

# Courier Correo Courier

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**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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## A word from the editor

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#### “Liminal Space”

**We who are rooted in Christ must tenderly reach across barriers to wash the feet of our brothers and sisters of other faiths who, like us, are made in the image of God. Our differences are merely the threshold of an eternal door that is more than worth opening.**

Kristen Esch, Millersville Mennonite Church, Pennsylvania, USA



### What leads to witness

Like many congregations, GITJ Jepara (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa) in Indonesia holds discipleship classes. Pastor Danang Kristiawan noticed his learners often try to compare the Christian doctrines they are learning with Muslim beliefs they have learned on social media or elsewhere.

“It is not fair to talk about other beliefs only from a Christian perspective,” he says. “So, I proposed to invite some Muslim scholars to talk about Jesus from their Islamic perspective.”

He had already built many relationships with Muslim leaders, so when the congregation agreed, he invited three Muslim friends to present about Jesus and Christianity in Islamic perspective.

“They came to the church and explained in our discipleship class. Then we shared our perspective about Jesus.”

With his spirit of openness, Danang Kristiawan has frequently been invited to talk at the Islamic university in Jepara. “Mostly, I am invited to respond to some issues from a Christian perspective. In the discussion, there are so many interesting questions about mission, doctrine, etc. In short, testifying to our faith in respectful ways will be possible if we trust one another as a result of our friendship.”

This issue of *Courier* contains more stories like this about how Mennonite World Conference members around the world are living out their Christian faith in multireligious contexts (pages 6-10). The balance of religions looks different in each location, but in nearly every place we are challenged to live as faithful witnesses to Christ among those who see things differently.

How should we talk to these neighbours?

“Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15-16a).

The passage puts the Christian as the responder, not the initiator. Do our lives cause others to see the Christ-light in us?

Pastor Kevin Guenther Trautwein in Canada asks: “What do my neighbours want to know? They can see if I shovel my neighbour’s sidewalk. They can see how my family interacts. If that causes them to ask ‘why do you live that way?’ or ‘why do you have hope/joy/peace?’ that leads to witness.”

When the way we live impels others to ask, we must be ready to tell others about Jesus.

Read more principles for multi-faith dialogue on pages 3-5.

“When we interact, something fundamentally human happens,” says Harry Huebner. Yet at the same time, there is something transcendent: “Participation of the divine within this is not to be excluded.”

Although the task of a witness is to describe what he or she has seen or experienced, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts.

When we listen with respect, seeking also to learn about the faith of others, we are open to learn something new about God as well.

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

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## Courier Correo Courier



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# Embracing the other: living as Jesus did

## Contributors

The following interfaith dialogue practitioners shared their perspective with MWC:



Danang Kristiawan is pastor at GITJ Jeparu (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa), Indonesia. He leads an annual friendship camp with Christian and Muslim youth and organizes regular celebrations with the church and Muslim leaders.



Harry Huebner is a member of Charleswood Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He is professor emeritus at Canadian Mennonite University and has been involved in Shi'a-Mennonite dialogue since 2007.



Kevin Guenther Trautwein is a pastor at Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He is part of Phoenix Multi-faith Society for Harmony.



Paulus Hartono is a pastor at GKMI Solo (Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia), Central Java, Indonesia. He is founder and director of Mennonite Diakonia Service.



Paul Phinehas is director of Gilgal Mission Trust, Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India.

“Interreligious dialogue is not just a method of mission; it is mission itself. Witnessing to Jesus is not just talking about Jesus but also living as Jesus did and taught, embracing the other,” says Danang Kristiawan.

## What does Scripture say?

“In the Old Testament, Israel thought of themselves as living as a witness nation for the nations around them,” says Kevin Gunther Trautwein.

Zechariah calls for people to love peace and truth in society (Zechariah 8:19-23).

“This is a beautiful image of what witness looks like,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

“Isaiah prophesied the coming of the Prince of Peace for all mankind on earth without exception (Isaiah 2:2-4),” says Paulus Hartono. Later, the prophet writes those “who join themselves to the Lord” include the foreigner and eunuch; “I will gather others to them besides those already gathered” (Isaiah 56:3-8).

And in the book of Psalms, the psalmists invite God’s people to seek peace as a way of living in the world.

Harry Huebner’s favourite place to begin with the parables. “It’s amazing how Jesus holds up the Samaritan. It’s not because he’s better theologically (Samaritans were considered a different religion than the Jews), but that he lives a life that is more in keeping with teachings of Jesus than Jesus sees among people of his own faith.”

The parable of the lost son also contains lessons. “Father God has two children: insiders and outsiders. It gets all confused because the insider becomes the outsider

and outsider becomes the insider.” It’s a warning against becoming comfortable in an identity as religious people. “There are people who think differently who are *also* God’s children. If you are going to exclude yourself from them, you are doing something God is not pleased with,” says Harry Huebner.

Many of the epistles also address breaking down barriers between insiders and outsiders. “The apostle Paul advised God’s people to live witnessing in peace to all people (Romans 12:18),” says Paulus Hartono.

“Jesus’ story is the basis of our mission in multi-religious contexts,” says Danang Kristiawan. “Jesus proclaims liberation for people from their weakness. It means the good news is holistic. So, to follow Jesus is to embrace the other, to bridge the gaps among people.”

As Jesus proclaims the year of the Lord’s favour in Luke 4:18, he says the gospel frees us from barriers. “The gospel brings truth, love, peace, justice and the integrity of creation (Mark 1:14),” says Paulus Hartono.

“The sermon on the mount (Matthew 5) is Jesus’ call to all creatures, including those of different religions, to bring peace so that salt and light can be seen in the world,” says Paulus Hartono.

“You are the light of the world,” Jesus says in Matthew 5:14. “We are called to shine in the world where darkness prevails,” says Paul Phinehas. “Witnessing to Christ is the most important thing in the life of a Christian believer.”

“We are clearly different; yet we are all God’s children in that none have been rejected from the domain, sovereignty, lordship and love of God,” says Harry Huebner.

### What can we learn about God from other religions?

“The fact that God allows religions to proliferate in the world says something about who God is,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

God is the director of a drama where faith in Jesus is a specific role among the parts of the play in Nicholas M. Healy’s concept of theodramatic ecclesiology. This places the emphasis on God’s action, not individual Christians nor even the church.

“This takes Christian specificity seriously while also taking specificity of other faiths and religions seriously,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein. “We don’t need to reduce them all to different versions of the same good.”

Many in Anabaptist churches have Muslim neighbours. “Islam places great emphasis on obedience and fidelity to Allah which is expressed in prayer five times a day,” says Paulus Hartono.

“I learn from their spirituality,” says Danang Kristiawan. “Spiritual discipline should not be seen as a burden, but a sign that we want to have an intimate relation to God.

“From mystical Islam (Sufi), I can learn about life surrendered to God. All reality is seen as God’s love. Nature is a window to come to the Lord. This is also related to Asian religious view of reality.”

**We don’t need to reduce them all to different versions of the same good.**

Harry Huebner has been impressed with the “enormous emphasis on the mercy of God and love of God” as he has dialogued with Muslim clerics. For example, Mahnaz Heydarpour “talks about the essence of God being love. The essence of God is unity. God does not desire conflict and destruction of the other. God desires the

reconciliation and peace of all people, all of God’s creation.”

“Islam also emphasizes ‘Ukhuwah’ or living in brotherhood with fellow people, fellow nations, fellow human beings,” says Paulus Hartono.

“From my experience with Muslim community, I can learn that God is love. I think this is our meeting point,” says Danang Kristiawan.

Islam also teaches respect for the Torah, and the Gospels. “So basically, Muslims want to know a lot about Jesus,” says Paulus Hartono.

“My overwhelming surprise has been that when I teach Muslim students or faculty, their openness to Jesus is astounding. It is at least as great as when I teach about Jesus at Canadian Mennonite University,” says Harry Huebner. “Muslims love Jesus.”

Other religions may help us see the sovereignty and transcendence of God better, says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

“Hinduism and Buddhism emphasize loving all beings and the universe. Life returns by way of incarnation, therefore to live in goodness is obligatory,” says Paulus Hartono.

“And Confucianism emphasizes living in pursuit of virtue. Respect older people

and love younger ones. Live healthy, prosperous, peaceful and long life,” says Paulus Hartono.

“It’s okay that religions are different. We are different individuals even within faith....We can talk about our differences of justice without having to threaten or kill each other. That is what we need to teach the next generation, to train ourselves and each other. We must train for peacemaking,” says Harry Huebner.

### Principles to guide Christian witness

#### Enter into an exchange

Listen as well as speak.

#### Take initiative

“We need to make friends and be friendly to people. Interreligious relations shouldn’t just be a program, but should be our way of life to build friendship to the other,” says Danang Kristiawan.

#### Be open

“We can be open to the other if we empty ourselves. This is hospitality (Philippians 2:5-11),” says Danang Kristiawan.

“Yet, our witnessing is not always accepted by the other, even as we offer peace as our message. To be open means



**Christian and Muslim young people discuss their faith in Indonesia.**

Photo: Novita Dwi Saputri

we are ready to be hurt, rejected and ignored. This also happened to Jesus.

“Openness is not only in our action to relate the other, but also in our mind: no prejudice, no judging; respect and willingness to learn and listen to the other,” says Danang Kristiawan.

## Interreligious relations shouldn't just be a program but our way of life.

### Be humble

“It's tempting to want to do all the roles. But our role in the process is limited. We are invited into God's conversation with the other person. Our job is to play our role and get out of the way,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

“The advocate comes and testifies and convicts the world of sin and justice (John 16:5-15). It's not us. We are to be witnesses,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

### Be committed

“To be faithful Christian witnesses in a pluralistic society, we have to have commitment to Jesus – not in an abstract concept, not only in emotion, but in action by living and following Jesus in daily life. Without commitment, our witness will be just chit-chat, nothing can we share. Commitment to Jesus means committing to love, and love always pushes us to relate to the other,” says Danang Kristiawan.

“Fulfilling Jesus' call to be his partner in this world means continuing his vision and mission in presenting, living and teaching the values of the gospel of the kingdom of God,” says Paulus Hartono.

### Treat others with respect

“Remember that the people we're dialoguing with are loved by God. Don't reduce or diminish them or their ideas. Listen for what they are saying in its best light,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

### Be specific

“I speak out of my faith: I don't speak as someone who comes neutrally. We are different, but we don't need to hurt each other,” says Harry Huebner.

“Use words, images and language from the Bible rather than 'Christianese' or theological vocabulary. (e.g. 'God is faithful' instead of 'God is immutable'),” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

“Don't try to generalize or speak for all – even in your own tradition. And don't ask for your dialogue partner to speak for others,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein. “Share when asked about your own specific practices and beliefs.”

### Speak of what you know

“God is the truth, so we testify to the truth. God is love, so we can witness to his love in real terms. God is peaceful, so we bring his peace. God is justice, so we uphold justice in the world. God is the creator of the universe with everything in it, so we are called to care for and manage it,” says Paulus Hartono.

“If my life causes others to ask 'why do you live that way' or 'why do you have hope or joy or peace,' that leads to witness. It's relaxing into humility that it's not my job to make you change – that's God's job,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

As a professor, Harry Huebner is frequently invited to speak about Christian faith: “What is it *but* evangelism? I speak of the power of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. The great commission isn't something in addition to that. It *is* that.”

### Practice patience

“This is God's process, God's timeline. God is patient with us (2 Peter 3:9); we should be patient with others,” says Kevin Guenther Trautwein.

Remember to be rooted in prayer, Paul Phinehas says.

And be grateful. “By the grace of God through Jesus Christ he has made us his children. So, we live to witness his love,” says Paulus Hartono.

## Testimony

### The patient work of the Holy Spirit

After an economic crisis followed riots which had damaged much of the city of Solo, Indonesia, in 1998, local leaders formed The Interfaith Committee (IFC). Paulus Hartono was asked to represent the church association on the IFC. He managed the humanitarian aid program that distributed 7 200 000 kg of rice to 12 000 households (60 000 people).

“This program laid the foundation for the continuation of the peace program in Solo,” says Paulus Hartono.

One of the people he worked with on the committee was Dharma Saputra, a Buddhist member of the committee. Through their work together, they build a relationship with respect and appreciation for each other's beliefs.

In 2014, Dharma Saputra invited Paulus Hartono to visit him in his final days in hospital.

“Please pray for me, sir. Pray as a pastor and friend not as the head of the IFC institution,” Dharma Saputra said.

“Would Pak Dharma be willing to pray in the Lordship of Jesus that I believe in?” Paulus Hartono asked. “I am willing,” he replied softly.

At Dharma Saputra's request, Paulus Hartono prayed for Jesus as God to guide him and forgive him.

“It is the guidance of the Holy Spirit who has worked in the journey of humanitarian and peace work for more than 10 years.”

## Indonesia

# A form of peace, faith, testimony and mission

by Janti Diredja

**T**he most difficult situation is the best class of life. When the whole world is facing the pandemic, we learn about solidarity and compassion, not only thinking about ourselves but also other people who are weaker.

Even amid difficulties, we can be a blessing for others and help people in need.

## Caring and loving action (*Aksi peduli kasih*)

The caring and loving initiative was born out of the concerns of the leaders and activists of GKMI Yogyakarta church over the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many members lost their jobs or were laid off. Thirteen overseas students could not go home while not having any money. There were families who had to self-quarantine because of suspected COVID-19 infection.

Even though the majority of the GKMI Yogyakarta congregation are poor, poverty does not hinder care and love in the midst of a pandemic. The members are optimistic, hopeful and have faith in God.

God's blessing is sufficient; it precedes and sustains them.

GKMI Yogyakarta *Peduli Kasih* Team not only gave attention to the welfare of the congregation members (physical and mental health) but also distributed food to community members around the church regardless of religion.

## A beautiful harmony

"Yes, there was entertainment from a small radio. On Sunday mornings I always listen to GKMI Yogyakarta's sermon. Thanks for the food and radio," says Mrs Martini, 76 years old.

Every Sunday, Mrs. Martini's neighbour Mrs. Sartini helps her to set up her radio to listen to the Sunday service. Mrs. Sartini also helps Mrs. Martini in preparing Holy Communion when she needed it.

What is interesting is that Mrs. Sartini is a Muslim. It is a beautiful harmony.

## Prayer chain movement and action (*Gerakan rantai doa dan karya*)

The construction of GKMI Synod Wisma Muria in Semarang which started on 11 January 2020 had just begun, when the COVID-19 pandemic happened in Indonesia. Amid the economic hardships of the pandemic, the GKMI Synod committee (Aristarchus Sukarto, Oendianto, Iwan Ganius) didn't quit. They made a breakthrough instead.

In the committee's sharing on 11 September 2020, GKMI churches around Indonesia were invited to pray for the workers and the construction of the GKMI synod office while every local church took turns to give lunch for the workers each week.

GKMI enthusiastically supported this movement. A multi-chat group was formed, where every day there is a prayer request and progress report about Wisma Muria. Starting from 28 September 2020, the GKMI churches took turns bringing lunch, visiting the workers and praying for them.

"The workers are very happy", said Juanto, the project manager. It's not unusual for the project to supply lunch for the workers; what makes this different is that the church members stay to visit.

"I feel the attention from the GKMI churches. We are thankful and grateful. Hopefully, the relationship will continue among the foremen, workers, supervisors and GKMI churches. Amen!"

Juanto and all the workers are Muslim.

"Alhamdulillah, the construction process of the building is going smoothly. There have been no significant obstacles, there have been no accidents, and the foremen and workers are healthy.

"I believe this is also because of the pastors and the elders who were present and prayed for us. I believe prayer for safeness is very important. Prayer in a Christian or Islamic way does not matter,

because we all have the same God, only different ways of believing. We are grateful for GKMI's attention."

The supervising engineer Srihono Purnomo says: "The workers are very happy and grateful. They can save 15-20 thousand rupiah a day and take home more money. Because of GKMI attention and prayer, they work better.

Reverend Aristarchus Sukarto says this movement is not just a matter of togetherness for being part of the same synod, but it is also an expression of faith:

- a. Feeding workers who need attention is a form of peace, faith, testimony and mission as God feeds and cares for us. (Mark 8:2).
- b. For us as God's children, this makes us receive God's grace in the form of a promise to receive the Kingdom that has been provided (Matthew 25:34-40). God loves and appreciates those who pay attention to the weak and needy.

GKMI Yogyakarta caring and loving action (*Aksi Peduli Kasih*) and prayer chain movement and action (*Gerakan Rantai Doa dan Karya*) are Christian witnesses in a multi-religious world during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Caring for and loving others is shown through real action and building relationships that don't quit in a difficult situation but overcome hardship.

We can be bearers of peace and bring *shalom* for others. We can minister without being segregated by religion or social status. We can serve others and let others serve us too.



Janti Diredja is a retired pastor and a member of GKMI Yogyakarta in Indonesia.

Rev. Dr. Aristarchus Sukarto, former GKMI moderator, former pastor of GKMI Puri Kembangan died 8 February 2021 of cancer.

## Guatemala

# God was always there

## Mayas and Anabaptists: A spiritual encounter

by Olga Piedrasanta

**G**uatemala is a beautiful country with pluricultural, multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious peoples. God allowed my birth to happen here.

### What God had prepared for my life

Forty years ago, a friend of the family invited us all to visit the Casa Horeb Mennonite Church. Shortly after that I was baptized for a second time in the beautiful Lake Amatitlán and I committed to following Jesus. At the time there was no way for me to visualize all the infinite mercies that the Lord had prepared for my life.

These were the years of the armed conflict in which many people disappeared, never to be heard from again. In the midst of all the fear that arises from this kind of violence, I graduated with a psychology degree.

One day a brother in the faith invited me to become part of the Anabaptist Seminary for Latin America (SEMILLA). This opened the door for me to take an important step towards a deeper spirituality that comes through a conversion/transformation process. I also learned to appreciate and follow Anabaptist values. After studying at SEMILLA for a number of years, I graduated with a degree in pastoral theology and still teach there now.

### The work of accompaniment

Next, I took on the direction of a Mayan institution, Utz Kaslemal (Good Life in the Quiché language). The mission was to provide psychosocial accompaniment to war victims among the Indigenous peoples and exhume the bodies buried in clandestine cemeteries.

There were so many people who died, and so much fear, that families buried their dead wherever they could. We put out a call to assist the people who had lost their loved ones. Whenever a clandestine cemetery would be found, we would get the call and

work with the justice system and forensic anthropologists in order to accompany the families.

For every exhumation there was a before, during and after phase.

People would break down crying just remembering the faces of their loved one(s), grieving not having had time to say goodbye or to complete their mourning.

Our role was to console and strengthen them during these moments, becoming one with them in their pain.

**In silence, I pleaded with the Lord to provide them with consolation, peace and tranquility.**

### God with us

This Psalm (85) which has been read so often at church and throughout my studies, took on flesh and came alive in my mind and my life.

*Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other. Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.*

*The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before him, and prepares the way for his steps. (NRSV)*

My unbelieving eyes saw how the truth of suffering sprang forth from the earth. How could I not look on the anguish of my Indigenous brothers and sisters with mercy? I cried out to our Father for compassion in these moments.

God was there with us; consoling and hugging and crying and washing away the tears of those women and men who mourned for the child they would never see again. How is it possible to talk about

righteousness and peace, tranquility, serenity, with people in this state? Except that Divine Justice is the opposite of human justice and it only comes from God. How could we talk to them about the source of peace, hope and certainty that is Jesus?

I could feel God guiding me towards being sensitive to their feelings, emotions and pain. In silence, I pleaded with the Lord to provide them with consolation, peace and tranquility. When I watched and listened to the Mayan spiritual funeral rites, I experienced God's presence right there, seeing us and pouring out consolation, faith and hope for each and every one.

I have been transformed and now I am an even more faithful follower of Christ! That strong, brave, indomitable Mayan spirituality along with Anabaptist teaching has taught me that following Christ is not easy; it is arduous and yet this is the way that unites us with the Father. This is the meeting place of our spiritualities.

### The Lordship of Christ

Now I understand that the Lordship of Christ happens not only through a close and intimate relationship with Our Father, but also with one another, in particular in relationship with those who are dispossessed and suffer. This kind of communion only comes as a result of faith and the working of the Holy Spirit, who in infinite mercy allows us to be the presence of Christ wherever we happen to be.

The presence of Jesus in our lives overcomes any barrier we come across, be it geographical, social, racial, religious or political. He came to overcome the barriers that separate us from God and from others. He came to search for us and save us when we feel lost, and to restore twisted interpersonal relationships so that they are once again in complete harmony with the Creator.



Olga Piedrasanta is a member of Iglesia Menonita Casa Horeb, Guatemala City, Guatemala

## Germany

# The messiness of actual life

## Interreligious work in Berlin, Germany

by Marius van Hoogstraten

**F**ollowers of other religious paths are often called “strangers,” but living in Berlin, Germany, that never feels right. Of course, “their” lives are in some sense strange to “us,” gathering as they do around different stories, with different songs and often on a different day of the week than our Sunday worship. Yet living in this city – as in many places the world over – these “strangers” are too close, encounter and relationship across such boundaries too everyday an occurrence, for this strangeness to persist.

This is not always easy. Our old neighborhood of Neukoelln is a microcosm of such conviviality in all its ambiguity.

### Past and present

This ambiguity is as close as a walk around our block. It takes you past the migrant-run shops and eateries that still survive amid ongoing gentrification, and past the expensive cafés and bars eager to supplant them. It takes you past an impressive mosque and a bright Hindu temple, but also a former synagogue, an eerie reminder of how much Jewish life there once was in this city.

In this place, hope for togetherness in the present is always haunted by the suffering of the past, which is never truly in the past. Before many homes in Berlin, there are *Stolpersteine*: commemorative metal cobblestones to mark the dwellings of those murdered by the Nazi regime.

Next to the Hindu temple is the *Neue Welt*, once a popular gathering place for workers’ meetings organizing resistance to World War I.

The main building of the *Sehitlik* mosque is recent, but this Muslim presence here predates the German state. The mosque still deals with xenophobic attacks on a regular basis. It stands at the edge of the *Tempelhof* airport, which was built by the National Socialist regime, became a lifeline for an isolated West Berlin during the Cold War, and has now been reborn as a large green space where people fly kites, grow vegetables and play football. Refugees live in its terminal building.

This is a city at once old and new, alive with hope and perpetually in mourning. Here, I am reminded that the borders erected, and the stories told to separate “us” from “them,” those who belong from those who do not, can have lethal consequences.

### New life from a grave history

For years, this is where the Berlin Mennonite Peace Centre did its work, guided simply by asking what the kingdom of God could mean in such a place. Early on, it became clear that this must include creating spaces for interreligious encounter and fellowship. And as we met with activists, faith leaders and social workers, we marvelled at the unanticipated newness of life that continuously emerged from our work together amid the grave history of this city.

When we work for peace, we always do so in the middle of everything that has happened before. There is never quite the fresh start that we might want. The “religious other” can never be approached simply as “other” without an appreciation for the historical mess of borrowings, togetherness and violence that are already in our shared history.

It is often assumed that either all or most religious paths are the same, or they are irreconcilably different. Yet, neither approach quite addresses the historical and contemporary messiness and ambiguity of actual life.

### Listening and witnessing

In our Christian-Muslim conversation group in Neukoelln, we settled into a habit of *listening and witnessing*, allowing the witness of the other to challenge us in our own faith.

Doing so, we quickly found our paths were far from fundamentally the same. There was too much difference there; our stories and traditions and our encounters with God were too particular, too much *ours*.

Yet that particularity did not inhibit our conversations, but made them come alive. My personal appreciation for the Trinity and the Incarnation – but also my fascination



A fellowship gathering at the Berlin Mennonite Peace Centre (pre-pandemic).

Photo: Marius van Hoogstraten/MFB

for the rabbi Jesus and his way of peace – have only deepened by being questioned and challenged by the questions and witness of my Muslim friends.

But as we ate together and shared stories of faith and life and community, assertions of clear-cut difference also began to waver. We realized that Christians and Muslims never formed homogeneous bodies: we often disagreed with our “fellows” more vehemently than with the “others.”

Something grew between us that cannot really be described as agreement or commonality but was also more than a mere respect in difference: relationship, community. Perhaps what we experienced is not so far removed from that odd kingdom of outsiders and unexpected dinner parties (Luke 14:15-24) to which Jesus of Nazareth calls us.



Marius van Hoogstraten serves as pastor in the Hamburg Mennonite congregation. He worked with the Berlin Mennonite Peace Centre 2011-2016. Learn more: [www.menno-friedenszentrum.de](http://www.menno-friedenszentrum.de)



Burkina Faso

# Together for dialogue

## Testimony of Fabé Traoré's relation with Muslims



Fabé Traoré with his mother.

Photo: supplied

by Fabé Traoré

**B**orn in a Muslim family in Samogohiri, I was a practicing Muslim before my conversion. Today I am a servant of God, commonly called a pastor and in charge of the local Mennonite church of Samogohiri, my birth place. I have also been a Bible translator since before I became a pastor.

### My journey with Islam

My legal name is Fabé Traoré and my given name Fabé means, "my father became a father while his father was living." This is simply to say that I knew my grandfather, who was animist, and my father was Muslim.

Given my relationship with my grandfather, I knew a lot about animism or ancestral religion even though my father had chosen to enroll me in a Koranic school. This was before my uncle came to take me out and enroll me in a French classical school at the age of seven. By enrolling me in a Koranic school, my father's choice and desire was to see me serve God as a great teacher of the Koran.

But God decided otherwise through my uncle's choice to enroll me in a French classical school. Didn't Jeremiah say that he had been chosen while he was still in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5)?

After a number of years of schooling, I completed my studies with a degree in theology at the former Abidjan Faculty of Theology of the Christian Alliance (FATEAC), known today as the Abidjan University of the Christian Alliance (UACA).

### A bridge

The Apostle Paul says that, "all things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

My journey with Islam was neither accidental nor in vain. For me, it was a way for God to prepare me to serve him not

only as a converted Muslim, but to serve as a bridge through my testimony between Muslims and those who have never been Muslim.

In short, throughout all of these years of serving the Lord in Samogohiri, following the example of other members of the church in Samogohiri, I experienced my share of trials starting with persecution from my own father after the conversion of my mother. However, the Lord, through the gift of his wisdom, helped me to criss-cross these mazes all the way to the exit. One of the greatest trials not to be forgotten was the struggle initiated by the great Imam of Samogohiri after the conversion of his own son.

The tactful management of this situation along with the involvement of the local administration allowed for a favorable outcome. Following this affair, the Imam attacked the church of Samogohiri to such an extent that some Muslims recognized the pacifism of the church thanks to how the situation was handled.

### Celebrations and collaboration

To conclude, I would say that after all of these years of perseverance and patience, relations between Christians and Muslims are becoming more and more peaceful. Opportunities such as celebrations and collaboration prove this to be true.

Yes to collaboration, because today I am with the Imam and the village chief in a structure that is working for peace and social harmony in the area. The structure is called, "Together for dialogue." Each time that tension arises, regardless of the nature of the tension, we are called to search for a peaceful solution.



Fabé Traoré is an MWC General Council member representative for the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso.

USA

# God's Wisdom and goodness

## Religious difference can bring people together

by Dorothy Yoder Nyce

**R**eligion is personal; it expresses our way to be. *Religio* means “to bind,” so religions are meant to bring people together.

To talk with other Christians (Protestant, Roman Catholic or Orthodox) is INTRA religious exchange. To converse with people of other living faiths or world religions reflects INTER religious dialogue.

Originally from Sri Lanka, retired professor Wesley Ariarajah defines *true religion* via terms of “compassion, nonviolence, self-giving, universal love, and the rejection of material acquisition.” His book *Your God, My God, Our God*, with the subtitle “Rethinking Christian Theology for Religious Plurality,” writes of how religions share in common a concern for an Ultimate Being.

### Jewish roots

Christianity has a strong Jewish base. It relies on Hebrew Scripture, the story of Yahweh the one God's faithful interaction with Israel. Israel, the people chosen to convey to other nations God's welcome or openness toward all human creatures, lived among ancient religions. Recall the Tower of Babel incident (Genesis 11:1-9). Those of a dominant language and symbolic tower seemed intent to control everything, even to compete with God. But rather than allow such dominance, the Creator who values difference scattered their desire for false power over the face of the earth.

From the Second Testament, we learn how Jesus our mentor valued his Jewish heritage. He taught through parables and direct action about God's way of welcome. Ever-pointing a way among ways to God, he stressed a divine kin-dom for all faithful followers. Not intent to start a new religion, Jesus called Judaism to re-form, to re-new its pattern of covenants, of human-Divine agreements. Before returning to God's realm, he enabled the Spirit, who had been co-active in Creation, to replace his direct being with believers.

### Spirit of Pentecost

The Spirit of Pentecost (Acts 2) brought scattered voices together. Although different, people of varied locations understood one another. A measure of unity within diversity came through verbal exchange, through God's wide gift of difference. Religious pluralism continues as a gift to us, to show God's will to save all.

Decades ago, German Max Muller comprehended the value of being duly informed of distinct insight from diverse religions in order to respect and compare them while engaged in personal journey. He shaped history with the observation that “To know one religion is to know none.” In other words, knowing only one religion fails to even know it with depth. Faith grows through understanding what others find meaningful.

I have learned from our good Sikh friend how deeply he honours his scripture, his present guru, the *Guru Granth Sahib*. To express or witness to my Christianity, without arrogance, and sincerely welcome, be open to learn from the integrity in other religions enriches my sacred being.

## Faith grows through understanding what others find meaningful.

### Peace with dialogue

“There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions and there will be no peace among religions without dialogue,” said Hans Kung. Mennonites claim a history of being peace-oriented. Although with that stance we are not alone among Christians, each generation in distinct locations needs to reaffirm what peacemaking means and how best to express peacebuilding for situations that emerge.

An attitude of readiness to learn from other religions helps. Mahatma Gandhi,

a Hindu with Jain influence, emphasized *ahimsa* (nonviolence) long ago. Gandhi's close friend Abdul Ghaffer Khan enabled strong peace efforts among his Muslim people. And Thich Nhat Hanh lived, taught and wrote about basic peace principles for more than loyal Buddhists.

### Receiving Divine truth

Can we receive as surely as extend Divine truth?

Acting together, people loyal to diverse religions enable peaceful efforts that overcome injustice. To retain attitudes of revenge, or resist overcoming stereotypes that misrepresent others, or block another from being fully valued all reflect handicaps toward peaceful existence. When religious teachings violate others through negative judgments because they differ or when people loyal to religions prompt conflict, the need for repentance recurs. How might sincere dialogue about principles held in common enable religious good-will?

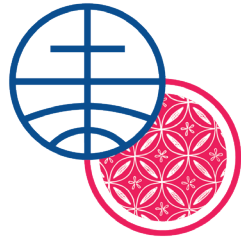
Religious plurality will persist in our world; for that fact, be grateful. We choose between religions and denominations regarding rituals for worship, patterns of belief, and holidays. As we meet people whose choices differ, opportunity presents itself for honest dialogue.

Exchange conveys perspective with faith. Dialogue partners expect to be comfortable with and loyal to, not defensive or fearful about, personal faith. Each expects to listen carefully to the other's confession, to formulate and clarify measures of personal truth, and to absorb or withhold what is further learned. Not debate, religious dialogue conveys mood or attitude, honours integrity, welcomes deepened insight and promotes friendship.

May you readers find it to be so!



Dorothy Yoder Nyce is a member of 8th Street Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana, USA.



## Indonesia 2022

05-10  
07 2022

bersama-sama mengikuti Yesus melintas batas  
sesarengan ngetut wuri Gusti Yesus nratas wewates  
following Jesus together across barriers  
seguir a Jesús juntos, superando las barreras  
suivre Jésus ensemble à travers les frontières

## Church beyond walls

As the world continues to fight the pandemic, Indonesian Mennonite churches are learning new ways of gathering, of reaching out to the community, and of what it means to be a church beyond the four walls.

They do what they can to educate people about COVID-19, how to prevent infection, and what to do if someone is sick.

"We also have to take care of church members who lose their income. We take special offerings to help members in need," said Lydia Adi, international relations representative of *Jemaat Kristen Indonesia* (JKI) and former Global Youth Summit delegate.

*Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa* (GITJ) and *Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia* (GKMI) also tapped into the Mennonite World Conference's COVID-19 response fund to help underprivileged church members in remote areas with food and hygiene supplies.

### Virtually united

The pandemic has forced churches to find different ways to gather. "Urban churches do virtual services. We also encourage older members to watch the livestream. However, in smaller towns, the internet may not be reliable so we organize socially-distanced service with masks on and sanitizing stations," said MZ Ichsanuddin from GITJ, MWC executive committee member.

Beyond virtual weekly services and cell groups, JKI is moving its three full days of youth conference Unlimited Fire purely online. "We want to empower young leaders to reach out to the nation in a relevant way. Today, that way is online," said Pastor Anton Sidharta of JKI Maranatha Church and founder of Unlimited Fire, "Going virtual has enabled us to reach out

to young people from all over Indonesia, even overseas! Without online tools, meeting them or flying them to the conference would have been far costlier and require much more time."

Churches are also finding new ways to combine resources. "Recently, interdenominational churches in Batam Island hosted a drive-in revival meeting which we participated in. People listened through the radio in their cars as the worship team led from the stage, and the speaker - who was not there in person, was projected onto a big screen," Anton added.

Meanwhile, GKMI will launch a mobile application to connect churches and members so they could collaborate on how to impact their communities.

"Change is inevitable, we shouldn't be afraid of it. We have to be transformed so that the gospel continues to spread and be experienced in new ways," said GKMI moderator Pastor Agus Mayanto.

### Longing for face-to-face gathering

Despite the challenges, hope remains that MWC churches will be together in 2022. "Churches in Indonesia have been through a pandemic before," said National Advisory Council chair Rev. Paulus Widjaja, "By the grace of God, we will get through this, and it is our hope that the world can come of this pandemic together, stronger, and more united. We look forward to welcoming you to Indonesia in 2022!"



Indonesian Mennonite churches exploring new ways to worship.  
Photo: Unlimited Fire Media, GITJ Juwana, Agus Setianto.



Indonesia  
2022



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

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

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

## Assembly Scattered

Before and after  
Assembly Gathered  
various locations in Indonesia

1-4  
July  
2022

**Global Youth Summit (GYS)**  
Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia  
**Theme:**  
Life in the Spirit:  
Learn. Serve.  
Worship.

5-10  
July  
2022

**Assembly Gathered**  
Holy Stadium, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia  
**Theme:**  
Following Jesus together across barriers.

## Assembly Gathered Program

### July Daily Themes

- 05 Tuesday (opening): following Jesus together across barriers
- 06 Wednesday: following Jesus, learning together
- 07 Thursday: following Jesus, living together
- 08 Friday: following Jesus, caring together
- 09 Saturday: following Jesus, celebrating together
- 10 Sunday (closing): following Jesus together



Socially-distanced worship at GITJ Juwana, Indonesia.  
Photo: Slamet Kristanto

### Morning Program

Each morning will feature speakers chosen by the Young Anabaptist Committee and by one of the MWC Commissions. Youth will be actively involved in the program on stage. Singing together will be a major part of our celebration.



Morning Program.  
Photo: Dania Ciptadi

### Afternoon activities

Afternoon activities will include workshops, service opportunities, local tours, sports, Global Church Village and Anabaptist World Cup. Workshop suggestions can be submitted to Estifanos Gedlu at [workshops2022@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:workshops2022@mwc-cmm.org) until 31 July 2021



Afternoon program: Global Church Village. Photo: Jim Cheng

### Evening Worship

Each evening will have special music and speaker from one continent.



Evening Worship at PA 2015 in the USA.  
Photo: Kazutomo Ray Epp

### Children's All-Day Program

Children will join the morning singing with their families. From there they will be welcomed into their own program in different age groups. The program will involve story telling around the biblical message. There will be games, crafts, singing and tons of fun. The program will include lunch and end before supper.



Children's Program.  
Photo: Wilhelm Unger

### Teen and Youth Program

Youth will have a special focus during all parts of Assembly. This will include small groups for youth, Young Anabaptist speakers, inspiring music, service opportunities, youth-related themes in workshops, sports activities and hang out time at the Global Church Village. And at the end of each full day, there will be a **bonus** late-evening youth program.



Giant card game for teens and youth at PA 2015 in the USA.  
Photo: Aubrey Kreider

## Registration

Registration opens in December 2021

**Registration fee for adults will be A \$35, B \$75, C \$150, D \$550 US or E Rp. 500.000** depending on country of citizenship (see rate groups on website). Registration includes lunch and supper, Semarang airport pick-up and drop-off and Semarang hotel shuttles to and from Assembly site.

There will be special rates for children, youth, families, volunteers and GYS attendees.

Please see website for more details: [mwc-cmm.org/A17-registration](http://mwc-cmm.org/A17-registration)

### Lodging, breakfast included

Hotel Rooms:  
\$30 to \$50 US room per night at a 3- to 4-star hotel  
Dormitory-style lodging at local school: \$10 US per person per night

### Registration fee GYS:

including food and lodging  
**A \$15, B \$35, C \$75, D \$275 US, E Rp. 200.000** depending on country of citizenship (see rate groups on website).

### For more information

[Indonesia2021@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:Indonesia2021@mwc-cmm.org)

Print your own Assembly poster; share information about Assembly.  
[mwc-cmm.org](http://mwc-cmm.org)



Indonesia  
2022

# Paseduluran: Indonesian churches live out the gospel of peace



**GITJ Banyutowo leaders celebrate the establishment of the church and village by Tunggul Wulung.**

Photo: Karla Braun

## Indonesia

### MWC member:

#### *Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ)*

Baptized Members	45 000
Congregations (2019)	117

#### *Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI)*

Baptized Members	15 789
Congregations (2020)	129

#### *Sinode Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI)*

Baptized Members	47 087
Congregations (2019)	400

Source: Global Statistics – 2018 Directory

**T**he presence of the Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonites is very significant in the history of the Anabaptists worldwide, for it brings a new light not only on “Who are the Anabaptists?” but also “Who are the Anabaptists’ neighbours?”

Since its birth almost 500 years ago, the Anabaptist family consisted of mostly European-background people. But it changed radically in the 1850s when the Anabaptists came out of Europe and arrived in Java.

This mission not only broke the centuries-long image of the Anabaptists of being “quiet in the land,” but also introduced the first international mission, for it involved the Anabaptists from the Netherlands and Russia.

Since then, the Anabaptists are no longer mostly white. And by being present in a country such as Indonesia with the largest Muslim population in the world, now we can say that the Anabaptist’s neighbours are not only Catholics, Lutherans and Calvinists, but Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists as well.

### Three national churches

Today, there are three Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Indonesia: *Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa* (GITJ –Evangelical Church in the Land of Java), *Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia* (GKMI –Muria Christian Church of Indonesia), and *Jemaat Kristen Indonesia* (JKI –Indonesian Christian Congregation).

GITJ is a predominantly Javanese church in the traditional Mennonite area of North Central Java, although it has some members who are Chinese, Batak, Sumatran and from Nusa Tenggara Timur.

GKMI has been registered formally as a church as early as 1927, and it made this group to become the first organized non-Western Anabaptist-Mennonite church in the world.

Its founder Tee Siem Tat, a Chinese Indonesian, refused to follow the Dutch colonial zoning system (each denomination was allowed to spread the gospel only to a specific ethnic group in a specific area), resulting in a diverse church today. In 1960, GKMI Kudus ordained Rev. Sudarsohardi Notodihardjo, a Javanese pastor, to become its lead pastor. This is like ordaining an African-American pastor in a predominantly white church located in deep Mississippi during the slavery era.

Anabaptists in JKI represent the diversity of Indonesia, comprising members who have Batak, Chinese, Sunda, Dayak, Banjar, Manado, Bali, Ambon, Kupang, Papua, and Javanese backgrounds.



**An Ulama (Muslim learned one) and a Catholic priest join in the Christmas celebration at GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa – Javanese Mennonite evangelical church) Jepara and are spontaneously involved in drama performance.**

Photo courtesy of Danang Kristiawan

### Anabaptist-Mennonite identity

Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonites have contributed to the larger Anabaptist family at all levels of Mennonite World Conference.

However, in Indonesia, the churches are known simply as Christians. There is no explicit distinction between denominational backgrounds such as Anabaptists, Calvinists, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, etc. Living in the largest Muslim majority country in the world that officially recognizes six religious groups, Indonesian churches do not have much interest in exposing denominational backgrounds. The churches are active in mission and evangelism while putting aside distinctive denominational backgrounds.

Yet in the past couple of decades, there has been a growing interest among the Anabaptist-Mennonites, especially the youth, to learn and understand Anabaptism better. Some Anabaptist theology and history books have been translated into the Indonesian language so that both church leaders and laypeople can study them. Books on Anabaptist theology have been used as textbooks in interdenominational seminaries and colleges where the Anabaptist-Mennonite churches are officially involved as owners and the Anabaptist-Mennonite theologians as teachers. This movement has made more Anabaptist-Mennonites bolder in identifying themselves as Mennonites.

The relation between GKMI's Mennonite Diakonia Service and the Hezbollah group in Solo is an example of how the Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonites have boldly paved a new frontier as peacemaking Mennonites.

The oldest national church, GITJ, shares the gift of contextualization. Using art and traditions from Javanese culture, they show how the gospel is relevant to the people of Indonesia. The gospel of peace is an expression of "*pareduluran*," a Javanese word for brotherhood.

### Activities

The Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonites have been involved heavily in interfaith peacebuilding. Some works of this interfaith peacebuilding have to do with disaster response. Some others involve training and workshops for mediation and peacebuilding.

The Anabaptist-Mennonites have also taken initiative, helped by Mennonite Central Committee, to open a master's-level peace and conflict studies at Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana. This has been the first study program to be recognized by the Indonesian government. This initiative, and some others, have encouraged some Christian universities in Indonesia to establish a peace centre in their institutions, resulting in peacebuilding courses now offered at all levels in many Christian universities in Indonesia.

Many Anabaptist-Mennonite churches and individuals have also taken the initiative to create alternative education and communities that foster peace. This includes things such as designing curriculum and providing Sunday school resources to enhance children's ability to foster peace; creating a peace village that mobilizes people to work together in developing economic welfare and

peace values; doing joint efforts with Islamic boarding schools to establish a peace library; networking with institutions and individuals from various religious backgrounds to foster peace.

The church's mission is understood and practiced not as proselytism, but as reconciliation.

JKI has been exemplary in outreach, especially to the younger generation. The church founded and continues to support the largest interdenominational youth conference in Indonesia called Unlimited Fire Youth Conference, which brings together hundreds of churches and thousands of young people to equip youth leaders and mentors.

Churches have used social media to engage with their younger generation, providing online teaching, creative counselling and also fun activities to join. Most of the volunteers serving the church are high school to young professionals.

For example, Jakarta Praise Community Church raises passionate disciples who love serving God through music, multimedia, teaching, technology and the arts. Music written and composed by members of the JKI church makes an impact not only on Indonesian Christians but all over the world. Albums have been translated into English, Thai, Japanese, Mandarin and Korean.

JKI also supports a mission base in Sumba. Children are sponsored for school and villagers are trained to weave traditional *tenun* fabric which is then sold nationally and internationally. Currently, JKI is building an irrigation system and promoting alternative agricultural methods to help the community raise their standard of living.

Near Batam, JKI is reaching out to the "Sea Tribe People" (Suku Laut) who live on Indonesia's myriad outer islands and on boats. They have minimal electricity, internet connection and often far away from stores or restaurants. They used to have to travel 8-10 hours by boat to hear the gospel through church services in Batam, but now, there are several churches among the Sea Tribe People. JKI missionaries also teach at a preschool.

The mostly rural congregations of GITJ live out peace in their communities. Congregations are involved in offering social assistance like medical care in their communities regardless of religion. A congregation in Magorejo has begun a project of reforestation of mangrove forests.



**A choir sings at Holy Stadium (a JKI congregation) in Semarang, Indonesia.**

Photo: supplied



**Footwashing service at GKMI Anugerah Rayon Kembangan, Jakarta, Indonesia.**

Photo: supplied



**Students at Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Wiyata Wacana, the Mennonite seminary in Pati, Indonesia.**

Photo: Karla Braun

## Challenges and opportunities

As Christians in a Muslim-majority country, the Indonesian Mennonites churches face challenges in worship and community. Sometimes there are restrictions in when and where people can gather for fellowship or services. There are obstacles to obtaining the necessary permission to build a church or to meet and preach the good news.

For 12 years, one GITJ congregation in the Jepara region petitioned to municipal officials to receive permission to use a church building. With persistence and peacefulness, church members built relationships with levels of government and with people from different religions. Their request was finally granted.

The rise of identity politics – especially regarding religious and ethnic-based identity – among the Indonesian people has made it difficult to promote peaceful co-existence among people of different ethnic and religious affiliations in Indonesia. Identity politics itself is not a bad thing, but it turns into an obstacle for social cohesion when the respected group feels superior while disrespecting and even alienating and terminating the other groups. Violence in the form of hate speech, discrimination and exclusion easily follow. This phenomenon takes place not only between groups but even within groups. The Indonesian Anabaptist-Mennonites are not exempt. Thus, there is a great challenge without and within.

In some areas, poverty, joblessness and low education remain a persistent challenge in church communities. For GITJ congregations, sharing good news means providing supplies and learning opportunities in addition to spiritual nourishment.

Other challenges include secularism and modernization that has made younger people avoid going to church. This has given opportunity to connect with the younger generation by engaging with them through multimedia, social media and creative activities.

Another challenge in the past year has been to keep moving forward as a church during the global pandemic, embracing technology in order to connect with the church members. Congregations have learned about online services, using Zoom, GoogleMeet, Instagram live, YouTube live, and WhatsApp video calls in order to

have services, small groups, counselling, meetings and workshops.

Indonesia's Mennonite churches love their neighbours in a holistic way. For example, parts of Semarang were severely flooded 5-7 February 2021, due to the heavy rainfall. Water submerged cars and homes. The churches in Semarang began to travel by raft to these areas, helping families escape from their homes. Stores and restaurants were already closed for the weekend due to COVID-19 lockdowns, so the churches delivered food for the families in need. They provided shelter for people who need to leave their flooded homes.

## Three synods

In the past, the relationship between the three synods was not that intimate. A Mennonite seminary in Pati is the remaining fruit of a partnership that flourished between GITJ and GKMI.

But in the last decade, a new way of partnering together has been carved in the form of the establishment of Indomenno. This new entity is intended to serve as a joint effort between the three synods to do work together and support each other, including partnering with Mennonite Central Committee and hosting the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in 2022. Some other joint efforts have been envisioned. However, COVID-19 has limited freedom to meet. Leaders had to postpone and re-work their agenda in order to prepare for the conference once again.

“We hope to remain solid and one-hearted in supporting this upcoming Assembly. We are very blessed and honoured that our global brethren could visit and see what God is doing in Indonesia,” says Eddy Suyanto, JKI leader.

**Contributors: Paulus Widjaja (GKMI), Eddy Suyanto (JKI), Lydia Adi (JKI), Teguh Sayoga (GITJ), Edi Cahyono (GITJ), Tri Gunanto (GITJ)**

Read more:

- *The Radical Muslim and Mennonite: A Muslim-Christian Encounter for Peace in Indonesia*, by Agus Suyanto and Paulus Hartono, trans. Agnes Chen (Semarang: Pustaka Muria, 2015)
- *A Cloud of Witnesses: Celebrating Indonesian Mennonites*, by John D. Roth (Herald Press, forthcoming)
- “Indonesia: struggling, learning, serving,” *Courier/Correo / Courier* October 2013, by Adhi Dharma

## MWC continues pastoral response to COVID-19

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, stories poured in from MWC member churches about job loss and hunger in their congregations and communities due to shut downs. Mennonite World Conference began collecting funds to respond to pandemic-related needs within and through the household of faith.

A year into the pandemic, MWC is blessing and affirming Mennonite-Anabaptist mission and service agencies as they continue their efforts to respond to the pandemic in partnership with Anabaptist churches around the world.

“We recognize the expertise and infrastructure our agencies have to be effective in long-term response to the pandemic,” says César García, MWC general secretary.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Anabaptist mission and service agencies were dealing with their own crises of relocating international service workers, and closing or adapting programs to new conditions, while also providing needed support to Anabaptist churches in the global South struck hard by COVID-19 and its economic fallout.

MWC gathered a task force to bring Mennonite agencies together to share information and expertise in response to the pandemic. Members included Deacons Commission secretary and chair Henk Stenvers and Siaka Traoré, Peace Commission chair Joji Pantoja, Andean regional representative Pablo Stucky, and two other representatives of Anabaptist mission and service agencies, chaired by Mennonite Central Committee strategic planning director Alain Epp Weaver. The task force oversaw MWC’s effort to accompany Anabaptist churches globally in ensuring that pressing humanitarian needs related to the pandemic were met.

This task force considered proposals for grants of up to \$10,000 for COVID-19 response – mainly for emergency food, hygiene and education resources.

Cooperation between partners through the COVID-19 response was evident not only in the task force, bringing together agencies in conversation, but also between national churches applying with proposals.

- Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India helped Indian national churches in planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting their humanitarian assistance projects.
- In Mexico, five national Anabaptist churches worked with MCC on a coordinated COVID-19 response.
- With the support of Africa Inter-Mennonite Missions, the Mennonite church in Burkina Faso (EEMBF)

supported the new Mennonite Church in Sierra Leone to carry out a project.

“First I want to give thanks to God, and then to all those who made the arrival of this ‘good portion’ in our lives possible,” says Patricia Torres Guerrero of Hacedores de Paz (Mennonite) Church in El Salto Jalisco, Mexico, a recipient of COVID-19 aid. Their barber shop was closed due to the pandemic and her husband’s pension was taken for the month. “We went to the church and we were crying out to God for help.”

The next day, the pastor called to invite them to visit the church’s food pantry. “After going to the distribution centre, I went home and ran to my bedroom where I began to cry. I thanked God for being so good to us. It’s all I can do to thank my brothers and sisters in faith who were God’s instrument in blessing us.”

“In this second phase, we will continue walking together, supporting each other in prayer and sharing information,” says César García, MWC general secretary.

“We are one family: we invite supporters to continue giving through these mission and service agencies,” says César García.

To donate to ongoing Anabaptist efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs created by the pandemic, please see the list of Anabaptist mission and service agencies at the end of this release.

Until the end of December, a total of \$444,711 USD flowed to 47 COVID-19 response proposals in the Anabaptist-Mennonite family. (See sidebar)

“We are thankful for the generosity of so many people who gave as an expression of ‘equality’ within the MWC family, as is the goal of the Global Church Sharing Fund according to 2 Corinthians 8:13-15,” says Henk Stenvers.

“Through this COVID-19 response, MWC fostered information-sharing and collaboration among Anabaptist churches and mission and service agencies, calling together a global response to meet the challenges posed by a global pandemic,” says Alain Epp Weaver.

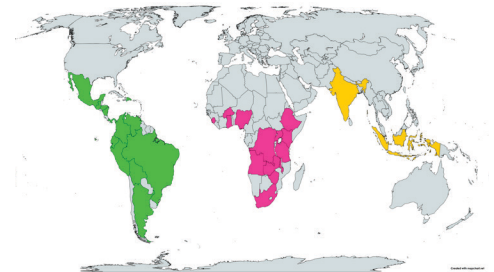
MWC will continue to convene mission and service agency representatives to share information about COVID-19 response projects from each agency and follow up on reports from previously funded projects.

“Vaccines are unevenly distributed around the world, and will continue to be for the next few years,” says Arli Klassen, MWC regional representatives coordinator. “The church must have a voice in caring for those most negatively impacted by COVID, by lockdowns and by vaccine distribution.”

### Anabaptist mission and service agencies supporting COVID-19 projects

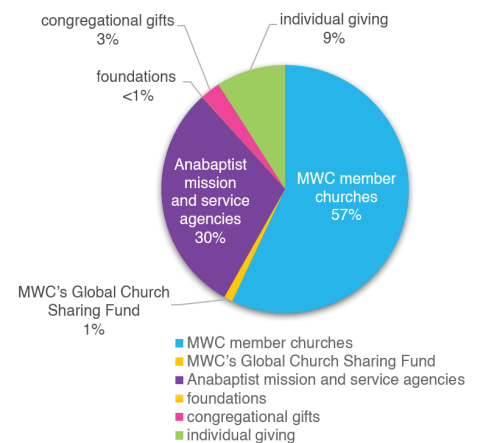
- [Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission \(AIMM\)](#)
- [Brethren In Christ World Mission \(BICWM\)](#)
- [Caisse de Secours \(France\)](#)
- [Doopsgezind WereldWerk \(Netherlands\)](#)
- [CIM – Council of International Anabaptist Ministries](#)
- [EMM – Eastern Mennonite Missions](#)
- [Evangelical Mennonite Conference Missions](#)
- [Mennonite Central Committee \(MCC\)](#)
- [Mennonite Church Canada](#)
- [Mennonite Mission Network](#)
- [Mennonitische Hilfswerk](#)
- [Multiply \(formerly MB Mission\)](#)
- [Rosedale International \(Conservative Mennonite Conference\)](#)
- [Swiss Mennonite Mission \(SMM\)](#)
- [Virginia Mennonite Missions \(VMMissions\)](#)

### Project locations



- Latin America – 20
- Africa – 16
- Asia – 9

### COVID-19 response funds received until end of December 2020







## Renewal 2021

As we look ahead to the 500th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement, the Faith and Life Commission will host a webinar **June 2021** focused on baptism.

The interactive webinar will provide teaching and offer opportunity for discussion about this central practice in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition:

- historical and theological context for baptism, focusing especially on pastoral questions surrounding baptismal practices;
- perspectives from diverse MWC church leaders on the ritual in cultural contexts (mode; age; preparation) and on the meaning, both for the person being baptized and for the congregation.
- important questions arising from the Trilateral Dialogue on Baptism report regarding new members who were baptized as infants.



Watch for event information and study materials here [mwc-cmm.org/renewal-2028](http://mwc-cmm.org/renewal-2028)

## MWC Online Prayer Hour

Please join us in prayer!

“Though we truly live out our Christian faith in local communities, it is when we meet as a global church we begin to grasp the vastness of God’s grace,” says Elisabeth Kunjam, a Mennonite church member from India.

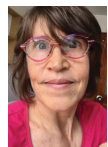
From Indonesia to Peru, you are invited to join the Deacons Commission and regional representatives for an online prayer meeting every two months.

## Meet your Operations Team

The Operations Team are MWC staff who assist the general secretary in managing key program areas.

### Chief Administrative Officer

Responsible for managing membership, database, archiving, translators.



**Anna Sorgius**

Location: France

Home church: Association des Églises Évangéliques Mennonites de France

*“It is an honour to serve the global church through MWC because it allows me to connect with people from the whole world.”*

### Chief International Events Officer

Responsible to plan and lead organization of MWC international events including, Executive Committee, General Council, global Assemblies and other meetings.



**Liesa Unger**

Location: Regensburg, Germany

Home congregation: Mennonitengemeinde Regensburg

*“I love working for MWC: it is a joy to create opportunities for people to meet, share their gifts and encourage the church.”*

### Chief Communications Officer

Responsible for managing and planning the global communications strategy, and overseeing creation and distribution of stories, prayers and worship resources for the global Anabaptist church through MWC Info newsletter and the website, *Courier/Correo/Courier* magazine, the Prayer Network and social media



**Kristina Toews**

Location: Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada

Home church: Level Ground Mennonite Church

*“It is an honour to serve the global church through MWC because I am able to see the powerful ways God is at work in our congregations around the world.”*

### Chief Development Officer

Responsible for managing and planning a global strategy for fundraising and capacity building.



**Shirley Redekop**

Location: Elmira, Ontario, Canada

Home church: Poole Mennonite Church & St Jacobs Mennonite Church

*“I believe in MWC’s ministry. It’s an honour to be in this role to learn more about our global Anabaptist faith family, support capacity building and share stories about MWC.”*

### Chief Operations Officer

Responsible for finances and budget, maintaining and monitoring staffing, policies, job descriptions.

*In transition. To be announced.*

Participants enter “rooms” on the online meeting platform to pray in smaller groups in English, Spanish, French, Hindi and Indonesian.

#### See the dates below.

Friday 14 May 2021

Friday 16 July 2021

Friday 17 September 2021

Friday 19 November 2021

Register here >>>>>>>>>





Rajnandgaon Mennonite Church made paper chains representing togetherness and the stretching across barriers in their Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday celebration service.

Photo: Preshit Rao

## Fellowship is stronger than lockdowns

“Together on [Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday], we feel connected to our brothers and sisters all over the world,” says Jannie Nijwening, pastor at Doopsgezind Gemeente Zaanstreek in the Netherlands.

Around the globe, congregations in the Mennonite World Conference family celebrated Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, “an opportunity to remind our communities of faith that we are all part of one body made up of many tribes, languages and nations (Revelation 7:9).”

Congregations tagged themselves on a Google map on the MWC website, leaving pins from GKMI Bukit Hermon Depot in Indonesia to Eglise évangélique Mennonite du Birkenhof in France to Igreja Evangélica Irmãos Menonitas Renovada in Brazil to Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Central de San Pedro Sula in Honduras to Boulder Mennonite in Colorado, USA.

In their recorded service, the Zaanstreek Dutch Mennonite congregation included greetings from Columbus Mennonite Church in Ohio, USA; Iglesia Menonita Teusaquillo in Bogota, Colombia; and from three Colombia Mennonites who are currently studying peace in Amsterdam.

“We feel connected and we wish you all the best success in all the challenges that society is posing to you: tensions, violence, separation between peoples. We hope you can contribute to more fellowship between peoples like we also hope we can do in our country,” says Jannie Nijwening as she addresses the Colombian church.

In turn, the congregation in Bogota

included greetings from the Dutch congregation, along with greetings from missionaries in Casa Grande children’s home in Benin and a song from Iglesia Menonita de Quito, Ecuador.

In India, local health orders permitted some in-person gathering. “We had a blessed time of worship and prayer together with our brothers and sisters around the world,” says Vikal Rao of Rajnandgaon Mennonite Church.

“We started this Sunday worship by introducing Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday,” says pastor Ashish Milap of Bethel Mennonite Church, Balodgahan. They used the worship resource materials in their service in addition teaching about Anabaptist beginnings, including persecution for faith, separation of church and government and practicing nonviolence.

“We were blessed,” says Ashish Milap. “We thank MWC to lead us in wonderful and blessed celebration of Anabaptist World fellowship Sunday. This has surely united and encouraged us to grow in a global manner.”

Hamilton Mennonite Church in Ontario, Canada, also took full advantage of the worship resources provided, using videos from PA 2015 for congregational singing, Scripture reading in Hindi and English, sharing prayers and testimonies from the worship package, and basing the sermon on the suggested packages.

In California, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church, Reedley First Mennonite and

How did your church celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday? Send us a story and photos about what happened in your church:

[photos@mw-cmm.org](mailto:photos@mw-cmm.org)

Check out Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday Materials & Resources [mw-cmm.org/awfs](http://mw-cmm.org/awfs) [#mwccmm](https://twitter.com/mwccmm)



Bishop Simon Okoth of Mennonite Church Uganda prays for individuals at Butologo Mennonite Church in Mubende District.

Photo: Ngire Jonah

Mennonite Community Church held a joint service hosting MWC general secretary César García as their speaker.

Mennonitengemeinde zu Hamburg und Altona in Germany had planned to hold ordination on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, “...in part, because we wanted to embody the way preachers are called to serve the whole church, not just the local congregation.” Unfortunately, lockdown conditions moved the service online, delaying the ordination for an in-person event.

However, the virtual celebration of Communion was “weirdly powerful,” says Marius van Hoogstraten. “There is something stronger than lockdowns keeping the church together!”

Whenever congregations celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, “we are in a continuous process of seeking unity and of sharing love and hospitality,” says Jannie Nijwening.



Learn how to invite an MWC speaker to share at your church.

## President's column

# Mission from the margins

While leading a study tour in his native Egypt for Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, professor Safwat Marzuk stood before the oldest surviving written mention of Israel. On a 1 200 BC stone inscription, Pharaoh Merneptah boasts about his imperial conquests. "Israel is made non-existent," he gloats after raiding Canaan.

Merneptah was wrong.

Through tiny Israel, God would bring a Messiah to save the world.

God had promised Abraham and Sarah that through their descendants "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). God seeks to bless, not manipulate or coerce.

It was tempting for ancient Israel to seek power with a king like other nations, but that ended in catastrophe.

It is tempting for Anabaptists today to seek political might. But we follow Jesus, who relinquished privileges of power to humble himself and serve. While we must never use Jesus' example of submission to deny rights to oppressed people, we should not use power to dominate.

In a multi-religious world, Anabaptists appropriately bear witness from a position of political weakness. Other 16th-century reform movements in Europe tried "top-down" ways change society, persuading with force if necessary.

Following Jesus's example, most Anabaptists rejected such use of power. Instead, they witnessed through loving relationships at the margins.

Anabaptists today should reject "dominion theology," which attempts to advance the gospel by placing



**Safwat Marzuk teaches at the Merneptah Stele in Egypt.**

Photo: Nelson Kraybill

Christians in positions of social and political power. People with such ideas burned Anabaptists at the stake. Christian nationalism led to the death of millions of native people in the Americas.

While Christians surely can serve in many roles in society, we should not want a "Christian" government any more than a government based on another religion.

Pharaoh Merneptah could not have imagined how powerless Israel would change the world. We cannot know how humble service, love of enemy and gracious invitation can do the same.



**J. Nelson Kraybill is president of MWC. He lives in Indiana, USA.**

## Be a part of MWC's work

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

Your contributions help to

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

Visit [mwc-cmm.org](http://mwc-cmm.org) to get involved.

Or

Send your cheque and share your story by mail to

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17808 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA

Thank you for participating in the MWC global family!



Scan to donate

Photo: courtesy Ashish Milap



## YABs Fellowship Week

### Perseverance: Hope in suffering 20-26 June 2021 | Romans 5:3-5

For this year's YABs Fellowship Week, we would like to bring a message of hope especially for all the young people who experience difficulties due to the ongoing pandemic. During the week, we will be discussing characters in the Bible who show perseverance during a time their faith is tested.

We would also like to collect stories from young people all over the world on overcoming the challenges COVID-19 brought in their lives. These stories to encourage us will be posted together with the materials for the YABs Fellowship Week. Submit stories by messaging on our Facebook page, Instagram or by contacting your regional YABs Committee member.

[mwc-cmm.org/yabs](http://mwc-cmm.org/yabs)

Facebook: [@younganabaptists](https://www.facebook.com/younganabaptists)

Instagram: [@younganabaptists](https://www.instagram.com/younganabaptists)  
[yabs@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:yabs@mwc-cmm.org)

Larissa Swartz – North America, chair  
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Ebenezer Mondez – Asia  
[ebenezermondez@gmail.com](mailto:ebenezermondez@gmail.com)

## Peace Sunday

### "Finding Hope and Healing in Crisis"

19 September 2021

Matthew 14:22-33, Mark 4:35-41

In this gospel passage, Jesus brings salvation in the midst of crisis. We desire and need this peace, especially after this year! And as followers of Jesus, we follow his example and work to bring peace in the midst of chaos.

## MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

### MWC Info

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

- English
- Spanish
- French

### Courier

Magazine published twice a year (April and October)

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



\*Avoid mailing delays: subscribe electronically

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Photo: Kristina Toews



Prairie Street Mennonite Church members in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, give each other “finger hearts,” a Korean sign of love in an online Sunday morning service.

Photo: Quinn Brenneke

## Called to witness

The Anabaptist world has changed immensely since the first assembly the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) organized in 1925. Our world family has witnessed a numerical transformation in ethnic, geographic and linguistic terms.

Our current cultural diversity is fantastic. Whereas in MWC’s early years, the dominant language was German and world assemblies were held in Europe and North America, today we try to produce all our materials in MWC’s three official languages: Spanish, English and French. We have many documents in other languages, and our assemblies rotate across five continents.

Such global growth has occurred in contexts other than those of the Anabaptist faith. The encounter with the world’s religions has been inevitable and wonderful at the same time. Our fundamental belief in Jesus Christ – as Lord and God as a normative paradigm for the human being and the way to the Father – has led us to ask ourselves how to interact with the religions surrounding us.

Unfortunately, the Christian church has not always left a very encouraging record of its encounter with the world’s religions. Stories of violence, oppression, colonialism and religious abuse are well known. As Anabaptists, do we have anything to offer regarding meeting other faiths?

In this *Courier*, we share some learnings from our global community in its interaction with world religions. The stories related here speak to us of the need to present Jesus Christ from our perspective as witnesses of who he is and has done in our lives. Such testimony has the following characteristics, among others:

### 1. It is offered in community and interdependency

A testimony that provides tangible examples of forgiveness, reconciliation, love and cooperation has an enormous impact on our encounters with other faiths. While cultural, gender, political and economic differences divide, faith in Christ makes new humanity possible.

### 2. It is offered taking into account the human being as a whole

Our encounter with Christ completely transforms us. That is why our testimonies include community development, conflict resolution, church planting, restorative justice, education, counselling and health ministries, among other things. In the person of Jesus, God is interested in the human being in his integrality, and we bear witness to that reality.

### 3. It is offered from an inclusive position

A testimony that privileges one race or social sphere over another is not consistent with the person of Jesus. Our witness to the love of Christ leads us to value *all* cultures, avoiding patterns of social domination. Every human being is invited to join us at the communion table and enjoy a relationship with God.

### 4. It is offered from a vulnerable position

Our testimony is not presented from an arrogant or superior position. We know from our own experience how God cares in a particular way for those most in need and sometimes excluded by society. In our witness, we unite with God in that walk.

As witnesses, our role is not to convince the other. In our encounter with the world’s religions, we are called to unite ourselves to what God is already doing in those contexts and, with humility, share what God has done for us in the person of Jesus.

However, our encounter with world religions has not always been consistent with our faith. We recognize that many times we have made mistakes that hurt others and negatively affected our testimony.

We pray that this issue of *Courier* may encourage and challenge us to be faithful witnesses. May the Spirit of God guide us to continue discovering in practice the implications of following Jesus in the multi-religious context in which we find ourselves!



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