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From “Second Conversion” to MWC Helm

By Kathy Heinrichs Wiest

As one amateur Mennonite historian likes to point out, the only real Mennonite name is Menno Simons. From there on down through history, the rest of the family names are just “add-ons.” After a series of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) secretaries named Dyck (1961-73), Kraybill (1973-90) and Miller (1990-2011) the name of García stands out as an historically recent addition to the Anabaptist family.

César García’s personal story with the Mennonite family began in Bogotá, Colombia, when his mother took him and his sister to several churches in search of a new church home. Eleven-year-old César chose the Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas Dios es Amor (God is Love Mennonite Brethren Church) as the place they would settle.

That choice was the first step on a continuing journey for García, who has come to treasure Anabaptist theology and history and has given his life to scholarship, to mission and to shaping the church from an Anabaptist perspective.

A drive to understand Scripture and have a reasoned faith has characterized García’s walk since what he calls his “first conversion” at age 19. After some teen years rejecting God and the church, García found himself depressed and unfulfilled by the existentialism and other philosophies he was pursuing. “The sense of vacuum was huge,” he recalled.

Under pressure from his mother to come back to church, García attended a Dios es Amor youth meeting where he

was touched by the speaker’s assertion: “God doesn’t see us as a problem but as a possibility in his hands.” Half-believing that he was just “talking to the walls,” García told God that he wanted to experience that hope.

“The next day my life was different,” he recalled. “I decided to read the Bible, come back to church and start looking for responses to my atheistic arguments.” Not satisfied with a personal emotional experience, he also began a lifelong

García worked for six years at a Christian radio station where he interacted with Christian leaders from charismatic, evangelical and mainline denominations. “It was a time of growing theologically,” he said of those years teaching and counseling in his radio ministry and serving as youth pastor and elder at Dios es Amor church.

More formal education at Seminario Bíblico de Colombia, an interdenominational seminary in Medellín, earned him a Bachelor of Theology and Bible with an emphasis on missiology and gave him the tools for study of Scripture. Well-versed in Protestant theology, García was now ready for his “second conversion”—to Anabaptism.

Juan Martínez, then president of the SEMILLA Latin American Anabaptist Seminary in Guatemala, challenged García to complete his education by studying Anabaptism. When García and his wife, Sandra Báez, moved back to Bogotá for church ministry he took up the challenge, starting with John Driver’s book, *Eclesiología Radical*. “It was amazing,” he said, “like candy for a child.”

A year later, he and Sandra were commissioned as church planters in Bogotá and seized the opportunity to weave their new-found theology into every aspect of Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas Torre Fuerte (Strong Tower MB Church). “I was excited about participative community, restorative discipline, servant leadership and communal hermeneutic. It was so clear that I wanted that kind of values for our new church.” The spirit of community drew new believers, and the church grew and flourished.

Photo: Byron Rempel-Burkholder



César García greets the Sung-Chiang Mennonite congregation, Taipei, in May.

pursuit of theological study, mission and church ministry.

García’s love for learning has brought him into contact with many theological traditions. As a child attending private Catholic school, he already found himself bringing his new teachings into discussions with his teachers. “Of course I lost the argument every time,” he said with a smile, “but it pushed me in my convictions.”

Cover: General Secretary Larry Miller (left) and General Secretary-elect César García (right) share a light moment at the MWC Executive Committee meetings in Taipei, Taiwan. Photo credit: Merle Good

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General Secretary-elect César García reflects on his journey and his vision

García credits visiting teachers with helping the Colombian pastors gain a deeper understanding of Anabaptist theology. One of them, Mark Baker, tells a story of how García applied the theology in his role as president of the Colombian MB Conference. At a national convention a delegate vote on a contentious issue barely passed the required 80 percent approval.

García was not content with the spirit of the debate or with the narrow margin of approval. He invited the delegates who had voted “no” to voice their concerns with conference leaders and encouraged everyone to reflect, pray and be ready for a new vote the next day. The result was a positive vote of 94 percent and a strengthened sense of trust and confidence among the conferees.

As much as he values the ideas and principles of Anabaptism, García also cherishes his relationships in the global Anabaptist community. Fellow leaders in Portugal and Venezuela are now counted among his closest friends because of their work together in the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB).

Other new friendships have developed among MB, Brethren in Christ and Mennonite Church leaders in Colombia. After some periods of little interaction or cooperation between the three denominations, “Mennonite Central Committee helped us to realize that in reality we were not so different and that many of the suspicions between us were only that.”

“I have a calling for eliminating suspicions and rather showing appreciation and respect for differences,” he added. “There are differences, but that doesn’t mean we have to fragment. The body of Christ is a living organism that demands diversity, but also requires love and unity.”

One of the bridges García is determined to strengthen is the one between people with a long Mennonite pedigree and those who have come to Anabaptist faith more recently.

At the same time, he knows from experience the value of coming to Anabaptist faith by conviction rather than heritage. “It gives the opportunity to have a passion—to fall in love with the tradition.”

“We need to value Anabaptism by conviction, but we also need to maintain our historical tradition, and to learn that those things are related, and not opposed,” he asserted. “We are thirsty for identity. In Anabaptism we find a body

Photo: Tangie Sheets



Beside César, left to right, are daughters María and Paula, and spouse Sandra Báez.

that offers that – not just theologically, but also historically.”

García also wants to strengthen the ability of every national body in the MWC to find and share its own cultural expression of Anabaptism. “MWC is relevant as ethnic churches bring our own identity and theology contextualized, instead of just copying Western patterns,” he explained. “Enrichment happens when every church brings that kind of value.”

When asked what he values about MWC, García paused, taking delight in mentally scanning the faces that would be around the table at their meetings. “I value the people who are there. Each one is like a treasure,” he reflected. “They bring insights from their different contexts, different gifts, different ways of seeing life and church.”

A year and a half ago, Search Committee Facilitator Bert Lobe took García aside after a church service and asked him if he would consider being one of the candidates for MWC General Secretary. With typical humility, García thought he must have misunderstood the question.

As soon as he realized that the invitation was genuine, he began a discernment process, talking and praying with Sandra and composing a discernment group to help them determine God’s direction. Humbly he accepted the nomination which resulted in his selection as the first General Secretary from the Global South.

Few others who know García would consider this appointment surprising. Recognizing his unique gifts of learning and leadership, many have invested in his education and preparation for ministry. From the Dios es Amor congregation, where he began teaching Sunday school and leading the youth at age 15, to MB Mission (the North American MB mission agency) and other supporters who helped finance his theological education in Colombia and USA, to the Colombian MB conference who, two years ago, sent him to complete a master’s degree at Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary in Fresno—people everywhere have recognized his potential for leadership.

Perhaps least surprised of all would be García’s mother, Evelia. She was 45 years old when she became pregnant with this son. The doctor advised her that, because of her age, the child was at risk. She pleaded with God for a healthy child and, like the biblical Hannah and Samuel, consecrated her son to God for ministry.

With a wry smile García remembered how aggravating it had been to hear his mother recount that story during those rebellious teen years. But today he finds it reassuring—a reminder that God’s gifts and blessing are on him from before his birth. And with this call to ministry comes God’s spirit to guide and give strength for the task ahead.

César García and Sandra Báez have two teenaged daughters, María and Paula. They have recently completed two years of study at Fresno Pacific University, the Mennonite Brethren university in Fresno, California. César earned a Master of Arts in Theology and Sandra completed a Master of Arts in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. The family is currently settling again in Bogotá.

Kathy Heinrichs Wiest is a writer from Kingsburg, California, USA.

2011 MWC Executive Committee meeting

MWC office will move to Colombia, USA will host next Assembly

Taipei, Taiwan—The rise of Anabaptist-related churches in the Global South is becoming much more than a matter of membership. At this year's meeting of the Mennonite World Conference's Executive Committee, May 4-10, actions on staffing and structures also reflected that growth. Setting the tone for the gathering was the May 4 appointment of César García of Colombia as General Secretary-elect, to take over the role from Larry Miller on January 1, 2012. The decision includes the relocation of MWC's head office from Strasbourg, France, to Bogotá, Colombia.

"We are opening a new chapter in Mennonite World Conference history, now that we have found César," said MWC President Danisa Ndlovu. "Now it is critical that, during his time of orientation, he be received and embraced by the various MWC communities."

The appointment of García, who currently serves as secretary of MWC's Mission Commission, also fulfills a

dream of Larry Miller. "It is the culmination of a long march toward leadership from the Global South," he said. "It's a key position for shaping the direction of MWC." He added that he deeply appreciates his growing relationship with García as they begin a five-month transition period beginning in August.

After almost 22 years in the position, Miller has accepted an invitation to become the first full-time secretary of the Global Christian Forum (see sidebar).

Concerns from the South also figured in the committee's acceptance of the offer of USA member and associate member churches to host the next global assembly in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in July or August 2015. A major worry was the difficulty many global visitors will face in getting entry visas. The United States currently places severe restrictions on visitors from many parts of the global South, particularly those between ages 18 and 25.

After considering an extensive feasibility study, the Executive Committee endorsed the Pennsylvania State Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg as the assembly venue.

Bert Lobe, North America Representative for MWC and part of the feasibility group, told committee members that the Harrisburg area is well endowed with Mennonite and Brethren in Christ congregations and institutions, and thus presents rich possibilities of volunteer participation and personal connections. Harrisburg is also close to many historical sites that are important to North American Anabaptists.

In a related action, the Executive Committee also accepted the invitation of the three MWC member churches in Indonesia to hold the 17th Assembly in that country in 2021. Indonesia's three Mennonite church bodies are home to about 90,000 baptized members.

WILL GLOBAL YOUTH BE ABLE TO ATTEND ASSEMBLY 16?

The Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee present an audiovisual to the Executive Committee insisting that support for youth in overcoming visa barriers must precede the next assembly. "U.S. visa refusal is more likely with young people, who may not have significant bank statements or assets to show, a steady job, or family to come back to," explained Marc Pasqués of Spain.

Standing, left to right, are Melani Susanti of Indonesia, Tigist Tesfaye of Ethiopia, Rodrigo Pedroza García of Mexico, Kristina Toews of Canada, Sumana Basumata of India, and Carlos Álvarez Woo, of Colombia. Seated are EC members Adi Walujo of Indonesia, Edgardo Sanchez of Argentina, and Sandra Campos Cruz of Costa Rica. Seated behind the youth is Magali Moreno of Paraguay, MWC administrative assistant and interpreter.



Photo: Liesa Unger



Leaders of the Fellowship of Mennonite Churches in Taiwan (FOMCIT), hold the ceramic plate presented by the MWC Executive Committee at a festive evening hosted by FOMCIT. Left to right are Joshua Chang, Pastor of Taipei's Sung-Chiang Mennonite Church and head of the ministerial department; Elder Li Li-Ching, FOMCIT Treasurer; Dr. George Wung, FOMCIT Secretary; and MWC President Danisa Ndlovu.

Anabaptist identity

MWC's increasing work in nurturing Anabaptist identity was evident as the Executive Committee reviewed and discussed updates from the Faith and Life Commission on two draft documents that may eventually become available as teaching tools and references (see story, page 7). Throughout the meetings there were frequent references to the November teaching delegation in Indonesia and India, sponsored by the Deacons Commission.

John D. Roth of the USA, newly appointed as secretary of the Faith and Life Commission, presented a proposal for "The MWC Global Anabaptist Profile Project." The research project, based in Goshen College where Roth teaches, would be independently funded but overseen by the MWC. It would randomly select 25 national churches for in-depth study of what Anabaptist-related churches believe and practice.

"We need to look at this in light of the commissions' discussions," Iris de León-Hartshorn of the US cautioned, referring to the difficulty that MWC's four commissions have in finding the funds and time to do their work. "The reality is that we can't do it all."

The proposal was approved, with the proviso it not detract from other MWC priorities and that it not be dominated

by theological and cultural questions that come only from the North.

Consensus tested on service network

One other issue that took considerable time was the decision on where, under the MWC structures, to lodge the emerging network of service agencies and committees related to MWC member communities.

Last August in Ethiopia, the Global Anabaptist Service Consultation, involving representatives of 27 Anabaptist service entities around the world, resulted in a decision to create a service network that would come under the umbrella of MWC. A provisional task force was appointed to work out the shape of the network and its relationship to MWC.

César García, a member of the task force and secretary of MWC's Mission Commission, presented two options from the task force: lodge it in either the Deacons Commission or the Mission Commission of the General Council, or make it a free-floating entity accountable directly to the General Council (MWC's governing body that meets every three years).

The issue occupied both plenary sessions and continental caucuses composed of Executive Committee members and commission leaders, who

Larry Miller named Secretary of Global Christian Forum

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) has appointed Larry Miller to become its first full-time Secretary when he completes nearly 22 years as the General Secretary of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

Miller will begin officially with the GCF on January 1, 2012, at the same time that César García, MWC's next General Secretary, assumes the position after a time of transition.

Seconded by the MWC for this service, he will work initially from his hometown in Strasbourg, France, in offices contributed by the Lutheran World Federation-related Institute for Ecumenical Research.

"My rootedness will remain in the Anabaptist-Mennonite communion and in relationships with you," Miller wrote to his MWC colleagues in the wake of the GCF's invitation. He noted that for several years he had felt an interest and call towards involvement in the GCF. "My hope is that the Anabaptist communion, including you, can view me as one sent also on your behalf."



The GCF, formed in 1998, is a growing global initiative that seeks to bring leaders of all Christian churches in the world together to

foster mutual respect and to address common challenges.

The GCF brings together leaders, not only from the historic Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions, but also from the whole spectrum of newer groups such as Pentecostals, Evangelicals and African Instituted Churches.



Photo: Merile Good

Japan Mennonite Fellowship leaders update Executive Committee members on relief efforts in the wake of the recent earthquake and tsunami. Yoshihira Inamine (left) and Michio Ohno (right) came to Taipei to meet with the leaders of the Deacons Commission and Executive Committee members to discuss ways in which MWC and associated agencies can best respond to the disaster and strengthen ties with the churches. See story page 12.

were also present at the meeting and who had already broached the subject in their joint gathering on May 3.

The questions were theological: Is service understood as outwardly focused, beyond the church, or does it include diaconal ministries within the church that ultimately enhance the church's witness? But they were also practical: Would a service network focused on work in the world overwhelm the Deacons Commission, or distract it from its current activities of addressing basic needs within the churches?

When the committee seemed stuck in an impasse, it consulted the MWC's guidelines on its consensus model of decision making. In the end, the decision was to endorse the task force's preference to lodge it with one of the commissions. After further deliberation when it meets in October, the task force will present a final recommendation to the General Council when it meets next May.

"In my years with MWC," said Ndlovu, "this was the first issue that took so long to resolve. But people were fully engaged, and there was a sense that what we were talking about was very important to us."

Transitions, Assembly plans affect budget

Early in the meetings, MWC's new Director of Finance and Administration, Len Rempel, presented a financial report that showed MWC in good financial health, despite the global recession. While the restricted fund balance is currently at \$1.2 million, it will be brought down significantly as the leadership transition is completed in the next year, and especially as MWC prepares for Assembly 16.

On the second last day of the meetings, the Executive Committee passed a revised 2011 Unrestricted Fund budget of just over \$1,000,000. The 2012 budget was also approved for \$991,000 while projections for 2013 and 2014 show a decrease in expenses to under \$900,000 in each year as MWC moves beyond the transition and begins preparing for the next assembly.

Among other actions, the Executive Committee:

- appointed Sandra Campos Cruz of Costa Rica to the Executive Committee, recommended by the churches of Central America;

- accepted the nine-congregation Iglesia Evangelica Menonita de Chile (the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Chile) as the 100th member church of the MWC;
- accepted the International Brethren in Christ Association as an associate member, a category of membership that can apply to networks of churches;
- agreed to appoint an MWC member to the joint governing council of Mennonite Central Committee in its new structure;
- heard updates on two developing conversations with other world communions: a tri-lateral dialogue with Lutherans and Catholics on baptism, with a significant colloquium to occur in January; and a conversation initiated by the world body of the Seventh Day Adventists, who are rediscovering and wanting to explore their Anabaptist roots;
- approved the formation of a standing task force, with youth representation, charged with creating the annual World Fellowship Sunday worship materials;
- approved new terms of reference for the Asia caucus;
- approved plans to meet next in May 2012, in Basel, Switzerland, just before the General Council meeting and in the context of MWC commission meetings and a gathering of European Mennonites.

Byron Rempel-Burkholder, MWC editor

The Church in Four Colours

Kitchener, Canada—What's the best way to sense that you're part of the global church? This past February, many Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in the American mid-West would have said something like: "Well, of course, you need to meet your brothers and sisters from other countries."

That was also the feeling among the four-person, four-continent MWC team who visited the region, January 28 to February 28. Traveling by van, staying in homes, speaking in schools, churches, and church agencies, the team shared with hundreds of people their experiences of being the church in their contexts.

"By not seeing us, and not hearing us, they don't know about us," said team member Cisca Mawangu Ibanda, of Congo DRC. "We were refreshing their memories that outside of their own environment they have a family."

Commission leaders grapple with growing mandate

Taipei, Taiwan—Three years ago in the Philippines, the MWC Executive Committee took steps to establish four standing General Council commissions to support a growing constellation of MWC ministries being carried out between global assemblies every six years. Like four chambers of the heart, the commissions would work together as a key life force within MWC, under the banners of Mission, Peace, Deacons, and Faith and Life.

The new commissions were appointed at Assembly 15 in 2009, and their chairs and secretaries met for the first time in August 2010 in Ethiopia. This year, on May 3 in Taipei, they gathered again to report on their activities, feed each other ideas, and formulate their counsel for the MWC Executive Committee, whose week of meetings began the next day.

As MWC Vice-President Janet Plenert summed up after the meeting, “Today, and a year ago (in Addis Ababa), we experienced toddler steps of learning our task in the world—learning to trust ourselves and each other. There was respect for each other’s commissions as interdependent.”

A major undercurrent for the day’s conversation had to do with the nurturing of Anabaptist identity and values. The Faith and Life Commission brought forward drafts of two papers as guiding documents for work of the commissions, but possibly also for the MWC as a whole: 1) “A Holistic Vision statement of the ‘Anabaptist Tradition’: Exploring Fellowship, Worship, Service and Witness,” by Commission Chair Alfred Neufeld; and 2) “The Anabaptist Tradition” by Swiss Mennonite Hanspeter Jecker.

“We are in urgent need of recontextualizing Anabaptism in the newer churches,” said Neufeld. “Africa, for example, has a complex background that doesn’t apply to the 16th century—so if you want to contextualize, you need a text to show us how—a task that is still ahead.”

On the other hand, Paulus Wijdaja, Indonesian secretary of the Peace Commission, cautioned, “We don’t need to put everything into this statement. Let this be a strong statement, and lead others to contextualize [Anabaptist tradition] for

themselves.”

Contextual issues also figured in the group’s discussion of the ongoing development of the Anabaptist Shelf of Literature. Two books on the Holy Spirit, for example were put forward as candidates for the collection—recognizing the theological gifts that charismatic Anabaptists, especially in the South, can offer to the MWC community.

The “toddler steps” of the commissions gathering also included practical challenges. Each commission has a dozen members representing the five continental regions of MWC. They must carry out their mandates by email and Skype, sometimes—unevenly—with the help of MWC staff and finances.

In the May 3 meeting and in the Executive Committee meetings that followed, commission members expressed a desire for more face to face meetings to facilitate their work.

What is “Anabaptist tradition”?

Hanspeter Jecker: If you want to reach the promised land, then remember the path in which God has led you until now (Deuteronomy 8:1-2). This look back to your own history with God fosters courage and confidence; but it also helps to orient and focus on an ambitious goal. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25) invites us to ask ourselves as Anabaptist congregations: what sort of insights and convictions have been entrusted to us as a treasure from our history, and what things should we readily toss aside in exchange for others?

Alfred Neufeld: The 16th century Radical Reformation, based on a continuum with the historic medieval church and triggered by the Protestant Reformation, aimed to restore the church toward a believer’s community, toward an ethic of love and toward a Christian existence based on discipleship to Jesus.

From the two papers the commission leaders discussed

Under the leadership of MWC North American representative Bert Lobe, the team also included Carlos Álvarez Woo of Colombia, representing the Young Anabaptists, and Cynthia Peacock of India, chair of the MWC Deacons Commission. Their itinerary took them from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana and Kansas.

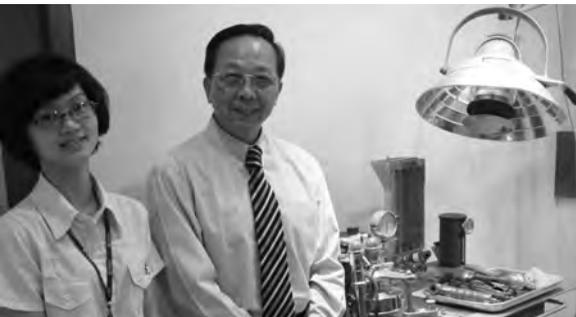
According to Lobe, this was the fifth such tour in North America. The visits, he said, underline the “primary challenge” of MWC communities in the North: to know that MWC is more than an assembly. As intended, the tour stimulated conversation about the significance of the church as experienced in the global South and North.

“We get energy from the narrative that is the church,” said Lobe. “That is the power of this kind of tour. We set [the team] *continued on page 14*



Photo: Bert Lobe

Left to right: Cisca Mawangu Ibanda, Rhoda Keener, Cynthia Peacock and Carolyn Holderread Heggan. Carolyn and Rhoda, of Mennonite Women USA, worked with Cisca and Cynthia on plans for a women’s conference in India next year.



Jacob Chao (right) with MCH public relations person Lai, Tang-Yu, beside a display of equipment brought by the missionaries. Today, MCH is a state-of-the-art facility, with an excellent neonatal unit (top photo).



Cheng Min Chang (left) a resident at the Mennonite Social Welfare Foundation, with the centre's director Wenchi Cheng, in front of one Chang's murals. Cheng Min paints about 10 pictures a week.



Residents at the New Dawn Centre create clay art, which is sold in the centre's gift shop

Taiwan Mennonites: Building

The Fellowship of Mennonite Churches in Taiwan (FOMCIT) hosted the 2011 annual meetings in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan (see pages 4-7). Here is a brief window into

When people in Taiwan hear the name “Mennonite,” they probably think of the 500-bed hospital located a stone’s throw from the Pacific Ocean beachfront in Hualien, on the east coast.

Mennonite Christian Hospital (MCH), which has won several national awards for service, is especially known for its obstetrics.

According to deputy CEO and retired Mennonite businessman Jacob Chao, it has such a solid reputation that half the pregnant women in the region go there to have their babies, even though there are four other hospitals in the district.

While only a third of its 950 staff are Christian (most Taiwanese are Buddhist and Taoist), the hospital has a clear Christian identity and mission, says Chao. Through chapel services and a robust pastoral care ministry, he says, “unbelievers know what we are doing.”

The 60-year-old medical ministry is now being multiplied in a new branch hospital on the edge of town. When construction is complete in several years, it will be much bigger than the mother hospital—with specializations in elder care and mental health.

The MCH consortium, however, is only one of several social service institutions initiated through FOMCIT. Funding comes from a variety of sources within Taiwan—business, government, and church. Other outreaches, all in Hualien, include:

- the seven-story New Dawn centre, which offers residential and day services to adults and young people with mental disabilities;
- the Good Shepherd Centre, a ministry for abused and at-risk women and girls; and
- the Mennonite Social Welfare Foundation (related to Mennonite Christian Hospital), a centre for severely disabled adults and children, the only service of its kind in the region.

Tracing its beginnings to a mobile clinic service run by Mennonite Central Committee in 1948, the hospital was initially developed by North American missionaries in the 1950s through the 1970s.

It was then turned over to the Mennonite churches that had also sprung up not only in Hualien, but also in Taipei and Taichung, another major city on the west-central side of the island. In the 1990s the government required that the hospital be separated from the church jurisdiction, but FOMCIT members still sit on its board and its mission and identity remain Mennonite.



Paul Lin, 84, served for 50 years as the Mennonite Christian Hospital's chaplain. He still does pastoral work at the Bo-ai Mennonite Church in Hualien.

Independent, yet loyal to its roots

The financial and administrative independence of the national church was a goal that the missionaries encouraged almost from the beginning. Since 1994, when the General Conference Mennonite Mission in Taiwan closed its work, FOMCIT has received neither financial assistance nor administrative direction from North America.

Taiwan’s rapid and robust economic development in the last generation has helped this process, and it is reflected in the fellowship’s middle class, urban congregations—21 in all, with a total membership of 1750.

The challenges they face are similar to those of other newer Anabaptist churches: how to express and develop an Anabaptist identity and mission that is rooted in their own context. FOMCIT’s recent history shows a loyalty to the

g on a legacy of social ministry

Annual meeting of MWC's Executive Committee and Young Anabaptists Committee
v into this vibrant Anabaptist church just 130 kilometres off the coast of China.

North American church whose mission agency planted the church:

- At least ten FOMCIT pastors have trained at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in the United States.
- FOMCIT has reaffirmed its use of the logo of the former General Conference Mennonite Church.
- A year ago, FOMCIT asked American, Sheldon Sawatzky, a long-time mission worker in Taiwan, to be its interim General Secretary as they seek renewal of vision for the future.

While FOMCIT draws freely from the traditions of other denominations—many pastors have trained at the Presbyterian or Holiness seminaries—their distinctive Anabaptist voice is apparent. FOMCIT has spoken, for example, to the militarism that has always dominated Taiwan in the face of China's threats to reintegrate the island, which is still not officially recognized by most of the world as a sovereign nation.

Several years ago, FOMCIT publicly supported a movement to soften the government's policy of compulsory military service. Today, young men are allowed to perform non-military service instead.

But the church also recognizes that peace includes much more. Kim Chen of the Meilun congregation in Hualien lights a peace candle in every worship service and seeks to promote peace theology within the congregation, especially in dealing with conflict, whether in marriages or work relationships. "Shalom," he says, "is the church's slogan this year."

Another growing edge may be in a theology of leadership. Chen is a promoter of "servant leadership"—the subject of his doctoral thesis. But he acknowledges that the idea is "almost impossible" to promote in a culture that values hierarchy. Even in the church, he says, it is easy to think "we are servants of Jesus Christ, but not of each other."

Chen seeks to show by example that the church is most alive when the gifts of all members can be valued and exercised.

FOMCIT's desire to build solid leadership for a renewal of its mission has been its focus since a leadership summit two years ago, and was at the heart of last year's gathering of pastors and delegates (reported in MWC news in November 2010). The gathering established FOMCIT's theme for this year—"Be disciples of Jesus, proclaim the gospel of peace"—and leaders have been seeking strategies for building missional leadership and for planting new churches in the southern part of the island.

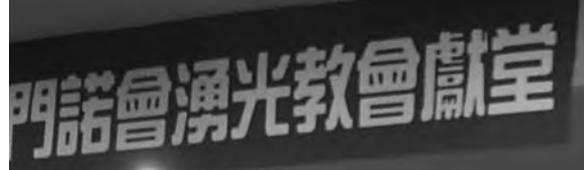
Sawatzky says that one of the reasons for his appointment was that the leaders "very much want to be Anabaptist." He has been asked to support and lead FOMCIT's efforts to launch Anabaptist training programs and develop teaching materials.

Sawatzky's long-held dream, affirmed at FOMCIT's annual meeting last year, is to develop a training centre in an existing seminary. Given the small size of FOMCIT, this direction is more feasible than building a full seminary.

According to Sawatzky, this would not only allow Mennonite pastors to get the training they need; it would also allow FOMCIT to share the gifts of their own values beyond the Mennonite church.

Given the strong foundations that are already in place after two generations, the church seems well-positioned to find its way into that future, with God's help.

Byron Rempel-Burkholder, MWC editor (story and, except where noted, photos)



Children's choir at the Sung-Chiang Mennonite church in Taipei.



Sheldon and Marieta Sawatzky, former mission workers. FOMCIT has hired Sheldon as interim General Secretary.



Photo: Janet Plenert

Kim Chen: a passion for servant leadership.

Taiwan snapshot

Population: 23 million

Languages: Mandarin (official) and Taiwanese (Chinese dialect)

Religions: Buddhist/Confucian/Taoist (93%); Christian (4.5%)

Mennonite Church (FOMCIT): begun in 1954 by North American missionaries; officially incorporated in 1962; financially and administratively independent in 1994; today 21 churches in Taipei area (11), Taichung (7), and Hualien (3).

From urban Brazil to rural Mozambique

Akron, Pennsylvania, USA—From fielding unusual theological questions—“If God is up there, why didn’t the astronauts see God?”— to a weekly bath in the river while gathering clams for suppertime soup, Priscila Santana is finishing a year that couldn’t be more different from her life growing up.

One of São Paulo’s 11.2-million inhabitants, the 28-year-old Brazilian now serves at a home for female students in Mozambique, whose families live in such remote places that at least one student has to canoe across a major river to visit her family on holidays.

As a participant in Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network! (YAMEN!), a joint program of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC), Santana serves as a counselor, informal teacher and friend—a role the students affectionately term “titia” or “auntie.”

She lives and works at The United Church of Christ-American Board Girls Home, located in the Machanga district of Mozambique, on Africa’s southeast coast. By providing room and board, the home allows about 40 girls to attend school at the nearby Machanga Secondary School.

“There’s no better reward than seeing the girls asking for books, reading their poems aloud, just even seeing their smiles when they’re able to understand things that at first seemed impossible for them to do,” she said.

This year, Santana is one of nine participants in YAMEN!, a program that expands the fellowship between Anabaptist churches and develops young leaders. Young adults from countries beyond Canada and the U.S., spend one year in a cross-cultural assignment.

Santana teaches a variety of subjects to the home’s 44 young women, ages 13 to 23. Since her mother language, Portuguese, is also Mozambique’s official language and the language used in the classroom, Santana helps many of the girls with reading and writing Portuguese. Many students are not fluent in Portuguese, because their first language is Ndau, the local dialect.

She also teaches informally in geography, English and art, using games, poetry, physical activities and handicrafts as teaching tools.

Santana advocates for girls’ education. “Mozambican women don’t have the same opportunities or rights as men. That’s one of the main reasons I came,” she said. “I strongly believed educating girls brings the changes and development any society needs. And I wanted the girls at the school to learn how to dream and to pursue their dreams and goals.”

This is the first year that the home will graduate three young women. “This is a great thing to celebrate as it’s not common for women in the area to go this far with their education,” Santana said.

In rural areas, Mozambican girls usually are kept home to work in the family’s fields or sent out to earn wages as maids. Their parents arrange marriages for them, often at age 16 or before. “I felt so sad to know four girls didn’t come back this year because they were to get married. One was only 14,” Santana said.

At the home, the wake-up bell rings at 4:45 a.m. “By 9 a.m., I’ve had breakfast, swept and mopped the floor, taken a bucket shower and am ready for one of my morning classes,” Santana said. The women have chores that include cleaning the yard, watering the vegetable garden and taking the goats out to pasture. The home’s gates close at 6 p.m., with evening prayers and bedtime at 8 p.m., the time when São Paulo comes alive, according to Santana.

Having grown up in one of the world’s largest cities, with access to shops, facilities and technology, Santana said she has learned that a simpler style of living brings her closer to creation and the Creator.

That’s one of the messages she wants to bring to her home church,

Igreja Evangélica Menonita de Interlagos, São Paulo. She also hopes to link people of faith she knows in Mozambique and Brazil, helping them to realize they not only share the same language but also a common faith and thus walk together as God’s children.

Emily Will, freelance writer, for MCC

The other participants in this year’s YAMEN! program:

Noel Sequeira Hernandez of the Principe de Paz Mennonite Church in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, serving in Honduras; Sindy Johanna Novoa Caro of the Casa de Oración in Bogotá, Colombia, serving in Honduras; Consuelo Mendoza Barillas of the Convención de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas in Managua, Nicaragua, serving in Bolivia; Sandy Corina Wall Hein of the Evangelische Mennoniten Gemeinde in Fildelfia, Paraguay, serving in Nicaragua; Clifford Sibanda and Nompilo Sibanda of the Brethren in Christ Church in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, serving in Mexico; Anielle Immanuel Santoso of the Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) in Kudus, Indonesia, serving in Nepal; and Rina Ristanami of the Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ) in Jepara, Indonesia, serving in Korea.



Photo: Berta Machava

Victoria Gimo (left) and Nelsa Dique braid Priscila Santana’s hair at Machanga American Board Girls’ Home. Santana is a friend, mentor and informal teacher with the girls at the home.



Photo: courtesy of Melani Susanti

One of the first pairs in the YABs Connecting Youth Groups involves Eben-Ezer Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, Canada, and GKMI Kudus Church in Kudus, Indonesia. Youth Task Force member Melani Susanti and Kristina Toews established the bond during a visit to Indonesia in April. Back row (from left): Farid, Andika, Candra; middle row: Budi, Aristya, Melani, Nindy, Kristina; front row: Daniel, Aries, Hana, Nita, Grace, Kaka, Wening.

Young Anabaptists to focus on global connections this year

Taipei, Taiwan—The new Young Anabaptists' (YABs) Committee of Mennonite World Conference has made stronger international fellowship the focus of their projects for the coming year. Meeting May 2–9 in Taipei alongside the annual MWC Executive Committee gathering, the group also completed the transition with its predecessor, the MWC Youth Task Force (YTF), which had laid the groundwork for the formation and mandate of the committee.

“The involvement of young people in MWC leadership and decision-making has gone a long way from where it first started in Zimbabwe in 2003,” said Tigist Tesfaye, African representative to the YABs committee, “and we are very honoured to facilitate the implementation of these dreams.”

Between 2002 and 2009, almost 6,000 young Anabaptists from around the world had expressed their hopes for the church through assignments and discussions associated with the Global Youth Summits in Zimbabwe (2003) and Paraguay (2009). In the last two years, the YTF had compiled these thoughts into the “YABs blueprint” (available for download at www.mwc-cmm.org), which became the basis for the work of the YABs committee.

Two YTF members, Kristina Toews from Canada and Marc Pasqués from Spain, are continuing to serve on the YABs Committee until 2015. Three new continental representatives joined them for the Taipei meeting: Tigist Tesfaye of Ethiopia, Rodrigo Pedroza García of Mexico and Sumana Basumata of India. (see page 15). They replace retiring members of YTF: Ayub Omondi of Kenya, Carlos Álvarez Woo of Colombia and Melani Susanti of Indonesia.

Omondi remains as mentor and secretary of the team, succeeding Elina Ciptadi-Perkins of Indonesia.

Since the Taipei meeting the committee has begun implementing the following initiatives:

Connecting Youth Groups. This effort seeks to pair youth groups across national boundaries so that they can learn how other Anabaptist communities express their faith, and explore common triumphs and challenges. The program will enable groups to support each other through prayer and the sharing of history and gifts. The YABs committee distributed the program’s description and application form to the MWC Executive Committee in Taipei, and to youth groups in Indonesia, Singapore and Taiwan during recent visits. For more information on the initiative, contact the committee at yabs@mwc-cmm.org.

Face-to-face meetings. The YABs will continue to pursue opportunities to connect with young people whenever the YABs Committee members travel. In the past 12 months, the Youth Task Force connected with youth and church leaders in USA, Ethiopia, India, Ghana, Nigeria, Canada, Indonesia, Singapore and Taiwan, explaining and promoting the YABs network.

Collaboration with MWC commissions. The YABs Committee will continue dialog with MWC commissions about opportunities to work together. As a start, the committee members will help with a MWC calendar project and MWC website improvement.

Other dreams that will require further development and administrative support include: **electronic connections**, especially through Facebook and Twitter;

a **video project** that could help educate youth about Anabaptist identity; and a **YABs day**, similar to World Fellowship Sunday, when Anabaptist youth groups from around the world use the same material to celebrate their common Anabaptist roots and values.

At their meeting committee members also created a system of accountability for reporting progress. “With language limitation, cultural differences, and geographical distance between us, it is crucial that we discuss and agree on how to communicate with each other and with our constituents,” said Kristina Toews. Among other things, they agreed on plans for:

- regular e-mail communication with each other;
- participation in MWC projects and commissions;
- regular communication with the youth and church leaders in their continents;
- assigning managers to YABs projects.

“I admire the new team’s sense of unity and purpose,” said Ayub Omondi, YABs committee mentor, upon observing the dynamics of the team in Taipei. “They come into the committee knowing what needs to be done to bring young adult involvement in MWC to another level, and are committed to represent their continents well. Their gifts and skills complement each other well, and I am confident that they will make many positive contributions to MWC and the global church.”

Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, Indonesia, outgoing mentor of the Youth Task Force

Japanese organize for ongoing disaster relief

Tokyo, Japan—A Mennonite World Conference (MWC) delegation to Japan, May 21-30, brought hope and support to Japanese Anabaptists still traumatized by the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant meltdown in northeast Japan last March.

The delegation, which went at the invitation of Japan Mennonite Fellowship (JMF), included MWC Deacons Commission secretary Bert Lobe; Paulus Hartono of the Indonesia Mennonite Diaconal Service; and Willie Reimer, Food, Disaster and Material Resources director for Mennonite Central Committee.

The group participated in three main meetings in Tokyo and the northern island of Hokkaido. They met with representatives of the JMF, which includes the four MWC member churches (Nihon Kirisuto Keiteidan,

Photo: MWC delegation to Japan



Pastor Minay Gishe and his wife Yasochō of Bible Baptist Church, one of the Baptist churches that has received help from JMF, in Kesenumu City with Paulus Hartono (right).

Nihon Menonaito Kirisuto Kyokai Kyogikai, Nihon Menonaito Kirisuto Kyokaikaigi, Tokyo Chiku Menonaito Kyokai Rengo). They also met in Osaka with representatives of the Nippon Menonaito Burezaren Kyodan (Mennonite Brethren Conference), which is not a member of MWC.

“It is good that you have

come,” one participant told the delegation. “We do not know [our way forward] yet, but we will listen to each other. The problems are complex. Solutions will take time.” In the course of the visit, however, it became clear that JMF was ready to organize itself to initiate a joint response, building upon a number individual and

congregational gifts of money and volunteer work.

On May 28 JMF formed the East Japan Great Disaster Relief Assistance Committee to provide relief and early rehabilitation. JMF had received \$55,000 from their member churches for disaster relief.

MCC, which by May had received more than \$954,000 for Japan relief, earmarked a portion of their donations to

support the Anabaptist churches’ coordinated effort. It is currently in communication with JMF regarding joint initiatives. MCC continues to work largely through Church World Service, a long term ecumenical partner of MCC.

Ferne Burkhardt and Byron Rempel-Burkholder, Canada

Anabaptists make their mark as Decade to Overcome Violence closes

Kingston, Jamaica—About 30 Mennonites, Quakers and Church of the Brethren (known as the Historic Peace Churches) participated in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation held May 17-25 in Kingston, Jamaica. The gathering marked the end of the Decade to Overcome Violence, an initiative of the World Council of Churches that was first proposed by German Mennonite theologian Fernando Enns.

Indonesian professor and secretary of Mennonite World Conference General Council Peace Commission, Paulus Widjaja, was one of several panelists who reported on continental consultations and documents produced by peace

churches during the decade. Others included: Alix Lozano of Colombia’s Mennonite Church, Timothy Siedel of Mennonite Central Committee USA’s Peace and Justice Ministries, and Scott Holland and Stanley Noffsinger of the Church of the Brethren.

Another workshop that received considerable attention was led by Thomas Finger, former professor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary (USA) on “Peace: the lens for re-visioning Christian theology and mission.”

Fernando Enns, recently appointed Chair of Peace Theology and Ethics at the Free University in Amsterdam, closed the



Fernando Enns, recently appointed to the Chair of Ethics and Peace Studies at the University of Amsterdam, spearheaded the DOV.

conference with a forward-looking challenge for the global church to keep developing and promoting theologies of “just peace.”

“Yes, we understand—better than ever before—the complexities and interdependence of poverty, racism, militarism, gender and

generation based violence,” said Enns, “but we are only beginning to understand our own afflictions. We are only starting to grasp the possibilities to care for one another. The church shall not speak for the marginalized; the true church is where the marginalized are. No, we are not satisfied.”

From WCC reports and Marijke van Duin, the Netherlands

MWC website to allow easier access and enhanced collaboration

Villeret, Switzerland—Accessibility to a broad spectrum of resources is the focus of a redesign underway at the Mennonite World Conference website.

“The previous site was built on a system that was outdated,” says Hans Ulrich (Hansuli) Gerber, who has been part-time webmaster since May 2010, working from his home in Villeret, Switzerland. “The new site can be more easily adjusted and maintained by a number of people without getting cluttered. Added functions allow subscribing to new

posts and linking with social networks.”

According to Gerber, traffic is increasing at the site, but users are still predominantly in the North (see sidebar).

While the look and feel of the site remain much as before, the latest changes seek to reduce waiting time for those without high-speed Internet or who rely on Internet cafés. Gerber has also modified the site to minimize the number of clicks users need to reach their destination.

The challenge of any website, and technology in general,

Gerber says, is two-fold. On one hand, it needs to “provide the latest news ... and make resources, including multimedia, available for downloading.” On the other hand, “people don’t have much time and they are selective in what they are looking for.”

Beyond easier access, Gerber hopes, the new website will enhance the functioning of MWC. He wants the site to “serve as a platform or workspace for relatively closed communities, such as MWC commissions,” offering more effective ways for

MWC to communicate and exchange information or work on projects.

“MWC is a community of communities,” Gerber notes. “It is complex, multilingual, multicultural, and with a theological spectrum. It makes its beauty—unity in diversity.”

While a website can’t actually substitute for in-person communion, Gerber says, “it can help increase a sense of belonging and improve collaboration.”

*Byron Rempel-Burkholder,
MWC editor*

www.mwc-cmm.org quick facts

Number of hits per day: 2,000

Increase of traffic over last year: 15%

Most traffic by regions: USA and Canada, Europe, Russia, Ukraine, Colombia, Taiwan, Japan

Languages used: English, French, Spanish, German

A one month snapshot: In May, 5,231 different people visited the site 7,859 times, looking at over 23,000 pages, with 72,000 hits and downloading about 5 GB of resources.

The person behind the website

Hansuli Gerber’s commitment to the MWC website is part of his larger commitment to the mission of MWC.

Raised on a Mennonite family farm in the Jura region of Switzerland, he attended a Mennonite school and worked first as a farmer, then as a teacher and later as a pastor. For 25 years he has worked with the international church in peace and relief efforts.

As the Executive Secretary of the International Mennonite Peace Committee from 1986-91, and MWC Secretary for Assembly 12 Program from 1988 to 1990. Gerber’s ties with MWC have preceded his current position. Gerber also served as a program executive for the World Council of Churches (2002-2009) and as Mennonite Central Committee Director for Europe (1992-2002).

Drawn to the website work by a sense of connection to MWC, Gerber says, “MWC is close to my heart, as it helps build solidarity and awareness in regard to seeing the world with eyes of faith and community.”

Gerber attends La Chaux-d’Abel Mennonite Church, Switzerland, where he serves on its pastoral team. He also serves as President of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR), and is Executive Secretary of its Swiss Branch.



Dutch Mennonites celebrating “four-fold Jubilee”

Amsterdam, Netherlands—This year the 8,000 members of the Dutch Mennonite churches have been commemorating four significant events in their history: Menno Simons’ death 450 years ago, the founding of its seminary 275 years ago and of the ADS (Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit—Dutch Mennonite General Conference) 200

years ago and the ordination of Annie Zernike, a Mennonite, as the first female pastor in the Netherlands 100 years ago.

Events during this year include expositions on the history and current life of Mennonites; books; dramatic performances; a “Menno Night” for the youth; a walking tour of Witmarsum, the place where Menno left

“the Pope’s church”; a cycling tour between Witmarsum and Bad Oldesloe in Germany, where Menno died in 1561; and many local initiatives.

In September the ADS is organizing a three day celebration where 1,500 Mennonites are expected. The celebrations, to be reported in more detail in the next issue of *Courier*, will look to the future.

“Too long we were only proud of our history and became the ‘silent people in the country.’ It’s time to show the world who we are,” said ADS president Otto Bleker at the opening Jubilee event, March 5, in Amsterdam.

Dirk Visser, the Netherlands

Financial Report

MWC thanks you!

The fiscal year ending December 31, 2010, showed financial results close to the budgeted amounts for both income and expenses. Total income for the unrestricted fund totaled close to \$800,000. This figure includes donations of \$630,000 from member churches, congregations, church agencies and individuals. The remainder includes investment income, exchange gains on investments and management fees charged to the restricted funds. Income increased slightly over 2009 and is over budget by \$50,000.

It is encouraging to see that the strong support from individuals continues. More than one third of all income came from individual donors. This is a very positive sign for the future of MWC and the continuation of its work.

The expenses for 2010 increased from 2009, as anticipated. A portion of the increase was related to the transition in leadership that is taking place within MWC. 2010 also marked the implementation of a new structure that includes four commissions (Peace, Faith & Life, Deacons and Mission) which seek to carry out the mission of MWC.

The unrestricted funds are used for the general operating expenses of MWC and it is the objective of MWC to always maintain a positive balance in this fund. At the end of 2010 the balance in the unrestricted fund was \$6,000. The budgets approved for 2011 and 2012 and the projections for 2013 and 2014 maintain this principle.

The charts show the sources of income as well as the distribution of expenses for the year. The third chart shows the allocation of restricted fund expenses, which are supported by special, designated donations. More detailed reports are available upon request by contacting the MWC offices.
Len Rempel, Director of Finance and Administration

continued from page 7

up in three or four colours, and then all they needed to do was tell people the story.

Team members spoke of the way the trip would benefit their home communities. "When this kind of visit happens," said Álvarez Woo, "you think, my goodness, this is bigger than I thought. It's not superficial; it's a matter of stories and traditions, faith, and ways to express that faith. And when you go back you say [to your fellow church members], 'Did you know there is a different way to do things?'"

Cynthia Peacock, likewise received new energy to bring different groups together in India. "There are so many [Anabaptist] conferences, each doing their own thing. Why don't we get together within our own contexts, and then internationally. That will bring us to unity and to appreciation of the mystery of the church."

Byron Rempel-Burkholder

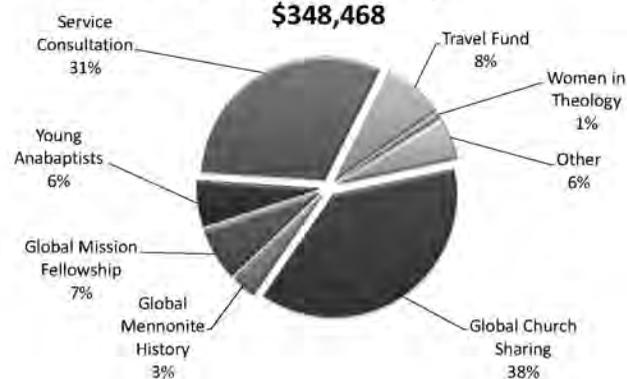
2010 Unrestricted Income for operations: \$796,103 USD



2010 Unrestricted Expenses for operations: \$930,627 USD



2010 Restricted Fund Expenses: \$348,468



Help support C-C-C

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Clovis, CA 93612

Canadian funds: 50 Kent Avenue
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1

Euros: 8 rue du Fossé des Treize
6700 Strasbourg, France

Introducing...

At the May meeting of the Executive Committee in Taiwan, several new leaders were appointed to succeed those completing their terms. Give thanks to God for their willingness to serve, and keep them in your prayers.

Sandra Campos, Executive Committee (Latin America and Caribbean)--replacing Félix Curbelo Valle of Cuba, who passed away in 2009 • Heredia, Costa Rica • Member of Rey



de Reyes (King of Kings), the first Mennonite Church in Costa Rica. • President of the Asociación Iglesias Cristianas Menonitas de Costa Rica • Mother of three, grandmother of four. • *"We have so much to learn from other cultures when we share the same faith and principles."*

John D. Roth, Secretary of Faith and Life Commission, replacing Larry Miller • Goshen, Indiana, USA • Young adult Sunday school teacher at Berkey Avenue Mennonite



Fellowship, Mennonite Church USA • Professor of history at Goshen College; editor of *Mennonite Quarterly Review*; administrator of the Mennonite Historical Library; director of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. • Married to Ruth and father of four young adult daughters. • *"The renewal of our North American*

churches depends on our connection to the global church. Our well-being and future depend on this."

Sumana Basumata, YABs committee (Asia), replacing Melani Susanti • Alipurduar, West Bengal, India • Member of Little Flock Mennonite Fellowship, a part of India's BJCPM. • Recently was United Nations intern with MWC and Mennonite Central Committee. • *"The YABs' project of pairing a youth group in one part of the world with a youth group in another part of the world excites me a lot."*



Rodrigo Pedroza García, YABs committee (Latin America and Caribbean), replacing Carlos Álvarez Woo • Mexico City, Mexico • Pastor of Iglesia Anabautista Menonita "Pueblo en Transformación" in Mexico City. •



Graphic designer and illustrator for a small company. • *"Young people are discovering that Anabaptism is something you live. They can be part of a transformative movement within the church. I want to encourage dialogue between young and old to help us grow together in the way of Jesus."*

Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle, YABs committee (Africa), replacing Ayub Omondi Awich • Addis Ababa, Ethiopia • Youth leader at Gurdshola Meserete Kristos congrega-



tion in Addis Ababa and board secretary for Meserete Kristos Church's campus youth ministry. • University student in international studies, hoping to work in conflict transformation in Africa. • *"I participated with the AMIGOs and attended the Global Youth Summit in Paraguay. These experiences helped me see Anabaptism live. I want to help others link to God's global family so we can understand that we are all connected."*

Interviews by Phyllis Good, photos by Merle Good and Liesa Unger

Ayub Omondi Awich, YABs mentor, replacing Elina

Ciptadi • Kisumu, Kenya • Member of Kisumu Mennonite Church,



Coordinator of Youth Programs for Kenya Mennonite Church • Social worker,

serving in a private business that assists people with income-generation. • Married to Dorothy and father of 2 young sons. • *"There's been a gap between the older and younger generations—in communication and decision-making. The YABs are an essential bridge, helping the whole body move forward."*



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www.mwc-cmm.org

Former MWC President Ross Bender passes away

Ross T. Bender, president of Mennonite World Conference from 1984 to 1990, died April 21, in Goshen, Indiana. In his 81 years Bender devoted himself to service and leadership in the Mennonite church, including congregational, denominational and global ministries. Much of Bender's service was in seminary teaching and administration in the United States. He was professor of Christian education at Goshen Biblical Seminary and then Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary over a span of 34 years, beginning in 1962.



Photo: J. Tyler Klassen

Keep the faith, César!

by Larry Miller

Saint Pierre le Jeune (Young St. Peter) church, several hundred meters from the MWC office, is one of my favourite places in Strasbourg. Inside is “La Navicella,” a mesmerizing 14th century fresco of “the little boat”—the church of Jesus Christ. Though they have just participated in an astounding event—the feeding of the five thousand—the disciples are now huddled together in a little boat, buffeted by the wind, battered by the waves.

Then they see Jesus walking on the water. The disciples seem more terrified by this “ghost” than by the storm. But Peter, energized by a word from Jesus, steps out. In a burst of faith, he tries to walk on the water. Suddenly, fear overcomes him and he begins to sink. “Lord, save me!” Peter cries out. Immediately Jesus reaches out his hand, catches Peter and says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14.31)

Did Michael Sattler doubt? In late 1526, the Anabaptist leader engaged intense debate with Strasbourg reformers, including Wolfgang Capito, the one closest to Anabaptist convictions. Some of their meetings no doubt took place at Capito’s home, adjacent to St. Pierre le Jeune church where Capito was pastor. Those conversations may have been one of the last best chances for reformers and radical reformers to agree on how to rebuild the “little boat.” But the men could not reach consensus on several life and death issues of the day.

So Sattler stepped out. Did he take a last look at the Navicella fresco before leaving town? Did he see Jesus walking beside the little boat as he crossed the Rhine River? Did he cry out for help?

In any case, Sattler kept the faith. A couple of months after leaving Strasbourg, he led the conference at Schleithem, which produced the first Anabaptist statement of shared convictions. In the days following, Sattler and his wife Margaretha were arrested, tried, and convicted of heresy. His last words as he burned to death: “Father, I commend my spirit into your hands.”

My MWC experience these 22 years has been an immeasurable privilege and a life-giving gift—it has also been incomparably gentler than was

Sattler’s experience as an Anabaptist leader. Indeed, children of those who opposed Sattler and other 16th century Anabaptists have during these years taken historic steps of repentance and reconciliation.

Still, there were times when we faced strong wind and high waves. Those were the moments when I saw most clearly not only that the little boat is filled with gifted companions but also that someone is walking

beside it, ready to reach out a saving hand.

So, keep the faith, César. Keep the faith, brother, just as you have thus far. Step out knowing that people surround you with all the gifts needed for the cause and, above all, knowing that someone is walking beside the little boat, ready to reach out when you call.

And all those of you who are in the little boat with César—whether it is the little boat of the church universal or the very little boat of the Anabaptist communion—keep the faith all the way through the long-awaited period of MWC’s pilgrimage which is now opening before us.

Larry Miller is General Secretary of MWC until January 1, 2012, when César García will assume the position.



“La Navicella,” in Saint Pierre le Jeune church in Strasbourg, France.