

courier



First Quarter 2002 • Volume 17, Number 1 • A Quarterly Publication of Mennonite World Conference



What Should the Church Do About HIV/AIDS?

World Calendar

June 29-July 3, 2002	Brethren in Christ Convention, Grantham, PA, USA
July 3-7, 2002	Mennonite Church Canada Assembly, Saskatoon, SK, Canada
July 4-7, 2002	EMMC Convention, Winnipeg, MB, Canada
July 5-7, 2002	EMC Convention, southern Manitoba, Canada
July 11-17, 2002	Asia Mennonite Conference Executive Committee, Manila, The Philippines
July 25-August 1, 2002	Africa Global Mennonite History Writers and Advisors Meeting, Zimbabwe
July 26-28, 2002	Mennonite Brethren Convention (Canada and USA), Abbotsford, BC, Canada
August 2-7, 2002	Conservative Mennonite Conference, Accident, MD, USA
August 2-7, 2002	MWC Executive Committee meeting, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
August 7-10, 2002	GAMCo Continuation Committee, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
July 2-7, 2003	Mennonite Church USA Assembly, Atlanta, GA, USA
August 11-17, 2003	Mennonite World Conference Assembly Gathered, "Africa 2003," Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
October 9-14, 2002	6th Latin American Anabaptist Consultation, Mexico

Cover photo: Brethren in Christ Church members in Zimbabwe discuss HIV/AIDS issues. On far left is Margaret Moyo, a volunteer working with youth who are out of the school system. Photo by Jethro Dube

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Courier (ISSN 1041-4436) seeks to nurture community, communication and cooperation in the worldwide Mennonite and Brethren in Christ faith family, a part of the Anabaptist movement. It is published quarterly by Mennonite World Conference, 8, rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. Known office of publication: *Courier*, P.O. Box 346, Lancaster, PA 17608-0346.

Periodical postage paid at Lancaster, PA.

Publisher: Larry Miller. Editor: Milka Rindzinski. Assistant Editor: Phyllis Pellman Good. Continental Editors: **Africa**—Doris Dube, MCC Zimbabwe, 214/215 Lutheran House, L. Takawira Ave./ H. Chitepo St., P.O. Box AC 680 ASCOT, Bulawayo, ZIMBABWE. Email <mccz@mweb.co.zw> **Asia**—Miwako Katano, Room 211, Toyohira-ku, Sapporo 062-0903, JAPAN. Email <hiromiwako@bd.wakwak.com> **Europe**—Ed van Straten, Eksterlaan 24, 2261 El Leidschendam, THE NETHERLANDS. Email <E.van.Straten@wxs.nl> **Latin America**—Milka Rindzinski, 3 de Febrero 4381, 12900 Montevideo, URUGUAY. Email <milkarin@adinet.com.uy> **North America**—Phyllis Pellman Good, 223 E. Walnut Street, Lancaster, PA 17602, USA. Email <mandpgood@aol.com> .

News and Copy Editor: Ferne Burkhardt. Designer: Dawn J. Ranck. Communications Assistant: Eleanor Miller.

Readers are encouraged to send news and feature stories and ideas from Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowships and members in their regions to their respective Continental Editors, whose mailing and email addresses are given above.

Courier is mailed free on request to church leaders worldwide. Send manuscripts and address changes to *Courier*, MWC, 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. <Strasbourg@MWC-cmm.org> Printed in USA.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Courier*, P.O. Box 346, Lancaster, PA 17608-0346.

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What Should the Church Do About HIV/AIDS?

The Brethren in Christ of Zimbabwe Face the Problem

by Doris Dube



Photo Lizzie Makhalisa

Primary school children, orphaned by AIDS.

In the past in Zimbabwe, when news of a death was shared the people often asked, "What happened? What was the cause?" Now they don't ask. Death has become so common, and yet, because of the times we are living in, it is better not to ask. That way the family is able to preserve some of its privacy and dignity.

In the past, burials were only held on

certain days of the week and only in the mornings. Now a visit to the cemeteries shows clusters of mourners here and others there. There are burials all day long. There are burials on every day of the week including Sunday. This has to be because the statistical information available to everyone is that about 3,000 people die of HIV-related ailments weekly

in this country. There has never been an epidemic here which has taken so many away, and there has never been one that has lasted so long.

In Harare a burial plot which was meant to service the city for many years is half-full in less than half the time it was meant to be in use. In Bulawayo a cemetery which had its first burial less

than four years ago is almost full. In all the big and small settlements country-wide, the earth is forever receiving the dead. In the rural areas villagers used to show respect for the dead by not working on the land during the funeral wake right up to the day of the burial. Now the people only break for the time of the burial; then life goes on as usual. In our culture we do not talk about cremations, but perhaps it is a language we must soon learn to speak.

Several months ago, the district Medical Officer for Gwanda, Dr. Iddolor, gave some sobering information to support the well-known information that 24.5 million people in the Sub-Saharan region are infected with HIV. In the hospitals 60%-70% of hospital beds are occupied by people living with HIV. On another occasion the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. David Parirenyatwa, said 90% of the patients in most hospitals are HIV positive. Close to Mtshabezi at Gwanda hospital 33%

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of pregnant women are found to be HIV positive. The same standard of testing reveals that at Beit Breidge, a border town with South Africa, the infected group of pregnant women is 40%. In September statistics from Hwange, a mining town, revealed that 31.7% of all deaths recorded at the colliery hospital since January were AIDS-related. These

and other figures in the local papers are a daily reminder that we are living in very difficult times.

The church had a slow start in the fight because HIV/AIDS was associated with promiscuity. Now many are realizing their mistakes and are doing all they can to correct this concept. The Brethren in Christ (BIC) church in Zimbabwe has been running an AIDS Education and Awareness Program since 1993. The center of activity is Mtshabezi District Hospital close to Gwanda town. The program has concentrated on four main areas.

There continues to be a great emphasis on Education and Awareness of HIV as a threat to humanity. Teaching is done whenever possible in gatherings of the youth, men, women, and schoolchildren. The estimated statistical information in the media shows that there are still many new infections, so teaching continues to be a priority. In the schools, the government has included the subject

This is my story . . .

My name is Gracious Linda. I have two daughters ages 12 and eight, and a son age 15. I am the ZNNP [Zimbabwe National Network for People Living with HIV/AIDS] Provincial Representative for Matabeleland South.

HIV/AIDS came to my home through the marriage bed. My husband was the Chief Executive Officer at the Council Offices. He had a roving eye, and because there were many women who came through his office he started cheating on me. Though I knew what was going on, I remained faithful to him. I hoped he would change, and I did not wish to break up the family home. To me it was important that the children should be raised in a home with a father and mother.

In 1993 when I was expecting my last daughter, I had a routine pregnancy blood test. I was shocked when I tested positive. A further test in 1994 confirmed the previous results. I was HIV positive. For some time I was in a stupor.

Confirmation of the reality of the

situation hit me over and over as each of my husband's five girlfriends died. By the time my husband died in December 1995, I did not need any more evidence. I knew that I as his wife had a big problem on my hands. By then there was more information about HIV/AIDS, and I had already joined a support group.

Sizo kaZulu support group was really my support emotionally and spiritually. There were 20 of us altogether. We got together and shared from the depth of our beings. We talked about living positively by developing positive attitudes. We all made up our minds that we would avoid further infection, build our bodies by eating nutritious food, and be there for each other.

When any of us went into depression we gave those persons counseling sessions and stood by them until they felt better. We applied for and got aid to start an Income-Generation Project. We raise and sell chickens. Our children automatically become members of the group.

The greatest challenge I am facing now is finding a way to share about my status with my children. My eldest

son, seeing my involvement with HIV/AIDS-related issues and knowing that he and his sisters are having their school fees paid through the National AIDS levy, has asked me probing questions about his father. I have not been able to answer all of them, but I am working on a Memory Book. This will be part of what I will leave for my children. Through it they will know some of my innermost thoughts and



Gracious Linda talking about the struggles and challenges of living positively with HIV.

Photo: Jethro Dube

in the curriculum so that it should be taught in all relevant age groups. Both men and women slot this in their meetings. Youths who are school-leavers have clubs where they share information through games, quizzes, and drama. Plans are underway to equip the youth with self-help skills so that when they are orphaned they can start and then run Income-Generation Projects.

The hospitals country-wide can no longer cope with the large numbers of the sick in the hospitals, so many people are sent home to die. Their relatives care for them under the *Home-Based Care Program*. The backbone of this program is the body of volunteers who give their time to visit, encourage, and care for the sick at their homes. They walk long distances to visit all the patients under their care. Many times they take along a little food from their pantries because it is not good to visit a patient empty-handed. Through grants from both Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and The



Photo Doris Dube

In this family graveyard two brothers and their wives were laid to rest. They left behind orphans who are now being cared for by very old grandparents. This common sight emphasizes the burden many old people are bearing as the child-bearing generation is lost to AIDS.

desires for them. They will learn about some of my struggles and triumphs on the long road with HIV/AIDS. They will learn about what our family life was meant to be before we were robbed by the scourge.

My in-laws and I do not have a particularly good relationship, so another challenge I have is to raise enough funds to be able to give my children a good education. The AIDS levy money from the government is helpful, but it is not enough, especially for my son who goes to a boarding school. I do not wish my children to end up as street kids. I pray that I should live long enough to push them on in their schooling. I am self-employed as a vegetable and fruit vendor. Sometimes I do cross-border trading in Botswana.

The health of my youngest daughter also causes me some concern. She is often sick. I do my best to give her a good nutritious diet and hope for the best.

— as told to Doris Dube

Canadian International Development Agency, the Brethren in Christ church has been able to provide Health Care Kits to families of the sick, so that the level of care in the sickroom is improved and the caregivers don't risk cross-infection.

Orphans are a natural result of the pandemic. The church is currently collecting data so that we can have accurate figures about the orphans in our church constituency and so be able to plan how to care for them. Their needs include the payment of school fees, provision of uniforms, warm clothing in winter, and, in some cases, something to eat.

What has been affirmed by many people involved or in close contact with the situation is that when both parents have died, it is not good to separate the children by sharing them out to different relatives. It is recommended that they remain in the family home and that a relative moves in to care for them in a familiar environment. There are also some orphans who are school dropouts, but find themselves as heads of households when they, too, are minors who are not equipped to look after their siblings. Some of these have already been given training to prepare them to start Income-Generation Projects.

The people living with HIV/AIDS live among us. They need our care. Many need friendship and the assurance that their loved ones will be cared for after they are gone.

Every year the BIC church slots a program for Home and Family in its church calendar. This year a number of congregations used this as an opportunity to focus on HIV/AIDS-related issues. At Bulawayo Central Church the congregation invited Dumisani Nkomo, a Christian man who has been living with HIV for the past 10 years, to come and share with the church. Dumisani has made it his mission to warn the uninfected and encourage the sick to live positively. He spoke from the depth of his heart and many were challenged to get involved in the care and support of those who have succumbed to the sickness.

Even in the church very few families have escaped loss through HIV/AIDS. We continue to hope for an end to this suffering. For now we are going through the night. After night will come daytime and we will rejoice.

Doris Dube, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, is Africa Editor for Courier.

BENSON the Soul Winner

A Zimbabwean Leader

by Doris Dube

In every generation some men and women are so attuned to God that he speaks and reveals his secrets to them. Sometimes he allows them to travel through deserts, and yet even there they know the love and depth of his protection. What God reveals to those men and women is so sacred that they, like Jeremiah, weep for the people of their generation. What God reveals to them is not always easy to pass on.

One man who has a very intimate relationship with God is Benson Nyathi. God speaks to him through dreams and visions. One time Benson had a strange dream. He was walking in the park here in Bulawayo. It is a place of beauty with green grass and lovely flowers. Wherever he stepped a fire started. He moved away from the grass and trees and stepped onto cement slabs. Still, a fire started as soon as his feet touched the ground in any one place. He was setting the whole place on fire.

In panic he started running until he met an old man who said to him, "However much you run, you will not be able to put the fire out." When he turned to look back he found that everywhere behind him there was a blazing wall of fire, stretching as far as he could see.

This dream came after he listened to a Missions Day sermon preached by the late Brethren in Christ leader, Rev. Steven N. Ndlovu, at Nkulumane Church in 1984.

Another time God spoke to Benson was when he was going through a particularly trying time in his long walk as a door-to-door soul winner. The mud-slinging and hostilities in his congregation were such that he was seriously considering leaving it to go and fellowship elsewhere, then God spoke. [*Abakhala ngemva kwakho uzabothini?*] *What will you do about all who are crying behind you?* The voice was so loud and clear that Benson turned around but found no one. He was alone. God had spoken.

There has been a lot to frustrate him in his call to win souls. Another time as Benson continued praying and seeking the Lord's face he had a revelation. In this vision he was lifted high so that he saw the whole of Nkulumane, Nketa, and Emganwini suburbs as if from the top of a high place. As far as the eye could see he saw a carpet of rooftops. He was told to consider every single one of those rooftops as a pulpit. When he was about to question such a directive the voice went on to chastise him, *When it comes to winning souls and helping them grow, you answer directly to me.*

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Benson works with an urgency born of a desire that none should perish.

Benson Nyathi was born in a family who belonged to Jehovah's Witnesses. His parents were such devout members that the family home was often used as a venue for meetings. When he started school, he went to an Anglican school. Because of his religious background, he was soon very much involved in church life. Eventually he rose to Youth Leader for the Bulawayo of the Anglican Church. He tried to live the Christian life; however he did not know Jesus, and he knew something was missing in his life.

As a young man Benson had a friend called Elton Tshuma who went to New

Life For All Fellowship Church. One time Elton lost a friend through sickness. On the day of the funeral, which Benson attended, the late Rev. Mathe preached from John 1, verse 12, as well as from the story in John 9 starting from verse 1. Benson wanted to have that relationship with God which was preached about.

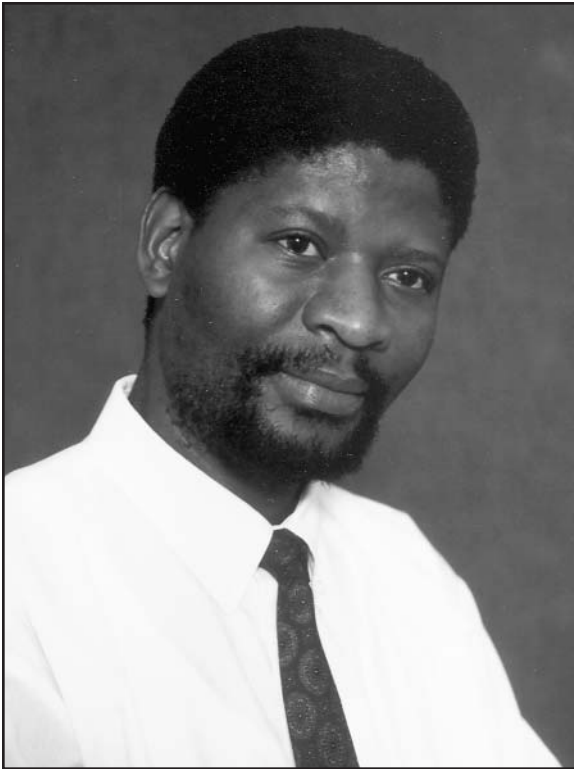
He started questioning many practices in his church. Though the leadership wanted to elevate him to the position of priest, that was not what he wanted. He only desired to serve God. Together with other Youth Leaders they sought an audience with the leadership in order to raise areas of concern. They questioned the liturgical prayers. They read the Bible and received revelation. When the door to fruitful discussion was slammed in their faces, Benson and a few others who were also searching decided to leave the Anglican Church.

At about that time he found a house in Nkulumane suburbs. A few enquires revealed that there was a Brethren in Christ church fellowshipping at Masuku School. Through their door-to-door visitations Benson was among those contacted.

At a Missions Day service Benson gave his heart to the Lord. That night he had the dream of walking through the park and starting a furnace of fire.

The dream bothered Benson because it was so intense and vivid. Benson's mentor throughout his long walk up to now interpreted the dream for him. Benson, his mentor, and another man formed the first cell group in their congregation. A friend who was an ex-combatant opened his home to these men and their wives, and soon the seed was born to start other such Bible study cell groups. These cell groups have been the backbone of church planting and growth in Nkulumane and Nketa.

When a cell group became solid and grounded in the Word, the leaders left to start other cells. Sometimes groups



Benson, the soul winner

which had become too big were split. Every Wednesday evening the cell leaders got together for training so that they too were continually nourished. By 1991 when a new pastor came, there were more than 16 cells at Nkulumane. Some of the people who have grown at Nkulumane have been instrumental in building Nketa and Emganwini congregations.

For Benson, door-to-door ministry is his life. After work, when the rest of us are looking forward to a lazy evening at home, his call is to visit and draw men to God. At first he used to go on his own, but as this could cause problems in some situations, he now goes with his wife. This husband-and-wife team has touched many souls and has been a testimony to others. The church has been built through this ministry.

God opens many doors to those who wish to serve him faithfully. One evening after work Benson felt the urge to go to Nketa. At one of the bus stops at Nketa 8, as Benson looked through the window, he saw a disabled woman watering her garden from a wheelchair. He felt the urge to get off the bus and minister to her. Benson went over, greeted her, and asked if he could come in and fellowship with the family. As he

was welcomed into the home he noted that the man of the house was on crutches.

The family was very happy to hear the Word of God and opened their door to more times of fellowship. Soon a group was meeting at the house for Sunday worship services. To keep the connection with the main congregation at Nkulumane, on the first Sunday of every month Mr. Knight Ngwabi, one of the elders at the church, would drive the couple to church with the larger body.

This fellowship was one way in which the body of the church was built. It was also one way in which power struggles within the church came to the forefront and destroyed all that had been built.

The church in that Nketa home could have developed into a BIC congregation, but that was not to be. Some people in leadership felt that rather than the church being set up in the home of the disabled, the pair should find a way of getting to the services at the main church. This hurt, and the couple was lost to the church, together with all the others who used to meet at their home.

Benson has served in several leadership roles in his congregation. Some leaders in his church felt that he should limit his service to being a deacon. They did not approve of his house visits. They felt that he was trying to overshadow the pastor who had no call for door-to-door house calls. They asked him to stop. It was at this time that he was tempted to leave this congregation until he was challenged in the vision of the rooftops.

Prior to being baptized, all those who are taking this great step are usually invited to give their testimonies. Many have shared about how they were introduced to the Lord through house visits by Benson.

One by one, Benson started inviting the leadership to join him in his house visits—starting with the pastor and on to all those holding key positions in the congregation.

In evaluating some of the obstacles which have frustrated his call to ministry

Benson says, “If there is a sin that is binding the church today, it is manmade rules. We leaders are the ones who do the most harm to the work of the Lord because of our separations and divisions. These rules prevent us from taking up our responsibilities to the lost.”

Benson’s desire is that all Christians should see the lost as God sees them. Though he respects and affirms the work that is done in theological training institutions, Benson feels that all believers are called to witness to those who have not heard and disciple those who are still young in their walk. He quotes the story of the Samaritan women. She did not go to a training college before she could witness. Neither did Legion. When Jesus touched their lives they wanted to tell the world about it. A touch by God and a burden for lost souls is all the teaching one needs to be a soul winner.

Recently Benson negotiated with his boss that instead of working from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., he would dismiss at 5:00 p.m. every Tuesday to enable him to do house visits. Already, three new cell groups are in place.

Some people cannot afford to buy Bibles for themselves, and yet it is Benson’s strategy that all believers should have access to literature to help them grow.

In doing house calls Benson has been challenged by the increase in the number of orphans around us, as well as the abundance of households which are headed by minors when the adults have succumbed to sickness. Benson’s desire is that all Christians should see all humanity as God sees us, with physical as well as spiritual needs.

Benson has a burden for his country. His vision for the next five years is that God would work in the church and raise men and women who will know and listen to God’s voice. Men and women who will learn from the master teacher, then go out and build *The Church*, not churches. Men and women who will take time to pray and change the world on their knees.

Doris Dube, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, is Africa Editor for Courier.

Global Shelf of Literature Launched

Mennonite World Conference has announced the launching of **The Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature**.

Each year Mennonite World Conference will announce the Selection of the Year. This may be a book, a booklet, or a series of articles. The selection may have been published first in any language from within any of the Anabaptist-related fellowships situated in 62 countries around the world.

"We do not intend to become publishers ourselves," explained Mennonite World Conference Executive Secretary Larry Miller. "Instead we want to encourage the development of an international shelf of common literature. Our hope is to encourage publishers in various language groups around the world to make The Selection of the Year available in their own language each year.

"In this way The Selection of the Year may be available in as many as possible of the 12 main languages used by 95% of Mennonite-related peoples around the world."

Miller noted that Semilla (Guatemala) and CLARA (Colombia) have been very active in publishing books in the Spanish language. GKMI has issued a number of titles in Indonesian. The Francophone Network is working to encourage the publication of books for Congo, Burkina, Faso, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Canada (Quebec). The Japan Anabaptist Center is publishing some books in Japanese. The Ethiopian church (MKC) has issued a number of books and booklets in Amharic.

Miller will work with MWC Communication Consultants Phyllis Pellman Good and Merle Good, along with regional editors, MWC staff and officers, and others from around the world in choosing and promoting the annual Selection each year.

Persons from any Anabaptist-related fellowship from any part of the world may nominate books, booklets, or collections of essays or articles for the annual Selection by writing to Mennonite World Conference, 8, rue du Fosse des

Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France.

"Mennonite World Conference is not forming its own publishing house," explains Phyllis Pellman Good. "Our goal is that, over the next 10 to 20 years, a common literature may emerge for the global Anabaptist-Mennonite churches. MWC can play an encouraging role by

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shepherding and advocating one given selection each year."

This would be a decentralized effort, requiring little outlay of finances or staff time from MWC, Larry Miller observed, "If the various language groups need subsidy to translate and distribute The

Selection of the Year in their languages, they will need to develop their own channels to do this. MWC will not be able to fund this."

"The 'Shelf' needs to have spirit, diversity, and conviction," added Merle Good. "If all of the selections come from the same continent or address the same topic over and over, the 'Shelf' will fail. We need themes of stewardship and prayer, family life and the work of the Spirit, as well as theology, peace, and history."

The Selection for 2002 has just been announced (see adjoining article). The search for the Selection for 2003 is already underway. "We hope to receive nominations from our fellowships all over the world," said Larry Miller.

— MWC News Service

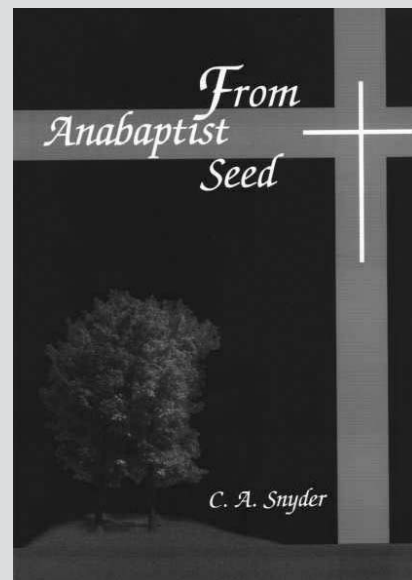
2002 Selection Named

From Anabaptist Seed: The Historical Care of Anabaptist-Related Identity by Arnold Snyder has been selected as the first title for The Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature.

Intended to cover basic defining points and to be highly readable, the booklet describes the Anabaptist "seed."

Subjects covered in bite-size fashion in this 54-page book include Anabaptist doctrines and their consequences, specific Anabaptist ordinances, and practices of discipleship (truth-telling, economic-sharing, and pacifism).

Comments Snyder, "The book provides a point of departure for continuing conversations."



Who Is Arnold Snyder?

by Phyllis Pellman Good

A slim little book is traveling the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ world these days. Its size belies its subject. Its style of language gives no hint of its academic authorship. The booklet is the 54-page *From Anabaptist Seed: The Historical Core of Anabaptist-Related Identity*. Its author is C. Arnold Snyder, professor at Conrad Grebel College in Ontario, Canada. The book is being enthusiastically claimed by Anabaptist-Mennonite leaders in many places around the world. How has this happened, and who is the person behind it?

Snyder wrote a textbook, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, which caught the attention of MWC's Executive Secretary, Larry Miller. (Miller was carrying the question that is on many people's minds these days, and was formulated at the MWC Assembly, India 1997: "What indeed does it mean to believe and act as Anabaptist Christians today, not only in thousands of different local settings, but also as a global family of faith?")

Miller thought Snyder might be able to help by providing a starting point for a global discussion of that question. "Is it possible to speak of an 'historical core' of Anabaptist-related identity?" Miller asked Snyder. "In spite of significant diversity from the beginning, can one identify a 'common core' of conviction and practice in early Anabaptism?" Miller went on.

"I think so," Snyder responded, "and I will do my best to summarize it simply and clearly."

And he has. Not only that. Snyder came to the MWC General Council meetings in Guatemala City in July, 2000, and allowed himself to be riddled with questions from Council members who are trying to put this ideal into full practice. The leaders pointed out the gaps in the booklet; they highlighted issues they believed were over-emphasized or understated. Snyder received the advice, asked questions of clarity, and became a full participant in the discernment process, without a breath of defensiveness.



MWC photo / Merle Good

Arnold Snyder

He was simply continuing a discipline he practices at home. "I've been doing a series of 20 or so sessions in local churches in Ontario, each lasting six or eight weeks. I use history as a kick-off to talk about what the church is today.

"I feel it's part of my teaching—to take from academia and give back to the church. I'm not strictly an academic. I'm also a church person. And I get a lot back; I enjoy it. It's been very revealing. It gets you out of the ivory tower pretty quickly."

Snyder, who has been on the faculty of Conrad Grebel College since 1985, teaches on both undergraduate and graduate levels in the areas of church history, western civilization, Anabaptist history, and Anabaptist spirituality.

"I don't seek my validation only from

the academic world," says Snyder, a statement substantiated by his interaction with the spread of international leaders in Guatemala City. "I do have a worry about the book *From Anabaptist Seed*, though," he reflected. "I am concerned that some will think this is a normative statement, that it is a 'blueprint' for the 'authentic' church. That's not the way the church works. I write as a North American Mennonite—and the church and this 'blueprint' look very different to an Ethiopian Mennonite, for example. It's in the reaction to the book that I'm finding excitement.

"We North Americans need to be in a listening mode these days. That's new for us. How do churches throughout the world discern? That's of great interest to me."

Snyder's fluency in Spanish and comfort in an international church setting began in his childhood. "Mom grew up in Argentina. I was born in Chicago, and soon after that, she and my dad, who was a pastor, felt a call to mission." The young family decided to go to Argentina. "But Dad died on the high seas on the way to South America."

Doris Swartzentruber Snyder continued on to Argentina with her two small children. In her new circumstances, Doris felt the need to complete her college degree, so eventually she and her youngsters went to Goshen, Indiana, for that purpose. That accomplished, the family of three went to Puerto Rico as missionaries.

Now a historian, Arnold Snyder allows his broad background to continue to inform his work with an honesty and freshness: "One of the things that's bothered me is that Anabaptism often acts like it discovered discipleship. But as I read medieval pious texts, I see Anabaptism as a continuation of spiritual streams. Anabaptism was locating those spiritual streams in a tradition."

Phyllis Pellman Good, Lancaster, PA, USA, is assistant editor of Courier.

The Aussiedler: A Growing Church

by Merle Good

One of the larger groups of Mennonite-related peoples in the world is still adjusting to a new home in Germany. Some are not even sure whether or not they really are Mennonites. Some are pretty sure they don't want to be Mennonites, at least not the "liberal" sort they've met or heard about elsewhere in Europe. (In fact, these people number more than all of the other Mennonites in Germany, The Netherlands, France, Spain, and Switzerland—combined.)

These people have come out of the Soviet Union (or later, out of Russia) over the past generation. By the thousands. No one knows exactly how many of them should be considered Mennonites, but well-informed observers estimate the number of "Aussiedler" Mennonite-related peoples to be between 30,000 and 50,000 members (not counting children, youth, and adults who aren't baptized members), depending on how precisely "Mennonite-related" is defined.

Their churches are often packed to the rafters, and are growing at a rate of nearly 5% per year, according to John N. Klassen, an expert on the Aussiedler peoples. They are very mission-minded and embrace the word "evangelical" as central to their identity. They number more than 350 congregations in 10 different groups in present-day Germany.

"Aussiedler" is a term meaning "out of" Russia (and other Eastern block countries). Another commonly used term by these peoples is "Umsiedler," meaning "over" or "relocating from one place to another." These terms apply to four million persons of German background who have resettled back into Germany from the Eastern Block countries (about half of these were from the ex-Soviet Union) during the past 30 or 40 years, of which the Mennonites are only a small part.

In the Soviet Union, because of the repression of Christian faith, the Baptists and the Mennonites worked together and worshiped together. In 1961 there was a division of opinion within the church about whether the government had too much say about church policies, theology, and the ministry. Those who went underground have tended to view those who registered with the Communist government as being somewhat compromised and perhaps less faithful.

Those experiences still shape the church life of these groups. In a congregation near Bonn, several persons agreed to be interviewed after the service. But they did not want to give their full names and they asked that their names not be used. They repeatedly expressed suspicion of churches who devote a great deal of energy to bringing all Christians together under one umbrella.

The congregation we visited was overflowing with hundreds of worshipers at the Sunday morning service. They are in fact building larger to accommodate the 900 regular attendees.

Music played an important role, with the congregational singing led by three teenagers, followed by a large, wonderful children's choir. We were told that this congregation also has a youth choir, a church choir, a senior choir, and a Russian choir, in addition to numerous special groups and an orchestra. "Music is one means we have to express our love to Christ," the music director told us. "Music was one of the main things that held us together in Russia."

The move to the West has left some deeply concerned. "Our cohesiveness in Russia was created by outside forces—a hard life, an atheistic government, and persecution." But in Germany they found many options, great diversity, and little Christian enthusiasm. "Our greatest challenge," one said quietly, "is how to deal with so much liberty and freedom."

Many of the Aussiedler Mennonites are skeptical of Mennonite World Conference because they fear it may emphasize unity at the expense of Christian principles. This seems understandable for a people who have been through so many years of suspicion and persecution. But we tried to reassure them that MWC exists essentially to connect churches to each other, to help and encourage each other, not to create a massive international bureaucracy.

As we left, we wished for more interaction between the Aussiedler and other Anabaptist-related groups around the world. "You have so much to share with us, to inspire us in our faith," we told them.

They didn't say absolutely no. In fact, one even asked how he could receive *Courier*.

Merle Good, Lancaster, PA, serves as a Communication Consultant/Writer for Mennonite World Conference.



MWC photo / Merle Good

An Aussiedler congregation near Bonn, Germany.

Africa 2003 Main Event: "Sharing Gifts in Suffering and in Joy"

by Ferne Burkhardt

"Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy" will be the theme for the next Mennonite World Conference assembly, Africa 2003. The theme is drawn from 1 Corinthians 12, the primary biblical text selected for the gathering in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in August 2003.

The events of September 11 have created a new sense of vulnerability to terrorism, economic decline, and instability that now includes North America. In the wake of that attack, MWC member churches around the world, especially several in highly volatile countries, expressed condolences and encouragement to their brothers and sisters in the U.S. These developments confirmed the growing understanding of the global church as the body of Christ with many members and many gifts to be shared in all circumstances of life.

Rejoicing together and celebration will be central at the assembly, with music being a major component. The music committee, led by Ken Nafziger (USA) and Eunice Khanye (Zimbabwe) and representatives from MWC-related churches in five continents, met for the first time with MWC officers and staff in Strasbough, France in November.

"If the music group inspires and moves the assembly in Zimbabwe half as much as I was inspired and moved [in France], it will be a highly successful gathering. The creative spontaneity of each member was most impressive," said Ray Brubacher, MWC associate secretary, after the meeting.

The committee will select at least two additional people from each continental region to form a choir to lead singing at the assembly. They will choose songs for worship from around the world and they hope to produce a songbook and a recording.

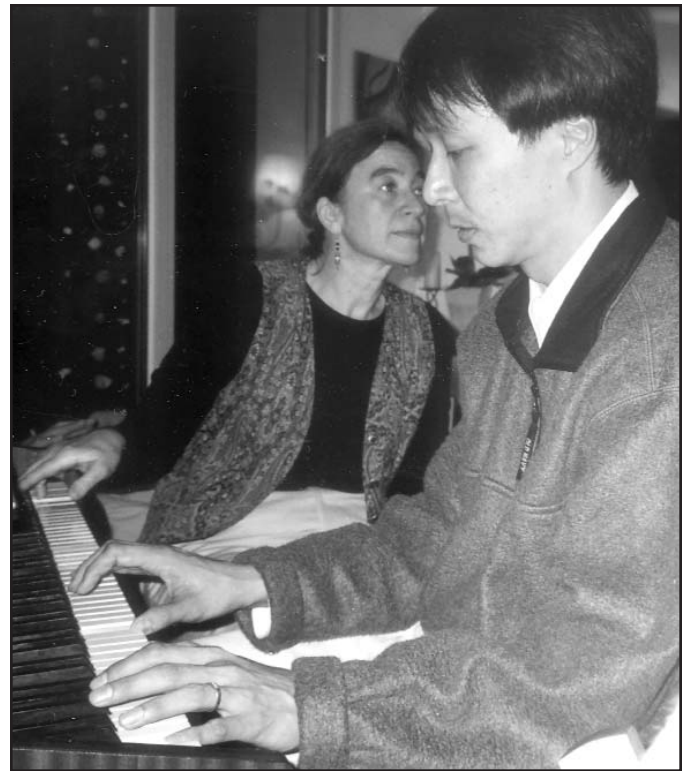
Plans continue for a youth gathering of representatives from each of the 87 MWC member conferences to precede the assembly. The agenda will focus on faith and life issues youth face in their contexts.

The youth programs and the scope of the music committee's ambitious ventures are contingent on adequate funding.

Looking ahead to Africa 2003, Bedru Hussein, vice president of MWC, and a leader of the Meserete Kristos Church in Ethiopia, quoted a Zulu proverb: "When a thorn pierces the foot, the whole body must bend over to pull it out."

Bedru continued: "Mennonite and BIC missionaries brought the Good News to Africa and as a result, many persons came to the Kingdom of God. They became members of the Body of Christ and of the MWC family. These churches have stories to tell and vibrant lives and gifts to share. Although there is suffering and pain in many African countries, these believers welcome their brothers and sisters from around the world to see, to feel, to experience their suffering and

their joy. Let us therefore bend together. In the process we will see the face of God and experience love and fellowship in seemingly contradictory situations. Come! Enjoy African hospitality and celebrate together the love of Christ."



Africa 2003 Music Committee members are beginning their planning: (left to right) Marilyn Houser Hamm of Canada and Agus Setianto of Indonesia are two members of the group.

MWC photo / Ray Brubacher

Plan for "Africa 2003"

- **Assembly Gathered**
 - Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
August 11-17, 2003
 - Daily services of singing, prayer, stories, Bible study and sermon, led each day by a different continental region
 - A choir representing each region leading congregational singing
 - Ample time for fellowship, eating, tours, workshops, performances
- **Global Church Village**
- **Youth Summit**
- **Assembly Scattered**
 - Visits to a wide variety of African churches across the continent before or after gathering in Bulawayo

Evangelism and Peace Witness?

by Merle Good

Ten years had passed since the Baptists and the Mennonites sat down together for bilateral discussions. What, if anything, might they learn from each other? In what areas might they encourage each other?

A Conference on “Evangelism and the Peace Witness of the Church” took place at Eastern College in Philadelphia, PA on January 10-12, 2002. Attended by about 85 persons, the academic conference was co-sponsored by Mennonite World Conference and Baptist World Alliance. About two-thirds of the attendees were Mennonite; only three or four of the whole group came from outside North America.

Amid the pulse-taking, several mutually held convictions emerged: 1) strong support for the “Believers Church” motif; 2) the need for a high Christology; and 3) a sense that the common threads related to the beginnings of these two groups should be explored more.

But the contrasts were more pronounced. Size was one—though the Baptists are a more recent confession, there are about 50 times more of them than Mennonites. Some attendees asked why this was, and whether this was in fact directly related to the theme of the conference. Were the Mennonites less effective in winning persons to their churches through the years? Or were the Mennonite ideals of discipleship and peacemaking too intimidating for most seekers?

“Personal conversion” and “baptism” were two themes which emerged repeatedly from the presentations of Baptist speakers. “Peace” and “reconciliation” were the two most common themes from Mennonite presenters.

Several of the Baptist speakers included rather dramatic stories of their own personal conversions to faith in Jesus Christ; none of the Mennonites did.

Several of the Mennonite presenters included stories of their involvement (sometimes dramatic) in missions of peace, reconciliation and justice; only one or two Baptist speakers did so.

“The Baptists have taken the commission to evangelize as primary,” noted one Baptist, quoting a Mennonite, “and the



Mennonite and Baptist participants in the discussion about evangelism and peace talk about “Where From Here?” in the closing session of the conference: (left to right) Pat Hostetter Martin, Larry Miller, William Brackney, and Stanley Green.

Mennonites have taken the second commandment of loving the neighbor as more primary in their life.”

“Baptists have been good obstetricians but bad pediatricians,” observed Denton Lotz, General Secretary of Baptist World Alliance. Larry Miller, Executive

*“We don’t seek
to convert each other
in these bilateral discussions,
but we learn
to know each other better.”*

Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, responded, suggesting that the Mennonites need to learn more from the Baptists about missions and evangelism. “Many Mennonites are missionary-minded. So what’s the difference

between us?” he asked.

Numerous suggestions were made throughout the conference on ways the two groups might encourage each other. It was noted several times that the Baptists and the Mennonites in the Soviet Union had worked closely together and, having migrated to Germany in recent years, often continue to do so today. Also, in countries around the world where Christians are in the minority, Baptists and Mennonites often have a closer relationship.

No formal structures are being proposed by either side, simply an occasional bilateral discussion which brings greater understanding. “We don’t seek to convert each other in these bilateral discussions,” Larry Miller observed, “but we learn to know each other better.”

Two poignant moments occurred near the end of the conference. One Baptist leader cautioned Mennonites on letting their peace witness become too one-sided. “Our people in the Soviet Union suffered a great deal for many years under the repression of that government,” he said, “and the Mennonites expressed very little witness against the horrors of the gulag. You should have.”

Later a Mennonite leader stood and with considerable emotion confessed, “I have been touched by your personal conversion stories. I wish I had that sense of conversion and assurance of salvation.” Then he added wistfully, “What confuses me is that so often the persons and groups who profess such a conversion turn out to be the most hostile as Christians to our concerns for peace and justice. Why is that?”

Both moments suggested the need for more conversations between these two groups.

Merle Good, Lancaster, PA, serves as a Communication Consultant/Writer for Mennonite World Conference.

Swiss and German Mennonites Collaborating on New Hymnal

by Ed van Straten



MWC photo / Merle Good

The Hymnary Committee at work: (seated, left to right) Anita Hein-Horsch, Annette Bergholdt, Reinhilde Salzmann, Paul Gerhard Schneider; (standing, left to right) Petra Hofer-Gerber, Käthe Schönhals-Driedger, Liliane Gerber, Birgit Foth, and Barbara Quiring.

A hymnary committee with German and Swiss members is at work on a new Mennonite hymnal to serve congregations in both countries. Committee members, ranging from ages 27 to 69, began meeting in 1998 and continue to meet about four times a year, hoping their work will produce a songbook of some 400-500 hymns by about 2005.

The committee started by compiling criteria and sent that to the congregations, along with a request for hymns they suggest be included. Most want to keep many traditional favorites from the present hymnaries (Switzerland, 1975; Germany, 1972). The committee had hoped instead to include hymns that reflect Mennonite theology and experience, although they are scarce.

Another problem that confronts the committee is the kind of songs young people like to sing. Experience tells them these songs have a rather short shelf life.

Committee members come from places as far apart as Hamburg in northern Germany and Tramelan in Switzerland, making meetings expensive. Between meetings, members communi-

cate via email and do homework. They sometimes meet in small, regional groups and then bring the results to the general meeting.

The committee hopes to include hymns reflecting Mennonite theology and experience, although they're scarce.

A German church leader, Peter Foth, once said his dream would be a multilingual hymnbook that could be used by Mennonites all over Europe. That may remain a dream because there are too many languages, but to have at least the Swiss and German sisters and brothers sing the same hymns in their churches is a good beginning.

Ed van Straten, El Leidschendam, The Netherlands, is Europe Editor for Courier.

Mennonites Assist World Council of Churches in “Decade to Overcome Violence”

by Ed van Straten

Theologians from the Historic Peace Churches (Mennonite, Society of Friends, and Church of the Brethren) are offering their peace theology ideas to the World Council of Churches (WCC), which is hoping for guidance from them for the “Decade to Overcome Violence,” declared by the General Assembly of the WCC at its meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998.

Fernando Enns (pictured below) represents German, Dutch, and Congolese Mennonites on the WCC Central Committee. He says that whenever peace/violence questions turn up in WCC committees, members ask his advice. He is impressed with the fact that WCC, far from being monolithic, is a forum where



MWC photo / Merle Good

Fernando Enns

Christians from many traditions meet and listen to each other. “Right now,” reports Enns, “they are listening to us.”

One of the WCC staff members is Laura Short, an American Mennonite.

Mennonite Central Committee and the German and Dutch Mennonites make it financially possible for WCC to employ her to do work related to the Decade to Overcome Violence.

Mennonites and Catholics Find Common Ground on Adult Baptism

by Ferne Burkhardt

Global Anabaptist-related churches may be surprised to learn that Catholics believe in baptizing adults on confession of faith. Wasn't voluntary adult baptism at the root of the turmoil and persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century in Europe?

Baptism was one of the topics discussed in Assisi, Italy November 27 to December 3, 2001 at the fourth of five Mennonite/Catholic Dialogues begun in 1998.

"There is much more convergence between a Mennonite and a Catholic understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper than has generally been assumed," said Helmut Harder of Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada), who presented a paper on these topics. He added that the Catholic spokesperson's "reading" of the import of Vatican II and subsequent discussion is that adult baptism is becoming

normative in the Catholic church, with less emphasis on infant and child baptism. Catholics accept persons baptized in non-Catholic communions, if it is done with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Larry Miller, executive secretary of Mennonite World Conference and a member of the Mennonite delegation, said in a recent interview that he felt an "affinity" with this Catholic theology and practice of baptism. "It is significant for Mennonites to hear the Catholic position on the theology of adult baptism and of its frequency."

Mennonite and Catholic participants in the dialogue on sacraments agreed that "the primary sacrament is Christ and the Body of Christ (the Church)," said Harder. They also agreed that the water of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper should be spoken of as "signs,"

pointing to a reality beyond themselves. For the Catholics, noted Harder, the emphasis on the objects themselves conveying salvation may be lessening.

Harder added that the Catholics found it attractive that the Mennonite paper on a theology of baptism and the Lord's Supper saw participation in these ordinances as bringing spiritual change to the recipient and to the community of faith.

The focus of the Mennonite-Catholic dialogues has been better understanding and the healing of memories, said Miller. Mennonites carry painful memories of the persecution endured by their 16th-century ancestors while Catholics see the Anabaptists' departure from the church as an abhorrent fracturing of the unity of the Body of Christ.

Lutherans in Ethiopia Put Their Neck on the Line for MKC Members

by Alemu Checole and Ferne Burkhardt

During a recent conversation at the SIM (Sudan Interior Mission) guesthouse, Calvin E. Shenk, a professor at Eastern Mennonite University (USA), related the following anecdote.

"On behalf of the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) members in particular and Mennonites in general, I want to thank you Lutherans for putting your neck on the line for us during the Marxist repression," exclaimed Shenk to a Lutheran professor at Mekane Yesus Seminary. The Lutheran professor responded, "We owed it to you because we put your neck on the line during the Reformation."

Anabaptists in the sixteenth century suffered at the hands of other Christians whereas MKC members suffered principally from people outside the Christian faith during the Marxist-military rule.

During the "Derg years" in Ethiopia, from 1982 to 1991 when a Marxist military government caused the MKC to go underground, the Lutherans provided an umbrella for repressed evangelical churches

for weddings and funerals. They did this to show solidarity with their suffering Christian brothers and sisters. On many occasions different Mekane Yesus churches in Addis Ababa opened their doors for a good number of MKC members for weddings and funerals.

Pastor Getaneh Ayele of the MKC Addis Regional Church office, for example, said that he got married on January 15, 1984 at Lideta Mekane Yesus. Ejigu Wolde-Gabriel, pastor of Kebenna MKC, was married on October 24, 1987 at Bethel Mekane Yesus where Esther Becker and Arlene Kreider were witnesses.

After teaching her Sunday school class in a home in Addis Ababa, Tenfyesh Yigezu, a Bible Academy alumnus and wife of Pastor Mesfin Tesfaye, died as a result of a car accident on January 9, 1988. The following day, her funeral service was conducted at the Urael Mekane Yesus Church.

Not only did the Lutherans open their church doors to MKC members, but they also opened their homes and arms in an

expression of Christian love and compassion.

Reverend Asfax Kalborie, a retired clergyman of Lideta Mekane Yesus, remembers with joy the excellent relations they had with MKC members and how the Council of clergymen of the Addis Ababa Lutheran churches agreed to commit themselves to serve the body of believers suffering repression under the Marxist regime, even risking the closure of their own churches.

The Lutheran pastor acknowledged the gratitude of Beyene Mulatu, an MKC church leader, who said that if the Lutheran churches had been closed and MKC had remained open, Mekane Yesus members might not have enjoyed such privileges.

These actions by the Lutherans were a significant expression of solidarity and demonstrate how each church is dependent on other Christian groups.

A Call to Prayer

compiled by Milka Rindzinski

*Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful?
They should sing songs of praise. —James 5:13*

*Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert
with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints. —Ephesians 6:18*

- Pray for Mennonite World Conference. May we have a broad vision for all the conferences represented. (Nicolás Largaespada, Nicaragua)
- Pray for MKC (Meserete Kristos Church) to continue its cross-cultural mission in the country and to start sending missionaries. Pray also for the Meserete Kristos College, that God would provide the necessary funds to build a campus on the land (60,000 sq. meters) received at almost no cost from the government. (Bedru Hussein, Ethiopia)
- Praise God for the following report: "We have been informed that the recent joint annual meeting of BGCMC in India has apparently brought unification to that body. The two main parties, at odds since 1994, met together this weekend and elected a single slate of officers for the coming year. Please pray that this rapprochement may last, and that other smaller factions will also be led to rejoin the renewed conference." (John F. Lapp, USA)
- Pray for the Brethren in Christ congregations in Zimbabwe as they prepare to welcome MWC Assembly 14, "Africa 2003." Pray also for the leaders of Zimbabwe and the choices they are making. (Doris Dube, Zimbabwe)
- Pray for the Mennonite churches in Europe that they may find new insights and new ways to spread the Gospel. (Ed van Straten, The Netherlands)
- Pray for peace in Indonesia/Philippines in this time of political unrest, violence, and con-

- flict among the ethnic populations in the respective countries. (Ambrocio Porcincula, The Philippines)
- Pray for the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in Nicaragua and all of Latin America that we may continue to consider, contextualize, and be faithful to the vision of the Holy Scriptures received from our Anabaptist forefathers. (Nicolás Largaespada, Nicaragua)
- Pray for Jaime Prieto of Costa Rica as he labors to complete the Latin America volume of the Global Mennonite History Project. Pray for the healing of his wife Silvia from surgery for cancer. (John A. Lapp, USA)
- Pray for John A. Lapp (USA) and Arnold Snyder (Canada) as they edit and bring to publication the first volumes of the Global Mennonite History Project. (John A. Lapp, USA)
- Pray for Alemu Checole (Ethiopia), Bekitemba Dube (Zimbabwe) and Eric Kumedisa (Congo) as they work to complete the Africa volume of the Global Mennonite History Project by the end of 2002. (John A. Lapp, USA)
- Pray that the North American Mennonite and Brethren in Christ (BIC) churches will be able to form sister relationships with Mennonite and BIC churches from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, so that they can celebrate and worship together at MWC Assembly 14, "Africa 2003," in Zimbabwe. (Alberto Quintela, USA)

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Africa

Doris Dube
214/215 Lutheran House
L. Takawira Ave.
H. Chitepo St.
P.O. Box AC 680
ASCOT, Bulawayo
ZIMBABWE.
Email:
mccz@mweb.co.zw

Asia

Miwako Katano
Room 211
Toyohira-ku
Sapporo 062-0903
JAPAN.
Email:
hiromiwako@bd.wakwak.com

Europe

Ed van Straten
Eksterlaan 24
2261 El Leidschendam
THE NETHERLANDS.
Email:
E.van.Straten@wxs.nl

Latin America

Milka Rindzinski
3 de Febrero 4381
12900 Montevideo
URUGUAY.
Email:
milkarin@adinet.com.uy

North America

Phyllis Pellman Good
223 E. Walnut Street
Lancaster, PA 17602, USA.
Email:
mandpgood@aol.com

The Fight Against HIV/AIDS: A Part of the Church's Mandate

by Pakisa Tshimika



MWC photo / Meric Good

Pakisa Tshimika

I received the annual UN report on the global situation of HIV/AIDS at the end of December 2001. The figures made me sweat. I became speechless for a moment. As a public health professional, I was taught to look at statistics and try to make sense of a situation. This time it was more than I could handle. The report shows an estimated 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS.

When I shared these figures with one church leader, he said that if many of these people would just change their ways of life,

then HIV/AIDS might not be such a big deal. His response made me realize once again that we Anabaptists still have a lot more work to do.

- We need to recognize that involvement in the fight against HIV/AIDS is not outside our mandate for church-planting, leadership development, and capacity-building. One of the pastors I met in Africa and who is HIV-positive told me that he contracted the virus when he was a truck driver. Some church people still look at him in light of his previous life. As I listened to him tell me his story, I wonder what we would say to Paul today?
- We need to reach to the heart of our theology, ethics, and mission. Churches must acknowledge that they have unwittingly contributed both passively and actively to the spread of HIV virus. Our difficulty in addressing issues related to sexuality, our tendency to exclude people, our interpretation of scriptures and theology of sin that promotes stigmatization and the suffering of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are theological issues that our churches need to deal with.
- We need committed leadership from our churches. This is crucial in the fight against any major issues in society in

general and in churches in particular. It is more so when dealing with HIV/AIDS. It is this commitment that will inspire action and attract the necessary human and financial means.

- We must recognize that people infected/affected by HIV/AIDS are not just statistics. They have faces and names.
- We must realize that most of our fastest growing churches are located in regions with a high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS. More than 90% of people who were living with HIV/AIDS in 2001 were from countries in the South. An estimated 3.86 million Indians are living with HIV/AIDS, more than in any other country besides South Africa. In Indonesia, the world's fourth-most populous country and where we have a large number of Anabaptist churches, infection rates are increasing rapidly.
- Finally, we must intentionally decide to work together. We might have our reasons to work separately or choose to protect our own turf, but the HIV/AIDS pandemic does not recognize national, religious, denominational, or socio-economic boundaries.

Pakisa Tshimika holds a Ph.D. in Public Health and is Associate Executive Secretary of Mennonite World Conference.

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