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**Global church communion focus
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Not by sight but by faith

by Dan Nighswander and Yvonne Snider-Nighswander

We woke early, before the alarm went off, fully conscious that Election Day had finally come. What would happen now?

There was great concern in the household where we were staying about how best to respond to this day, mis-named Election Day: Stay away? Leave the ballot blank? Spoil the ballot so that it cannot be filled in later? There was no agreement on what approach would be best.

Members of the household left early, to avoid long waits at the polling stations that would disrupt their day. As it happened, they found nobody in line; they walked right in and were among the first voters to register. Fingers marked with red ink, they could show anybody who asked that they had voted. That alone was a relief, as stories of being harassed about voting were circulating widely. It turned out to be uneventful in our neighbourhood, but we decided to stay home all day.

All businesses were closed for Election Day, a Friday, and many were not planning to re-open until Monday, because they did not know what would be the repercussions of the voting.

Schools were closed by decree, and the students attending the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) mission boarding schools were returned to their homes, unsure about when and how they would get back to school. In ordinary circumstances, their transport would be well-organized, but the shortage of fuel, inflation, and uncertainties around the political situation meant that planning for the students' return to their boarding schools was extremely difficult. The expectation that each family would send a large amount of food with each returning student compounded the stress on parents. In the end the students returned to school Monday and Tuesday of the week following the election.

We were keenly aware that Election

Day was also day two of the Mennonite World Conference call to prayer and fasting, which, we knew, meant that people around the world were praying for Zimbabwe and for us. As is the practice here during times of difficulty, everyone in our household gathered at 4:00 p.m. to spend time in prayer. A good practice.

As we waited for the day to end, we anticipated watching the news that evening to see what had happened. Alas, the electricity went off 15 minutes before the polls closed; it came back on just after the South African Broadcasting Corporation news had finished. Later that evening, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation showed footage (old) that substantiated the claim of good voter turnout. One person who showed up in the footage was known to have died several years before!

In many ways, Election Day was the climax of the two weeks we spent in this country as deacons commissioned by MWC to stand alongside our Zimbabwe sisters and brothers during what could turn out to be a difficult time. The letter of invitation asked us "to incarnate the MWC global community's care for the BIC churches [and] ... to provide encouragement to others under duress."

To fulfill this assignment, we spent much of the two weeks in both formal and informal conversations—with

M*WC commissioned Dan Nighswander and Yvonne Snider-Nighswander to travel to Zimbabwe for two weeks in June 2008 in the days surrounding a tense run-off presidential election in that country. Mennonite Church Canada Witness workers in South Africa, the Nighswanders were asked to serve as deacons from the MWC community to the Brethren in Christ (BIC) church in Zimbabwe to provide encouragement and to stand by church leaders during these days of stress. The Nighswanders had participated in an MWC koinonia delegation to Zimbabwe nine months previously to offer support to the church at that time.*

Zimbabwe's run-off election was called after the results from a March 29 election, though apparently won by challenger Morgan Tsvangirai, were declared short of the percentage required to win, according to the government of President Robert Mugabe. Tsvangirai subsequently withdrew from the run-off, alleging violence against opposition supporters, leaving only Mugabe on the ballot. That the government would continue with the run-off under these circumstances added to the stress and uncertainty of the final days in June when the Nighswanders made their visit.

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Shopping in Zimbabwe means confronting more and more scenes like this: empty store shelves and outrageous prices for the few items that are for sale.

church leaders, with pastors and their spouses, with former missionaries, with members of the community. We participated in Sunday morning worship services, mid-week Bible studies, birthday and other parties, and in family gatherings. We also kept up an extensive email correspondence with MWC and others around the globe to keep people informed about what was happening in the country.

And we learned a great deal.

The people we talked with seemed to be much less concerned about political issues than about the economics of daily life. While it is impossible to describe the current economic situation in Zimbabwe adequately, we do offer these impressions and examples:

The longest queues we saw were at the banks. The government permits only a small amount of cash to be withdrawn each day, so people queue frequently for this purpose. Because of this, sending foreign currency into the country by the “Zimbabwean diaspora”

is essential to the survival of most people. There are people on every block ready to change money, but one must search for a reliable person to change foreign currency into Zim dollars to avoid getting cheated. People prefer to change money in the afternoon when the exchange will be higher than in the morning; on the other hand, prices will also have gone up by the afternoon.

Inflation doubled in one week while we were there. The numbers are too big to have meaning (one egg cost the equivalent of three billion Zim dollars on 30 June!). In grocery stores, most of the shelves are empty. Bread, milk, eggs, and meat are not available some days, not in all the grocery stores, and the prices are inconsistent. Soap and toothpaste are luxuries. We saw many people pick up grocery items, laugh incredulously at the outrageous prices, and set them back down, unable or unwilling to pay the price.

Pharmacies have very little stock; basic headache medication is unavailable. Hospitals are without equipment and medication, and there are frequent electricity cuts. We heard stories about deaths that could have been prevented if appropriate medication and treatment had been available. And when people died, there were further prob-

lems because the refrigerators in the morgues were not working.

On a previous visit to Zimbabwe in 2007, we had met a businessman who was quite hopeful that the economy would turn around and his business would survive. This time, nine months later, the same man was much less optimistic. His business has shrunk. Raw materials are hard to acquire. Transportation is very expensive. It is impossible to price products to achieve a profit because of the rapid inflation. In 2007, he had guessed that 40% of the people were living beyond their means; now he estimated it was 70%.

Another businessman, who sells auto spares (parts), said few people are buying because they aren’t driving as much and can’t afford to keep their cars operational. He sells some products to the government, but the government takes 30 days to pay, by which time the money may be worth 10% what it was when the item was billed. We were told that businesses don’t accept cheques because they take five days to clear, and by then the cheque’s value may be less than half of what it was when written.

Equally sobering is what we observed in the schools. We met with the headmaster of a secondary school in a Bulawayo suburb. His school is two years old; it’s the only secondary school serving that suburb. There are nine classrooms. Three of them have desks and a blackboard, a smooth section of painted concrete on a brick wall. The rest of the classrooms may have one or two planks on discarded bricks; many of the students sit on the floor or on bricks.

There are some 800 students at this

Cover: As part of its meeting in the Philippines (see page 6) the MWC Executive Committee and staff visited three Mennonite churches on Sunday, August 3, 2008. Here Thijn Thijink-van der Vlugt, Executive Committee member from the Netherlands, visits with children of the Lansay Mennonite Bible Church, located an hour’s drive in the mountains outside Lumban.

Photo by J. Lorne Peachey

school, attending in two shifts. One set of teachers attends to classes in the morning, another in the afternoon—18 teachers in all. Fewer than half are qualified teachers. The rest are “temporary teachers” who have not completed high school. Because inflation eats away virtually all of the contract salary, these temporary teachers never sign on for a second term, so they are constantly being replaced.

At least three of the nine classes we visited did not have a teacher. The headmaster asked, “Do you have a teacher today?” and the students answered “no.” All the unsupervised classes were quiet and mannerly. In two of them the students were quietly reading their text books. In the other the students had no books, no desks or chairs. They were just waiting.

Why are the teachers absent? Some of them have to accept opportunities to supplement their income, so they don’t always show up for work. The day after payday teachers take the bus or train into the city to wait in queues for several hours to withdraw cash. Because of limits on withdrawals they may have to repeat this four days in a row. On those days the teachers are simply not at school.

According to the headmaster, the shortage of teachers has come about because so many have fled to other countries. Those who are left are so valued that no discipline is taken against absenteeism. One day they too may simply not show up because they have crossed the border to Botswana, South Africa, or Namibia. Most of the qualified teachers remaining are devout Christians whose motive in staying is their passion for the students’ well-being and education.

Students often feel that staying in school is a waste of time. The drop-out rate is high; the failure rate is also high.

The headmaster’s wife teaches at the only primary school in the suburb. This facility was built to accommodate 600 students but serves 2,200 in morning and afternoon shifts. Classes have 45 to 50 learners—with no teaching assistants. There are no desks and chairs for most students. There is a shortage of writing materials and of text books. Here, too, many of the teachers are temporary staff.

Why are resources so limited? We were told that it is a political decision in response to the fact that Bulawayo in general and this suburb specifically did not vote for the ruling party in previous elections. Control of services, including education, was transferred from the municipality to the national government in order to facilitate the control of resources for political ends.

But perhaps the most difficult things we heard and learned were in our meetings with church leaders, pastors, and their spouses. We met with them for hours, and the conversations always ended in prayer.

From the pastors we heard great concern about the number of their members choosing to leave the country. This includes many lay leaders. At the same time, the number of widows and orphans who need the care of the church is increasing. Families in the church are being separated because of these moves and because individual members need to travel in order to find jobs.

“I struggle with the dilemma of knowing that God is rich but we are hungry,” one pastor said. This need to survive is affecting faith, because members are turning to clandestine activities to support themselves. This includes prostitution—and the resulting problem of an increase in HIV/AIDS—stealing, and other activities not a part of the Christian life.

“It’s a struggle for me to preach under these circumstances,” one pastor said. “The gospel is about bread, transportation, education, but if we mention these things, we are at risk politically. So we compromise.”

And then there is the pastor’s own economic situation. “My total salary for April [2008] will pay for only one bus ride now [in July],” a pastor told us.

Pastors’ spouses were also feeling the pressure. Said one: “Church members come to the door. We have no food; there’s a baby on her back, but we have nothing to give. I can say, ‘Go and read your Bible and pray,’ but that is hardly enough.”

Said another: “When there is a person dying, the church members call our husbands out of their beds to go and minister to them. But when our husband has a person in his own family

dying, who comes to us in the middle of the night? Nobody!”

Another spouse said: “What do we do when there are two weddings or funerals on the same day—one in our family, one in the church? Generally, if it’s a wedding, we go to the family wedding. If it’s a funeral, the pastor goes to the church funeral and the wife goes to the family funeral.”

Children in the pastor’s family are also feeling the pressures. They know there are more expectations for them to be good, even under these circumstances. “And yet, because of all the work, they don’t get to spend much time with us, their parents,” said one mother. So they are under extra burden. “We worry about them leaving the church.”

Another admitted that the parental absence is also affecting her family. “We are always gone,” she said. “Their daddy has so many funerals. ‘When do we get to have you?’ they ask us.”

“But we get through, not by sight, but by faith,” one pastor said.

Our two weeks in Zimbabwe in the days surrounding the election were a sobering experience for us. But we come away from the experience convinced that MWC’s decision to send us to be with the Zimbabwe church during those days was a good one. Many people expressed, first of all, surprise that we were there, then gratitude to MWC for sending us to be with them during this experience.

We believe that MWC should continue to keep the concerns of the BICC in Zimbabwe before member churches around the world. No one at this point knows what the future of this country will be. No one can predict what the church will be called to face as it seeks to be faithful as disciples of Jesus Christ during a difficult time. The situation has not improved since the election; in many ways, it continues to worsen. More than ever, the Zimbabwe church needs our prayers and our support.

We are also convinced that MWC’s ministry of sending deacons to churches around the world in times and places of struggle is an important one. This impacts not only those who receive, not only those who go, but also the rest of the church around the world.

Global church communion focus of 2008 Executive Committee meeting

Manila, Philippines—Building global communion, the 2009 assembly in Paraguay, strengthening relations with Asian and African continental church bodies, and hearing reports from the worldwide church were key themes at the MWC Executive Committee meetings held here July 31-August 5, 2008.

“As we moved deliberately but gently forward this year, we did see signs of growth in communion within the MWC community of churches, between member churches, and with other Christian world communions.”

These words from Larry Miller, general secretary, set the tone for much of the annual meeting of the committee, held in the Philippines for the first time. The committee had met in Indonesia in 1999, the most



recent gathering in Asia. The Integrated Mennonite Church of the Philippines hosted the 2008 meeting.

The gathering itself builds global communion, since the committee is made up of two members from each of five continental regions plus its officers. Committee, commission, Global Youth Summit (AMIGOS), and staff members came from Canada, Colombia, Congo, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Kenya, the Netherlands, Paraguay, Singapore, Switzerland, Tanzania and the USA.

Asia Mennonite Conference Executive Committee members from Japan and India participated in some sessions, as did leaders of the Philippine Integrated Mennonite Church.

This year’s meeting immediately followed a two-day

Mennonite Central Committee international summit, deliberately set in Manila to have MWC Executive Committee members as major participants. The summit was the first of a series of consultations MCC will conduct around the world in coming months to discern its future vision, priorities, and structure.

Discussions between MWC and Arli Klassen, MCC’s new executive director, continued throughout the week to strengthen the existing links between MWC and MCC.

New commissions. A significant action at this Executive Committee meeting was to move ahead on forming commissions to advise and serve the General Council and MWC member churches. Recently appointed commission chairs—

MWC’s executive officers during deliberations (from left): Nancy Heisey, USA, president; Danisa Ndlovu, Zimbabwe, vice-president and president-elect; Larry Miller, France, general secretary

Alfred Neufeld, Paraguay, for Faith and Life; and Cynthia Peacock, India, for the Deacon Commission—were at the Philippine meetings. Mulugeta Zewdie, Ethiopia, Peace Commission chair, was unable to attend.

Conversations over several years between the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) and MWC aim to culminate in Paraguay in 2009 with GMF and the General Council Mission Commission joining to form one body. The Executive Committee expressed its support for a proposal through which the GMF chair would serve also as mission commission chair. Janet Plenert, Canada, currently serves as GMF chair.

The commissions, each with specific tasks, will work closely with each other and with the General Council to



During the Executive gathering, Filipino pastors attended a two-day Bible study and workshop led by Robert J. Suderman, Canada. They joined the MWC group for a festive meal and to get acquainted on the last night. One of the participants, Rudy Rabe (left) and his wife Annie Fe, are scheduled to go to Cambodia as missionaries in the near future. Behind Rudy is Naomi Unger, Executive Committee member from Canada.



Annual tree planting. For the past 11 years, MWC has planted a tree in the community in which its Executive Committee holds its annual meeting. In the 2008 meeting in the Philippines, president-elect Danisa Ndluvo (above, right) and president Nancy Heisey plant a kalamias tree at the

Lumban Mennonite Bible Church, the mother church for several other congregations in the area, according to Bishop Ambrocio Porcincula. To make this tree-planting possible, Lumban members needed to dig a hole in the concrete patio surrounding the entrance to their structure.

promote unity and the concept of a holistic gospel rather than compartmentalization. The image of a heart as one unit with four chambers was used to illustrate how the commissions will function.

The new commissions will replace the former Faith and Life and Peace Councils. The

Deacon Commission is new, and the Missions Commission will be a new role for the GMF.

Paraguay 2009. Ray Brubacher, international coordinator for Assembly 15, Paraguay in July 2009, reported a great deal of

enthusiasm for the coming global assembly.

One year before the event more than 130 people have already registered, and nearly 700 have signed for tours. Ray reported he receives inquiries daily regarding the assembly and already has more than 30 unsolicited workshop proposals.

Program plans around the theme, “Come together in the way of Jesus Christ,” are well underway. Speakers and Bible study leaders from Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Europe, and North America are being contacted. Names will be announced as soon as confirmations have been received and plans are complete.

In addition to the Assembly Gathered, group meetings being planned at Paraguay 2009 include the second Global Youth Summit (GYS), Latin American Women Theologians gathering, a business and faith consultation convened jointly by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and MWC, and a gathering of representatives from Anabaptist-related theological schools around the world. Indigenous people from the Americas plan to gather in the Chaco after Assembly Gathered. Other special interest groups are exploring possible meetings.

Global church support.

Reports of other successful efforts at building global communion came from Zimbabwe, Congo, Colombia and Asia.

Danisa Ndluvo, MWC president-elect and Brethren in Christ bishop of Zimbabwe, expressed the profound appreciation of the BIC Church in Zimbabwe for the 2007 koinonia delegation, the deacon visits during stressful elections this year [see page 2], and the financial support from the MWC community of churches. He noted that Christians in Zimbabwe cling to hope and their faith to survive in their daily struggle in the on-going economic and political chaos.

Tim C. Lind, Church-to-Church Relations coordinator, who works from Kinshasa, Congo, reported that churches in all parts of the world see great possibilities in direct, collaborative relationships. Tim urged MWC to give strong leadership to new and redefined roles so that member churches “do not waste energy and resources on separately inventing the ‘church-to-church wheel.’”

In response to a plea from the Colombia Mennonite Church, the Executive Committee affirmed its support for the various peace initiatives of MWC member churches in Colombia. Among the plans are efforts to foster conversation between the military and several guerrilla groups.

Stronger connections.

Many of MWC’s member churches are widely separated both geographically and historically. MWC is working toward building stronger relationships and facilitating better cooperation among churches within the same continental region, first in Asia and Africa.

Several Asia Mennonite



For the first two days in the Philippines, MWC’s Executive Committee met in Manila. Then the group moved to Lumban, center of the Integrated Mennonite Churches, three of

which the group visited on Sunday morning. The photo above is a view of Lumban taken from a nearby mountain, location of the Lansay Mennonite Bible Church.

Conference (AMC) leaders came to the meetings in the Philippines, bringing with them a proposal drafted by the leaders and MWC to have the AMC and MWC’s Asia Caucus integrate. The MWC committee approved the draft proposal. A final document will go to AMC and then to the MWC General Council for action in Paraguay in 2009.

Representatives from Africa also brought a proposal concerning future relationships among Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in

Africa and with MWC. No new structure is envisioned, but the proposal defines roles, organization, and activity. The Africa Caucus will work with MWC to determine the shape of MWC’s presence in and for Africa.

Global gifts sharing.

MWC’s global gift sharing emphasis includes giving and receiving teaching. At the 2006 General Council meetings in Pasadena, California, USA, MWC facilitated contact between many leaders, including those of Mennonite Church Canada and the Integrated Mennonite Church in the Philippines. As a result, Robert J. Suderman, Mennonite Church Canada general secretary, conducted a two-day workshop at the Lumban Mennonite Bible Church during the Executive Committee gathering. Some 40 Filipino pastors and other

Integrated Mennonite Church workers participated. Many of these joined the MWC group for a concluding communion service and community-building festive event.

In other business, the Executive Committee reviewed the draft of a new constitution and approved 2009 budgets.

Paul Quiring, MWC treasurer, reported that on June 30, 2008, unrestricted funds were ahead of the budget and that both net assets and member church contributions had increased. Fund-raising efforts in Paraguay for Assembly 15 are on target, and good registration numbers, still unknown, will help balance the assembly budget, Paul said.

However, he predicts financial challenges ahead. “In the short term, we are O.K.,” he noted, “but MWC needs to do some aggressive [financial] planning.”

The Executive Committee, along with the General Council, will meet next before Assembly 15 in Asunción, Paraguay, in July 2009.

—Ferne Burkhardt



Following a visit to the Lumban Grace Christian Church on Sunday morning, Markus Rediger (right), Executive Committee member from Switzerland, gets to sample the local transportation.

Come together in the way of

1. Gathering

Leader: We come together as the church to worship our God of grace and glory.

People: **We rejoice in your presence and delight in your love, O God.**

Leader: We come together to learn the humble, obedient way of Jesus Christ.

People: **Teach us how to be your loving disciples, O Lord.**

Leader: We come together in the abiding fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

People: **We need your guidance and unity, Spirit of God.**

All: Praise the name of Jesus. Amen.

2. Praise and prayers

a. Read Psalm 67

b. Singing:

Song suggestions—Select songs and hymns originally written in Spanish or from languages and cultures other than your own. Choose those with the themes of Christian discipleship, the way of Jesus, unity, and service. Some time during the service you also may want to sing “In Christ There Is No East or West” if it is familiar to you in your context.

c. Prayers

- thanksgiving and confession out of your context;
- prayer requests from various continents (see page 15);
- Mennonite World Conference and the global church.

3. Children's time

Theme: *Braided together*

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:12

Object: Three pieces of ribbon to braid

How many of you know what braiding is? Braiding is weaving three pieces together. Some people wear their hair in braids. (Look for children in your groups who may have their hair in braids. Mention their names.) Have any of you braided friendship bracelets? Some people have belts that are braided.

As I'm talking to you, I'm braiding three pieces of ribbon together. When the ribbons are by themselves, they are just single strands. When they're together, they're stronger because they are all woven into a strong braid.

I like to think we're woven together with God. Imagine that the pieces of ribbon are you, other people in our church family, and God. God is woven closely with each of us. We're woven together as a church family.

We love one another. We care and support one another. We help one another. God is woven in with us, too, because

God is always present in each person's life. Our prayers to God and listening to God help that weaving together to stay strong.

These were three separate pieces of ribbon. Braided together, they have become one piece. Remember that we are also braided together. Each of us, our church family, and God are braided together as we pray, love, and care for each other.

Prayer: Dear God, it's so good to have many people in our church family. Thank you for your presence with us. Thank you that we're strong together. Amen.

From *More Little Stories for Little Children* by Donna McKee Rhodes (copyright 1996 by Herald Press, Scottsdale Pennsylvania, USA). Used by permission.

4. Hearing the Word

a. Read today's text: Philippians 2:1-11

b. Sermon: Use the reflections written by Mosés

Mayordomo as prompts for your sermon (see page 10).

c. Stories: Select people in advance to read or tell the true accounts that illustrate how the text can be applied in the life of the church today (one story at right; additional stories in WFS materials).

5. Responding to the Word

a. Take time for more songs, prayers or reflections from the congregation on the theme.

b. Celebrate the Lord's Supper as a visible reminder of Christian fellowship, reconciliation, and unity. Include footwashing as a symbol of humble service.

c. Use chipá as the bread for communion or serve it as the congregation departs (see box at right).

Each year, MWC encourages members of our global family of faith to celebrate our worldwide communion on the fourth Sunday in January.

This year's materials—centered around the theme of MWC's Assembly 15, scheduled for July 14-19, 2009, in Asunción, Paraguay—were prepared by two members of our Executive Committee: Naomi Unger, Canada; and Markus Rediger, Switzerland. Both also serve on the Assembly 15 Gathered program committee.

What appears on these pages is an adaptation of WFS materials MWC is sending to each national conference. You are encouraged to make copies and use these ideas for worship on Sunday, January 25, 2009, in ways that will help you enter more fully into fellowship, intercession, and thanksgiving with your global faith family.—Larry Miller, MWC general secretary

of Jesus Christ

6. Sending

Unison: We came together as God's people
to confess the crucified Jesus
as the exalted Lord of all,
to grow in unity and in dependence on God
and on each other, and
to increase our zeal to imitate Christ.
We go now as the church into our communities,
to live in the way of Jesus, and
to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Leader: May God strengthen you day by day with his
eternal presence, encourage you with Christ's love and
guide and protect you with his Spirit. Amen.

Chipá

Chipá is a type of starchy, cheesy bread eaten everywhere in Paraguay. It is sold in small stores, by vendors on street corners, and at soccer games. Many Paraguayans enjoy it as a snack with *tereré* (tea). Traditionally, a great deal of *chipá* is eaten during Holy Week and also shared with others. While there are many variations in *chipá* recipes, each contains starch, Paraguayan cheese, eggs, and milk.

1 kgm	(8-10 cups)	tapioca or manioc starch / cassava flour (from Asian shops)
250 g	(approx. 5)	eggs
10 g	(2 tsp)	aniseed (optional)
200 cc	(3/4-1 cup)	milk
250 g	(1 cup)	butter or fat
500 g	(2 cups)	fresh cheese, grated, e.g., feta, mozzarella, mixed
20 g	(1 tbs)	salt (less if cheese is salty)

In a large bowl, stir the tapioca starch to remove lumps. Make a hollow in the center and add the softened butter, eggs, aniseed, and salt. Knead mixture with hands, then gradually add the grated cheese and as much milk as needed to make a soft bread dough. Knead until smooth and dough holds together. Shape as desired into rings or small round rolls. Place on ungreased baking sheet and bake at 220°C (425°F) for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown.

Additional resources for celebrating World Fellowship Sunday—including the full text of Mosés Mayordomo's sermon, more stories from Paraguay, and MWC and Assembly 15 videos—are available at www.mwc-cmm.org.



Sigamos juntos
el camino de
Jesucristo

Nicaragua celebrates mothers during the entire month of May. The celebration is full of joy for those who have living mothers but brings pain to those who do not.

That's true for the girls age five to seventeen in the Getsemani Orphanage. During May they are very homesick, sad, and cry because they did not have mothers at their side.

Verónica, a young Mexican volunteer, had a wonderful idea! She got the girls excited about preparing a special recognition for 35 mothers from the neighboring settlement who live in extreme poverty or are single or sick. These were mothers who had no hope of receiving even one small gift during this month.

For a week the girls from the orphanage practised eagerly for this celebration: songs, plays, dances, and poems. They also helped prepare a delicious, typical Mexican supper with many desserts and sweets.

At 6:00 p.m. on the day of the celebration, the mothers from the settlement started to arrive. The girls brightened and began to receive them with care and elegance. There were decorated tables, candles, low lights, delicious snacks, and music.

As the program began, I sat at the back to observe every detail, every expression, every look—all the feelings from the girls as well as from the mothers. I could feel God's vast love in every detail, in the unity that was noticeable between two longsuffering and marginalized sectors of our society. The girls forgot their sadness, the mothers smiled timidly with happiness.

Through this experience, the girls at the orphanage received the healing love of Jesus, the restoring grace of the Holy Spirit, and the friendship that characterizes the children of God's kingdom in our Christian orphanage. We cannot replace the love of a mother, but we try to show them the love of heaven in this place, their new home.—Elizabeth Vado

Elizabeth Vado is director of the Getsemani Orphanage in Managua, Nicaragua, and a member of the MWC Executive Committee.

God is one of us too

by Mosés Mayordomo

God's path is abasement. Using poetic words, this path is painted in the greatest imaginable contrasts (2:6-8). From a god-like existence, Jesus goes into slavery. He "empties" himself, makes himself nothing. He gives up all divine prerogatives and privileges.

Jesus' purpose is identification. But he does not just act human, he becomes human. He walks this path voluntarily, without pressure or orders.

Of course, human comparisons are halting. But I try to imagine what it would be like if the head physician of a big hospital would voluntarily ask to be treated like a penniless, sick patient in his hospital.

Jesus does not give a short guest performance. He does not slip into a role for a little while. He does not bend down patronizingly to us "poor humans." No, the end of his path is death on the cross.

However, this "song of Christ" does not end with death. The second part (2:9-11) begins with the little word "therefore" and then sings about how God appoints his son as ruler over everything. Jesus, the crucified man, gains universal recognition as "Lord" over all "principalities and powers" at the end.

No world order can really comprehend this association! In our world, you come into power through assertiveness, ambition, and even through the use of force. Where has the opposite ever happened—that somebody reaches the top through voluntary humility and suffering?

Nor are these "principalities and powers" the rule of foreign powers, a view prevalent today. Rather, they are the power structures, vicious circles of violence and counter-violence, social interests, alienation through inherent economic necessities—in short, everything that causes us to lose our freedom. Often these "prin-

icipalities and powers" are invisible, i.e., hard to see and to name. That makes their effect on the individual and on society so much more threatening!

But Jesus has authority over these, not through assertion but through self-abandonment. The universal ruler did not fight his way to the top, he did not make all his opponents bow under his feet by force. Rather, he "served" to get this position—he went through death to realize it.

As a result, in this passage, Paul encourages Christians to express the same attitude: freedom of possessions, renunciation of privileges, service, voluntary humility and obedience to suffering.

This call is unsettling and liberating at the same time. It is not so much the fact that God became human but the consistently radical way in doing it that is unsettling. From that arise values that should be part of being Christian.

In this text, the unity of the church is based on a common attitude that allows itself to be shaped by the life and death of Jesus. Paul paraphrases it very well: "To consider others better than yourselves." That does not mean that we consider ourselves worthless but that we allow our fellow human beings the privilege of being valuable.

It feels liberating to me that God does not rule on a throne with a scepter in his hand. Rather, God is one of us too—no, God has actually placed himself way beneath us. This God does not demand anything that he himself has not done much more radically. I bend my knees before such a Lord. I am happy to call him "Lord."

Mosés Mayordomo is professor of New Testament at the University of Berne, Switzerland, and on the preaching team of the Mennonite Church in Berne.



Paraguay
2009

Frequently asked

Now that registration packets for Paraguay 2009 have been received in conferences and congregations, MWC staff have been fielding a host of questions related to the next world assembly. Here international coordinator Ray Brubacher answers some of the more frequent questions being asked.

What is Assembly Scattered? What is its purpose?

Assembly Scattered is a way for Assembly Gathered participants to experience the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. It is also a way for hosts to experience the global church via their guests who are traveling to or returning from Assembly Gathered. Assembly Scattered includes churches in Paraguay as well.

How does Assembly Scattered differ from the tours being offered?

A tour group is organized by a "tour operator" who does all the planning for travel, lodging, touring, and eating. All tours featured in the registration packet include Assembly Gathered as well as at least some additional travel.

Assembly Scattered is not an organized group. The Paraguay 2009 registration form includes a list of options as well as arrival and departure dates and a brief summary of activities as described by the Assembly Scattered hosts.

All Assembly Scattered visits take place either before or after Assembly Gathered. Persons can participate in one or two Assembly Scattered visits if they wish.

Venue nears completion. *The 10,000-seat Centro Familiar de Adoración (CFA), site of MWC's Assembly 15, is well on the way to completion. Shown at right are the stage and main floor of the complex as they appeared this past July. The structure also has two balconies and large meeting rooms.*

questions about Assembly 15

If you go on a tour, can you also participate in Assembly Scattered?

Technically, no, since tours have a set itinerary. But some tours may include a visit to churches; so, to the extent that the group is hosted by a local church, that is an Assembly Scattered-like visit.

Can I go to the Chaco on my own by using public transportation?

You can but it's not advisable. Assembly Scattered and tour groups are going to fill up all available hotels and private homes. In general, tour groups will use the hotels, and Assembly Scattered participants will be hosted in private homes. You need to be aware of possible congestion if you decide to go on your own.

Is the registration fee and lodging in Asunción included in the tour cost?

That depends on the tour operator. The registration fee is usually not included but lodging is. When checking out tours, ask.

Does registration include meals?

The registration fee includes the noon and evening meals during Assembly Gathered. Most places of lodging include a breakfast.

How are the registrations coming?

Because of the high number of tours, registrations are off to a roaring start. The majority so far are from North America and Europe. The first registrations received in the MWC Strasbourg office, however, were from Ghana!

Is there still room?

Apparently rumors have been circulating in some communities that airline and lodging options for Paraguay 2009 are already full. It is true that some tour groups are already full. But the gate for individual, family, or small independent groups is still wide open.

However, now is the time to register and begin travel plans. Late planners may well get second or third choices. The options for air travel from the main feeder cities like Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo into Asunción is rather limited, so the sooner one reserves, the better. Our backup plan is express bus service, which will be generally cheaper than flying. This is also an option for persons on a limited budget—if one doesn't mind a 19- to 22-hour bus ride!





Paraguay 2009

The Mennonite churches of Bolivia

Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ

In preparation for Paraguay 2009, C-C-C is publishing a series on the Mennonite churches of the Southern Cone. In this issue we feature two MWC-member groups in Bolivia.

Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Boliviana. The Evangelical Mennonite Churches in Bolivia emerged through the work of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) from North America.

In 1968, MCC volunteers came to Santa Cruz to serve in agriculture, health, and education. At the beginning MCC focused on helping “conservative” Mennonites who had emigrated to Bolivia from different countries. As they lived and worked, volunteers realized that the Bolivian population also had needs not being met. Soon they extended work to these communities.

The first volunteers held Sunday school for children and organized vacation Bible schools. Out of these contacts the first Mennonite

churches were formed. The first baptisms were performed in 1975.

Eventually the work came to be supported jointly by the Argentine Mennonite Conference and by Mennonite Board of Missions (now Mennonite Mission Network) of North America.

One of the early missionaries, José Godoy, recalls: “Church work at that time was not easy in a traditionally Catholic culture. Not many were friendly toward us. They even hated us. But the Lord gave us wisdom to know how to respond to each situation.”

Today the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Boliviana has eight churches, five in rural areas and three in the city. Membership is approximately 400.

Churches in rural areas are going through many changes: migration of young people to the city, trained church leaders who leave the country, economic hardships.

Since 1990, the

Evangelical Mennonite Church and MCC Bolivia have cooperated in PRO-JUSE (Promotion Service to Youth), giving young people an opportunity to serve with churches and social service institutions. The church also operates a day care center with a capacity to serve 150 children.

Bolivian churches continue to be faithful to their call: to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to be active workers for peace and service.—*Leonidas Saucedo, president, Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Boliviana*

Iglesia Evangélica Anabautista. The Anabaptist Evangelical Church in Bolivia started in 1973 through the work of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference from Canada (EMMC).

Prior to 1973, there was significant contact between Mennonite individuals and groups in Bolivia and Canada. In 1969, EMMC leaders travelled to Chorovi, 37 kilometres from the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia, and eventually established a clinic to serve a Mennonite colony of Canadian origin in this region.

Soon, Bolivians began to come to the clinic, and EMMC started evangelistic services with these settlers. They noted that these nationals accepted the gospel more readily than had the original Mennonite settlers.

The first church among the Bolivians was started in 1974 in the area of Zafranilla with worship services for families and Bible studies for children.

This church grew in numbers and in strength. Prompted by the Great Commission, the church began to preach the gospel to their neighbors. In 1984, as a result of flooding of the Pirai River, a new neighborhood, Fortaleza, was formed near Oratorio del Palmar, south of Santa Cruz. Here a new congregation developed as neighbors came to worship services and also to fetch water—the mission, with the help of the church, had installed the only water pump in the area. From this work the gospel spread to various locations in Santa Cruz.

Currently there are 11 congregations in the Bolivian Anabaptist Evangelical Church, plus a school and a seminary, Seminario Teológico por Extensión a las Américas (SETA). This extension seminary, started in 1992, serves many leaders for whom attending other schools would be impossible for financial and work reasons. Today 95% of pastors of the Anabaptist church have studied at SETA.

Plans for Iglesia Evangélica Anabautista for the future are to continue planting churches and creating institutions that help in the task of sharing the gospel with all people.—*Estevan Gonzales, facilitator, GDT Alliance*



Violence against Christians in India includes BIC church in Orissa

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
—Christians have fled to the jungle with nothing but the clothes on their backs, fearing for their lives. They cannot go home. While the threats are still there, their homes are not; they have been burned to the ground. So have their churches, schools, orphanages, hostels, vehicles, and entire villages.

Violence against Christians in Orissa, India, erupted on August 24, 2008, in the Kandhamal district. It lasted for 12 days. The fury was set off by the fatal shooting of Laxmananda Saraswati, a leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a militant

group, and four of his followers. Saraswati had been accused of persecuting Christians for a long time.

Although the Indian government has said that Maoists (Anti-Communal Forces) are suspected of his killing, Christians are being blamed by the VHP, and all Christians and some NGOs (non-government organizations) have become targets.

Information on the violence in India came from the regional administrator for South Asia* of the executive committee of the International Brethren in Christ

**Name withheld for security reasons*



Late-August attacks by militants in India (left) leave homes of Christians in Orissa (right), including those of BICs, in ruins.

Association (IBICA) at a meeting in Toronto in early September.

The Brethren in Christ Church in Orissa is an MWC-member church. Thirty congregations are in the hard-hit Kandhamal district.

“People have been brutally murdered, hacked to death, women have been gang raped, and more than 100 churches in all six districts have been burned,” the administrator reports. BIC members have been attacked but not killed,” he reports.

While there have been incidents of violence against Christians in India for the past 20 years, none has been as widespread as this summer’s outbreak, the worst that Christians of all denominations in Orissa have ever experienced. Estimates put the current death toll at more than 60 people.

In August, a crowd of up to 4,000 Hindu militants attacked the BIC Girls Hostel at Nuagoan. The mob set the hostel and church ablaze, destroyed its water tank, and demolished the campus. Staff, girls, and local believers—some of whom were beaten—managed to flee.

According to the administrator, the Cuttack-based offices of the BIC Church in India were also a target. Several pastors and church planters also lost all their belongings when their homes

were looted and burned.

“People, including pastors, who are still hiding in the forest have lost everything. They have no clothes, no food and are at risk of snake bites and malaria. They have no medication. It is not yet safe to help them,” says the church leader. Anyone offering assistance would be at risk, he notes.

And is the leader himself at risk? “Of course,” he answers. “All church leaders are targets.” But he will return to Cuttack, where his office is still closed. He cannot run away; he must serve, he declares. Several times over the past 25 years this leader has been threatened, sometimes by a mob of hundreds of people. But always, he claims, “the Lord protected me.”

MWC and IBICA plan to send a letter to government officials concerning the persecution, and the BIC Church leaders in India plan to send a delegation to the state government asking it to put pressure on the local government to protect its citizens and to restore peace and harmony.

Update: MWC has received word that the BIC churches in Orissa where among those experiencing flooding in September. Worldwide prayer for these churches in relation to the violence and flooding is being requested.

Peaceful pastor beats air force

Can one person stop noise pollution by the national air force? Liesa Unger, who with her husband Wilhelm, is pastor of a Mennonite church in Regensburg, Germany, did just that.

For years citizens in the Burgweinting district of Regensburg had tried unsuccessfully to stop low-level flights over their district. When Liesa—who had earlier directed YAMEN! for MWC—moved here, she decided to try to do something about the flights. She first of all wrote to the air force, asking for an explanation. The air force said these flights are legal anywhere except over cities with a population of more than 100,000.

Liesa wrote a second letter, pointing out that while Burgweinting has a population of only 9,000, for more than 30 years it has been a district of Regensburg, a city of more than 100,000. A response from the Department of Defence thanked Liesa for exposing a mistake in air force maps, and the low-level flights stopped.

Neighbours were profuse with their thanks. One man, who had lived in the community all his life, came to the Unger’s church on a Sunday morning looking for “the pastor who had stopped the low-level flights.” He said the flights had annoyed him for years but he had no idea where to start to do something to stop them. “This is not the last time you will see me in your church,” he said.

Liesa’s actions were covered in the *Regensburger Rundschau* with a feature story headlined, “Pastor defeats air force.” The story concluded by noting that it was the pastor of a historic peace church who beat the air force in a peaceful way.

Contributions strong to MWC budget

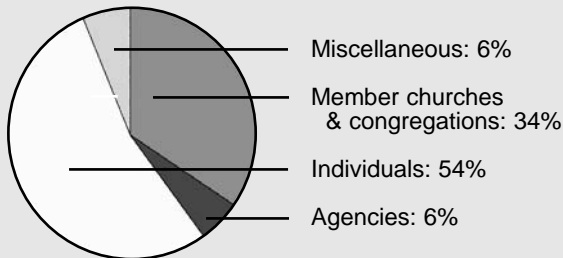
MWC is currently in a good financial position, according to treasurer Paul Quiring. "Overall our financial picture is strong because of many individuals who have come to support the unique work MWC is doing in the global church," he says.

The charts below illustrate the sources of income for MWC in 2007 for the operations budget (unrestricted contributions) as well as how those contributions were spent (unrestricted expenses). The third graph shows the expenses for designated (restricted) funds in 2007.

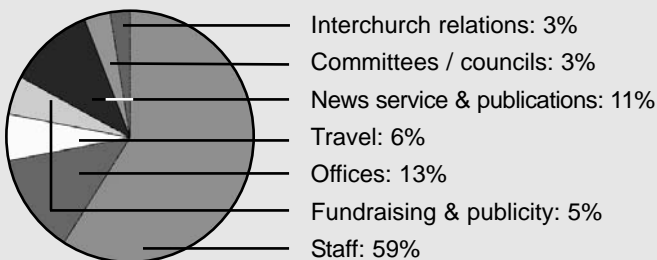
MWC's annual operations are funded primarily through "fair share" payments made by its member conferences and by contributions from individuals. MWC projects such as the global assembly and other programs are funded by participant fees and designated contributions from individuals and agencies.

"Projects like the Assembly pose a special challenge for MWC because we incur significant costs in preparation and planning for the event long before we begin to realize income," says Paul. "Strong participation by all church members will be important to financing next year's Assembly," he says.

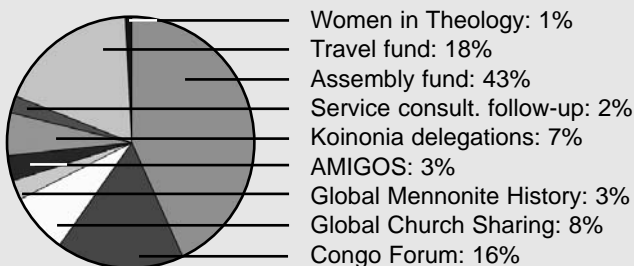
Unrestricted contributions: \$721,000^{USD}



Unrestricted expenses: \$684,000^{USD}



Restricted expenses for projects: \$435,000^{USD}



Andrea Geiser named to head YAMEN! a joint MWC-MCC young adult venture

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada
—Andrea Geiser is excited about her new job as coordinator of YAMEN! She expects participants in the program to grow spiritually and emotionally. She hopes they will help build bridges and break down misconceptions held by people in the countries where they work and in their own churches.

YAMEN! (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network) is a joint MWC and Mennonite Central Committee program. YAMEN! is committed to building church-to-church relationships and strengthening the global Anabaptist church.

In the program, single young adults aged 18 to 30, primarily from MWC-related churches, serve in countries where MCC works.

YAMEN! is different from MCC's IVEP (International Volunteer Exchange Program), which Geiser also coordinates. IVEP brings internationals to North America for a year of service while YAMEN! provides opportunities for young adults from outside North America to serve outside of North America.

This year YAMEN! has nine volunteers, the largest group since the program began in 2001. The nine will serve in Tanzania, Indonesia, Bolivia, Egypt, Brazil, Nicaragua, Mexico and Korea.

YAMEN! participants are expected to share their experiences and learnings with their home congregation and area churches upon their return from their assignment.

Andrea says she also hopes the year of service will give participants a taste for

longer-term international service. That's been her experience.

After her graduation from Houghton College in western New York, Andrea signed up as an MCC SALTER (Serving and Learning Together) and went to Cambodia to teach English at Royal University of Phnom Penh. That one year of service led to three more years in Cambodia, helping



Andrea Geiser

to develop a music program at a Bible school, teaching music in various settings, working with IVEP, and helping to organize reunions of IVEP alumni in Cambodia.

The global church is in Andrea's blood. As young adults, her parents served in Korea, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Labrador. In 1997, they took the entire family to the MWC global assembly in Calcutta, India.

Geiser is a member of the Kidron, Ohio, USA, Mennonite Church, where she has served on the youth leadership team, participated in the church choir, a bell choir and led congregational singing.

Andrea began working from Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, in mid-July.



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Prayer requests from around the world

for World Fellowship Sunday: January 25, 2009

From Africa

1. Pray for the many displaced persons in Kenya, Somalia, the Darfur region of Sudan, and southern Africa as a result of political turmoil in their countries.
2. Pray for our brothers and sisters in the Brethren in Christ church in Zimbabwe, the Mennonite Church of Tanzania (KMT), and in the Mennonite groups within the Democratic Republic of Congo, that they will remain faithful to Christ, that growth will happen, and that reconciliation will continue.

From Latin America

1. Pray for the Paraguayan Anabaptist churches as they prepare for Assembly 15 in Asunción in 2009.
2. Pray for unity among the Anabaptist churches and clarity in maintaining a faithful witness to Christ in this culture.
3. Pray for wisdom and commitment to resolve conflicts in different countries as well as to respond to food shortages and the increasingly difficult economic situation of many people.

From Europe

1. Pray that Mennonite churches, conferences, and congregations will get to know each other better and learn to appreciate each other despite differences in ways of expressing their faith in their daily living.

2. Pray that the church will be able to discern an Anabaptist approach to political and legal issues in a growing Europe, responding to the needs of refugees, acting responsibly towards God's creation, and working to find solutions to the worldwide food crisis.

From Asia and the Pacific

1. Pray for the spread of the Good News of Jesus, especially in Central Asia.
2. Pray for the church whose work and ministries are affected by political disturbances, civil unrest surrounding elections, religious and ethnic conflicts, and economic injustices.

From North America

1. Pray that the church will discern:
 - a faithful response to the marginalized urban poor and aboriginal people;
 - a prophetic response to the increasing power of corporations;
 - a missional response to living in a society that has a growing disinterest in the church at the same time that the population is becoming more multi-cultural and multi-religious.
2. Give thanks for the energy that many young adults put into living faithfully for Christ; pray they may find a church where they feel they belong and can participate in God's reign.

Help with the costs of C/C/C

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US funds: 2529 Willow Avenue
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Euros: 8 rue du Fossé des Treize
6700 Strasbourg, France



Day's end. With myriad duties when the MWC Executive meets, you don't often find general secretary Larry Miller and his wife Eleanor Miller, communications assistant, side by side. But it happened after a long day in the Philippines when both checked their emails.

Perspective:

The other cheek, the second mile

by Danisa Ndlovu

You have heard that it is said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. . . . If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.—Matthew 5:38-41

When I read these words from the Sermon on the Mount, I wonder if what Christ says makes sense for today. Take our current situation in Zimbabwe, for example.

Our people exercised their constitutional right to vote for new leadership. They did so peacefully. But the powers that be were not happy with the outcome, and they have pursued violence against their own people. Some have been brutally assaulted, left with broken bones, scarred for life, and denied access to medical care. A few have lost their lives.

How do we as a people, as Christians, respond? Some have fled, crossing the borders to neighboring countries. Others of us have stayed. We are humiliated and our dignity has been stolen from us. Many outside our country view us as wimps. If Zimbabweans were really suffering as they would want the world to believe, they say, the people should be out in the streets violently demonstrating.

How then do these words of Christ speak to us in our situation? Do they have any relevance at all?

I find Christ's words incredibly empowering. In these verses, Jesus suggests that no one should be given the right to be in charge of another person's destiny, no matter the circumstances. To do so is to allow another person to be God in someone's life. However, by turning the other cheek, by walking the second mile, we disempower the one who tried to assume power over us.

Perpetrators of violence tend to assume the place of God in other people's lives and judge them harshly for non-compliance. According to Christ, we should respond to such injus-



tice in nonviolent ways. Responding in nonviolent ways exposes hatred and other machinations of the evil one and his agents. Only then can nonviolence triumph over violence.

The call of Christ does not mean allowing other people to treat us as they please. Rather, we respond to injustice in nonviolent ways that will, we hope, bring about a positive outcome even on the part of the perpetrator. It is calling the perpetrator of injustice to think twice about the actions that person is taking. Through nonviolence, we offer the aggressor an opportunity for soul searching. It offers time for the perpetrator to listen to the heart as it cries for help!

For in reality, those who pursue violence are in need of help more than the victims of injustice. In that respect, nonviolence is a way of responding from a position of power on the part of the victim rather than that of weakness and fear. It is taking away the power of control from the perpetrator and owning it as a victim, regardless of what follows.

The Zimbabwean church—and the church around the world—has a responsibility in the harsh realities in which it finds itself to respond in ways that will honor God. The church must demonstrate what it means to be disciples of Christ through radical responses to unreasonable demands.

Christ himself set the pace and example. Up to his death, he responded to every form of injustice against him in powerful but nonviolent ways. The church must continue to give the other cheek and to walk the second mile. This is the way to call for better and equal treatment. It is also the way of respect and dignity of humankind.

Danisa Ndlovu, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, serves as vice-president and president-elect of MWC and as bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe. This article first appeared in Perspective, monthly publication of the Swiss Mennonite Church, from which it is adapted by permission.

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