am glad to belong to the global Anabaptist family where we want to love our faith/belief and proclaim and promote

peace. Our witness to the global Christian church is as relevant as it was 500 years ago.”

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available in English at this time.) They come with suggested dates for when to publish them and are an easy way to mention MWC on a weekly basis.

If a visual is needed there is a colour poster for PA 2015 with dates including Assembly Gathered, Assembly Scattered and the Global Youth Summit. This is available as a PDF file, easy to download and print.

As a way to introduce MWC to congregations and friends, there is a 3.5 minute video called, “Who is Mennonite World Conference?” This video explains what it means to be a worldwide community of faith and is available in English, Spanish and French.

MWC partners for pre-Assembly meetings

Bogotá, Colombia – Mennonite World Conference will partner with different agencies to host several meetings, focused on different topics of relevance to the global church, prior to the next Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015. The Assembly will take place from 21-26 July 2015.

Organizers for each of these meetings have agreed to a subtitle that ties the meeting into the overall theme of the Assembly, “Walking with God.” The meetings include:

- MWC Health Care Leaders Summit: Together on the Road of Health Care



This new poster for Pennsylvania 2015, useful for promoting the Assembly, is now available on the MWC website.

There are also resources for those who want to support PA 2015 in prayer. Brothers and sisters from the global Anabaptist family world-wide are invited to join the PA 2015 Prayer Network. There is information posted online and people can sign up to receive monthly communications with scriptural meditations, stories, information surrounding Pennsylvania 2015 and items to pray about.

All of these resources are easily found on the “Resources” page in the Assembly section of the MWC website: mwc-cmm.org/pa2015resources

– Kristina Toews

- MWC Global Education Conference: Together on the Road of Anabaptist Spirituality in Education
- MWC & MEDA Faith and Business Dialogue: Together on the Road of Faith and Business
- MWC & Historic Peace Churches: Together on the Road of Shalom

Visit the MWC website (mwc-cmm.org/pa2015) for details. Go to “Other Meetings” in the “About PA 2015” menu.

Give a gift to MWC

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

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

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

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17606 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 Canada
- Calle 28A No.16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia
- 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France

• Mennonite World Conference urges its member churches to pray for *Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria* (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria), which is experiencing horrendous violence and persecution from the Boko Haram organization

In a recent news release, Samuel Dali, the president of the EYN, warns of the possibility of “genocide” of Christians in northern Nigeria. He reports that eight pastors and 3,038 EYN members have been killed, 80 kidnapped and 96,000 displaced. He also writes that, “EYN is severely damaged by the terrorists in many ways. The whole Lardin Gabas, the historical center of EYN, has been almost destroyed. So, continue to pray so that the Lord can increase our faith and give the strength to bear the suffering. . . . The people they

Often in situations such as these, it is the sense of loneliness and lack of evident support from others that is most discouraging. Let us bear these burdens together. Let us assure these brothers and sisters of prayers and actions on their behalf.

• Pray for the leaders and members of an Indian congregation under attack for its ministry with Dalits (lower caste). The congregation, in the village of Kongalnagaram in the southern Tamil region of India, is part of Gilgal Mission Trust, a member church of Mennonite World Conference. One Sunday, a group of higher caste orthodox Hindus from the local community entered the worship centre, started to attack believers and ordered the pastor to stop the worship service.



A displaced family in Nigeria, with Rebecca Dali who has been one of the Nigerian Brethren visiting the makeshift camps where people have fled the violence in northeast Nigeria. Photo courtesy of Rebecca Dali, on the Church of Brethren website.

have killed are still uncounted and not buried.”

MWC encourages its members to become informed about what our brothers and sisters in Nigeria are experiencing. Member churches are also encouraged to send MWC a copy of correspondence and connections made with EYN, so that MWC is aware of all possible initiatives. For more details, visit the MWC website at mwc-cmm.org

The reason for the attack, according to reports, is that those of higher caste object to the Christian influence, which advises Dalits of their human and moral rights. The higher caste fears that they will face a labour shortage if Dalits get further education and seek other jobs.

Local community leaders have formed a peace committee to analyze the situation. “We hope to solve the issues with peace,” wrote Paul Phineas, the president of Gilgal Mission Trust. “Please pray that the high caste community (Gounders and Naidus) should come [to peace talks] to compromise and repent.”



The Ndirande Brethren in Christ church building, damaged by heavy rainfall in January 2015. According to a report by Rev. Francis Kamoto, the building’s sanctuary was saved from destruction, though other parts of the structure were destroyed.

• Pray for organizers of a national youth camp being planned by Mennonite Church Nigeria 10-13 September 2015 in Eket, Akwa Ibom State. According to Psalmist Ekpedeme Jackson, president of the national youth fellowship and camp coordinator, all youth (15-40 years) in all nationalities are invited to participate. The camp will include salvation messages, seminars on peacemaking and peace building, motivational talks, career counselling, Bible study and human capital development on small- and large-scale businesses.

• Pray for brothers and sisters in Bhutan, where the door is closed for the gospel and they cannot openly share about Jesus or build a church. The

only official religion is Buddhism and if caught sharing the gospel believers are arrested and imprisoned. One brother has been in prison for over two years. Pray for the material needs of these believers and that God will call people to follow Jesus in this place.

• Please pray for the people of Malawi, who experienced flooding and displacement as a result of several days of nonstop heavy rain in January 2015. According to a report by Rev. Francis Kamoto of the Brethren in Christ Church in Malawi, several houses were swept away by flooding, while others collapsed. Among the damaged buildings was the Ndirande Brethren in Christ Church building (pictured).

News Briefs

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chaired Mennonite Medical Board and Mennonite Board of Christian Education for almost ten years. He was also manager of Mennonite English Senior Secondary School Dhamtari and Mennonite Higher Secondary School Dhamtari. He is survived by his wife Anjana and an adopted daughter.



Edward Sahani

Courier/Correo/Courrier

Volume 30, Number 2

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Courier News is available on request. Send all correspondence to: MWC, Calle 28A No. 16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia.

Email: info@mwc-cmm.org
www.mwc-cmm.org

Courier/Correo/Courrier (ISSN 1041-4436) is published six times a year. Twice a year, the newsletter is inserted into a 16-page magazine. Mennonite World Conference, Calle 28A No. 16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia. Publication Office: Courier, 1251 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg VA 22802-2434 USA. Periodical postage paid at Harrisonburg VA. Printed in USA. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Courier, 451B Pleasant Valley Road, Harrisonburg VA 22801.

Why do we need a global communion?



“Walking with God” is the theme of our next global Assembly, to be held 21-26 July 2015. But how can we walk together if we do not believe exactly the same? That was the question that a leader raised some months ago while I was visiting his community. He believed that it is not possible to walk with those who think differently than you.

That seems to be the message that we hear replicated around the world, especially when we think about religious differences. Even in our Anabaptist history we have a long record of fragmentation and divisions emerging because of strong disagreements in our doctrines and ethics. Is it possible – even desirable – to have communion in a global way when there is such diversity of cultures, ethical decisions and theological understandings?

I would say that in MWC we have discovered that diversity is not just possible but even healthy. Such diversity is manifest when we share the same foundation that has been laid: Jesus Christ.

Moreover, when I look at Scripture, I find at least three reasons why we need a global, multicultural and very diverse community.

First, Jesus. There are four gospels that speak about Jesus. Each of them reflects the experience of its author with Jesus Christ. These theological writings do not show Jesus in exactly the same way. There is a lot of diversity among them. Why do we not have just one gospel? Why do we need four different points of view that give different understandings? From its very beginning, the church saw this diversity as something crucial, something that could help us to understand who Jesus is. The primitive church did not try to harmonize the four gospels in order to give us a unique and uniform account about Jesus. We need diversity in order to know Jesus better.

Second, ethics. The text about love that we find in 1 Corinthians 13 is in the context of diversity and deep disagreements. Believers in that context, for example, differed as to what they could eat or not eat. These same believers make different decisions regard this ethical problem, decisions made possible because the Scripture itself does not give a definitive answer. In this context, the Apostle Paul urges love. From this example, it seems that diversity and even disagreements are required in the body of Christ if we want to know the meaning of unity, love, forgiveness, patience and self-denial. It is easy to love others that think the same that you think, but are we able to do so with those that think differently?

Third, vision. On the road to Emmaus, the disciples found out the truth about Jesus’ resurrection only when they sat down and had dinner together – with Jesus at the center – in spite of their differences. During the long walk from Jerusalem, they resisted the tendency of walking away from each other due to their divergent theological understandings of the Messiah. They did not find Jesus through the long hours of theological arguing. Their eyes were open only when they shared a meal. We gain a new vision of other followers of Christ – and about Christ himself – when we see people not as our opposites but as members of our family. With family, it is possible to sit and eat together in spite of our differences.

Why do we need a global community? This question is one of the topics that we address in this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier*. We need a global community and the diversity that it brings in order to know Jesus better; to grow in our experience of unity, forgiveness, love, patience and self-denial; and open our eyes to new realities that can keep us close to each other.

May God help us to walk together and love our very diverse, global church. I am looking forward to living this idea in part during Pennsylvania 2015. Come join us, and let’s walk with God!

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

MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

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

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Courier

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