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2 **WELCOME TO PARAGUAY!**
What host churches dream will happen at Assembly 15

What we dare to hope and

by Carmen Epp

Hosting a Mennonite World Conference assembly is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. But we must admit to mixed feelings about the privilege to do so.

On the one hand, we feel honored that the Mennonite world is coming to visit us. We are happy to welcome you to our country.

On the other, we are anxious about what it takes to host such a major event. Will we be able to fulfill all the expectations that people have for an assembly?

Then we tell ourselves that everything is possible with God's help. That's how it has been for previous assemblies in other countries.

People in Paraguay from many different occupations are already involved in preparing for Assembly 15: conference leaders, pastors, heads of Mennonite organizations and institutions, church members, students, business people, housewives—the list is endless.

As the result of all this activity, we have gone through quite a paradigm shift. So far, MWC assemblies have been for delegates we sent because travel and registration costs were too high for the rest of us. Now here is an assembly for everyone in our country—even for grandmas, even for kids.

What are the hopes and expectations of the Paraguayan Mennonite church for this assembly?

1. We hope we will get a better understanding—or even a redefinition—of what it means to be Mennonite.

In Paraguay, “Mennonite” has come to be applied to a cultural group. Sure, it is part of the official name of the various conferences, but that is not how the word is used on a daily basis, whether among Mennonites themselves

or by the general Paraguayan population.

When someone says, “I am a Mennonite,” the implication here is that the person belongs to the cultural group of German-speaking immigrants and their descendants from Canada, Russia, and Mexico. So Mennonite is used to identify a cultural group, just as Paraguayan is used for the majority Guaraní-Spanish population, Enlhet, or other Indigenous people groups.

Thus members of Spanish-speaking or Indigenous congregations more commonly identify themselves as *evangélicos* rather than *menonitas*, since the latter is so strongly linked to a specific cultural group.

We hope Assembly 15 will help us get a better grasp of the fact that Mennonites come from many different cultures and languages, that being Mennonite is a matter of faith. I don't know if we will find or coin new terminology for either “faith Mennonite” or “cultural Mennonite,” but hopefully we will come to understand that these two have very different meanings.

2. We hope the testimony and outreach of our churches will be strengthened.

It is a challenge, as well as an opportunity, for Paraguayan Mennonites to be a testimony of unity since we come from so many different cultures. Often it seems we have little in common except our faith. We are hoping to show our country the richness of this faith and the fraternal spirit that can result because of it.

Some of us hope that Assembly 15 will not only help us rediscover our Anabaptist roots but also be a spiritual revival for us. As a result, we can then reach out to different church denominations, worshipping and evangelizing together.

3. We hope Assembly 15 will help us create better networks, both within Paraguay and within the global Anabaptist family.

We have very well-organized Mennonite structures in our country, but there seems to be little connection between them. Some of us hope the assembly can be a catalyst to help groups and structures to come together in a healthy way.

We also hope Assembly 15 will help us create bonds of friendship, service, and unity with the global church community.

4. We hope to make a good impression.

As hosts, we want to provide a warm, friendly atmosphere for all who come to our country. We hope our visitors enjoy the Paraguayan culture, its charisma, food, and music.

Part of the joy of hosting is getting to know our guests. We look forward to meeting and getting to know brothers and sisters from around the globe—people who have different perspectives and who worship the same God in many different languages and styles. We look forward to connecting with the global Mennonite church on a very personal level.

5. We hope to make Paraguay and its Mennonites better known throughout the world.

We want to share our experiences and our strengths with the rest of the world. We want to show what we produce and what we have achieved in different areas.

We want to show what Paraguay has to offer. We want to share what the Mennonite church is doing in missions and social work, both within cultures and across cultures. We also

dream

hope our visitors come to learn about our history and our involvement in politics.

6. *We hope to show our gratitude for the help of the past.*

Mennonites from around the world made it possible for our people to settle in this country. Assembly 15 can be an act of gratitude and thanks for the help we received from them. As we tell of the history of the Mennonite pioneers in this country, we can say “thank you” for all the help we have been given.

7. *We hope to have fun together.*

Our youth particularly are looking forward to getting to know their peers from other cultures and other countries. All of us, as we share our experiences and challenges, can enjoy each others’ presence. We can have fun together—and in the process witness to the fact that we are a peaceful and multi-cultural people dedicated to serve each other and our world.

Carmen Epp works in the MWC Asunción, Paraguay, office with responsibility for Assembly 15 translations and Assembly Scattered logistics. This article, based on interviews with her colleagues in the office and the church, is adapted from the January-March issue of the MCC Peace Office newsletter.

Cover: Dressed in a traditional Paraguayan costume, Isaías Agüero prepares to sing in Guarani at a recent farewell for C. Paul and Hildi Amstutz, retiring pastors of Iglesia Evangélica Menonita La Roca in Asunción, Paraguay.

photo by Eleanor Miller



BEHIND THE SCENES—MWC’s Asunción office staff who are responsible for the detailed planning for Assembly 15: **Above, back row:** Carmen Epp, translations & Assembly Scattered; Renate Franz, service opportunities & youth; Friedbert Flaming, bookkeeper & registration; Ernst Weichselberger, national coordinator; Arnold Voth, GYS 2009.

Above, front row: Robert Penner, peace servants coordinator & administrative assistant; Ryan Toews, operations officer; Cynthia Dück, lodging; Kelsey Shue, youth & registration. **Insets**—**left:** Nahemy Moreno de Fehr, registrations; **middle:** Meliessa Rempel, receptionist; **right:** Magali Moreno, office manager.



Paraguay 2009 registration numbers climbing

Strasbourg, France—As of early May, more than 2,110 international registrations had been processed by MWC and MTS Travel offices. This includes 315 from Latin American countries other than Paraguay.

Registrations from Paraguay were at 2,050 and climbing rapidly.

With more than 640 registrants from Canada and 330 from Europe, “we’re well past our goals—450 from Canada and 200 from Europe,” Ray Brubacher, Assembly 15 international coordinator says.

To date registrations from the USA total 665. “That’s short of the 700 we projected, but we’re optimistic about getting there,” Rays says.

Organizers hope for a total attendance of close to 6,000—the same number that attended Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003. While Paraguay has several thousand fewer

members in MWC-related churches than does Zimbabwe, economic and travel conditions in the host country should make it possible for as many people to attend this year’s gathering.

Chris Regehr, a 24-year-old from Gretna, Manitoba, Canada, was the first to have his registration processed. He mailed it in last July.

“I was in a rush to register [because] I wanted the opportunity to stay with a host family,” he says. “I was fortunate to do that for Zimbabwe.”

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Three you'll want to meet in Paraguay

by Katherine Arnoldi

Ernesto Unruh:

Walking humbly with God

If you are looking for Ernesto Unruh, you just may find him on his hands and knees with other members of his congregation, painting the floor of the church in Yalve Sanga, the Chaco, Paraguay. Then when you talk with him—which you can do at MWC's Assembly 15—you will find he speaks humbly of working together with others, of cooperation and harmony.

Ernesto Unruh is an Enlhet leader, a man of great stature, dignity, poise, grace, and diplomacy. A pastor at one of the largest churches in Yalve Sanga, he served for 13 years as president of the *Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet*, an MWC member church with seven congregations and 2,125 members.

Ernesto is a graduate of the Bible Institute of Yalve Sanga, and he continued studies for six years after graduation. Since then, he has co-written many books—including *Ya'alva Pangcalhva II*, a collection of stories from Enlhet elders; the 903-page Enlhet Dictionary; and *Lo Que Cuentan los Enlhet*, (*Stories of the Enlhet*), a book published in both Enlhet and Spanish. He has traveled to Europe and Africa as a representative of his church, his people, and his country.

Ernesto's last name comes from the fact that his father, Francisco, an

Enlhet, was given the name of his boss, Mr. Unruh, the owner of a large farm. "My father attended a fiesta and there met my mother, a Nivacle. I am the third of their 12 children," Ernesto says.

"As a boy, I sang in the local choir and at 18 came to the Bible Institute back when the classes were held in a barn." During his years of study, he helped build a new building for the institute and began his work with the local church, where, after 10 years, he became a pastor.

It was in 1984 that he, along with two other Enlhet and two Nivacle, was invited to the Mennonite World Conference in Strasbourg, France. "I saw a different world on that trip," Ernesto says, "I saw many new ideas and activities. I saw people living in big buildings, which is not our custom; we like to live out in the open air, free. I saw people hang gliding, flying in the air great distances."

But, most importantly, he met Mennonites from all over the world. "I saw my Mennonite brothers from many different places. I saw people of many different colors who are part of the Mennonite family. I learned about all the diverse Mennonite churches that are equal. I met many people, and we discussed many themes, studied much, and thought much together about Christ."

In 2003, he attended MWC's Assembly 14 in Zimbabwe. "I saw the African people walking together, singing on the way to church, and we at the conference also walked and sang



Ernesto Unruh

together." Ernesto learned about the devastation of AIDS in Africa and saw many people suffering from this disease. He was also moved by the diversity of the Mennonite congregations. "I met and talked with Africans from many countries."

Back home, Ernesto, now 55, continues his work as pastor, traveling long distances to speak with people and offer solace, advice, and marriage counseling. He does this work, as he has always done it, without pay. "When we walk on the road with God, we must do it with or without pay."

Elsa, Ernesto's wife, works with women's groups at the church and sings in the 80-member women's choir. She organizes various church activities, including preparations for Christmas celebrations. They have four children: one daughter and three sons.



Helga Dueck:

Living life for the poor and disabled

Helga Dueck had no idea, when she attended MWC's assembly in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, in 1990, how much her life was about to change as the result of that experience. She had traveled to Canada from Filadelfia in the Chaco, Paraguay, on her crutches and one leg. She left with a new direction that would lead to a new dream.

"God calls a person, and, if that person is willing to obey, then they can continue to pray, continue to go forward and not fear, but to have confidence in God," Helga says. She stands, surrounded by adoring children, in front of the place that started as a

dream and is now *Rayito de Luz*, a school for the deaf in Filadelfia.

The journey from the dream to the reality was not so easy, but it was far from the first challenge that Helga has faced in her 66 years.

One of ten children of refugees from Siberia, Russia, Helga developed polio as a small child. A botched operation at age 12 created even more problems. Still, the indefatigable Helga continued her studies, graduating from the Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Montevideo, Uruguay, despite the need for an amputation halfway through her schooling. She then taught for several years at a school at Km 81, a Mennonite-run leper hospital east of Asunción.

Next Helga was off to Canada where she worked at the Mennonite Brethren "Gospel Light Hour" for several years before returning to Paraguay and Yalve

Helga with students from the School for the Deaf in Filadelfia, Chaco, Paraguay: "God calls a person, and, if that person is willing to obey, ... they go forward and do not fear but have confidence in God."

Sanga, an Indigenous community supported by the Mennonites, where, for 19 years, Helga was counselor, teacher, and principal.

In 1989, Henry Enns of Mennonite Central Committee came to Paraguay, looking for someone who could speak German, English, and Spanish and serve as a spokesperson for disability rights in that country. Everywhere he went people recommended Helga, and soon she was on her way again to Canada for orientation and job training—which included attending MWC's assembly in Winnipeg.

That's when Helga's life began to change.

When she returned to Paraguay, Helga traveled from 1991-95 throughout that country as well as Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, visiting centers for the disabled, giving speeches about disability awareness, and chronicling the needs of the disabled. As she traveled, Helga became aware of the many deaf children she saw, and she was moved by the conditions in which they lived.

She began to dream of opening a school for the deaf.

Helga continued to pray about her concerns, and she continued to move forward, not to fear and to have confidence in God. Everywhere she went, it seemed to Helga that Proverbs 31:8 appeared somehow: "Open your mouth for the speechless."

"God, if it is only me that wants a deaf school, let me know," Helga prayed, "I cannot do it alone."

Encouraged by trips to the Lobetal Institute in Celle, Germany, and to an



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MCC-sponsored school for the deaf in Recife, Brazil, Helga continued to pray and to plan.

Then, miraculously, an opportunity appeared. She was urged to run for the *concejal* (city council) of Filadelfia. She won. With that salary, Helga began her school, first in a Sunday-school room at an Indigenous Mennonite church, then at the government-run school, and, finally, thanks to help from friends in British Columbia, Canada, she was able to open a school with a dormitory, *Rayito de Luz*.

And the students come. They come because the police have picked up a homeless boy who was sleeping with dogs and discovered he was deaf. The students come because a mother, having heard of the school, arrives with her child and eyes of hope. They come to find Helga and her teachers, who believe in these children and their abilities. They come to find confidence, pride in their accomplishments, hope, and inspiration.

At a recent end-of-the-year ceremony, *Rayito de Luz* was filled to capacity with the people of Filadelfia, the alumni of the school, and city officials. The children signed songs, put on a skit, read Helga's lips as she instructed them, spoke their names aloud. All the while they beamed with love at the woman who started from nothing, nothing but faith.

From that faith and that dream had come this opportunity to shine at *Rayito de Luz*.

How you can help:

Funds continue to be an issue for Rayito de Luz. "One March," Helga says, "I had to gather the teachers and tell them that I did not have the money for their salaries for that month. Then I explained that my experience with God was that it will come." It did. If you want to help, send donations via your country's MCC office designated for Rayito de Luz.

Cristina Caballero:

Guided every step of the way

As a little girl, Cristina Caballero watched her mother, Ubaldina Centurion de Caballero, and grandmother create wonders that seemed humanly impossible: the world famous intricate Nanduti lace of Itauguá, Paraguay.

"The heart of the crafts artist is simple, not shallow," Cristina says, "When they start something, they must finish. They must go to their work every day. They must not waste time." The artisans of Itauguá lace spend years in apprenticeship and are extraordinarily patient and painstakingly thorough.

Just the qualities that Cristina Caballero courageously brings to her every endeavor. These include serving as a co-moderator at the public sessions of Assembly 15 as well as chairing the local worship planning committee for this gathering.

The ninth of thirteen children, Cristina says, "My parents gave me a solid foundation, and then the Lord came in, who is the biggest role model we can follow." Cristina says.

Cristina tells how her father, Miguel Angel Caballero Romero, an elementary school teacher, invited a new missionary Hans Eitzen, into their home when he came to town. Cristina's sister was the first to attend the Sunday school, then her mother, then Cristina and the other siblings.

"When I was thirteen, I opened my heart to God," Cristina says. I understood the sacrifice of Jesus and the love of God and that was when I started my journey. I was baptized at eighteen."

She dreamed of becoming a chemist, but going to college was impossible, so Cristina took a job in the Chaco, close to Loma Plata, in the Enlhet village of



Cristina Caballero

Pesempoo, teaching Spanish. "Chaco was a key in many ways. The start of my adventurous journey," she says. Her mother had always told her she showed a curiosity about other cultures.

While most of her siblings followed in her father's footsteps, Cristina found that teaching was not for her. One day, while listening to the local radio station ZP 30, she felt they needed a woman's voice. So she enrolled in the *Escuela Municipal de Locución* in Asunción, a school to prepare students for broadcasting.

After her second year of school, Cristina received an invitation to participate in Mennonite Central Committee's International Visitor Exchange Program. She spent a year at Rockway Mennonite Collegiate in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, working in the library. Here she also added English to her other languages: Guaraní, Spanish, and German.

Cristina returned to Asunción, finished her studies, and decided to enroll in the Bible Institute. While studying, she also produced a radio show every Sunday morning on 102.1 FM, the

Christian Mennonite radio station, *Obra Evangélica de Difusión Radial* (OBEDIRA), where she hoped to work full time.

But the radio station had no positions when she graduated, so the indefatigable Cristina began work with ophthalmologist Rainald Dürksen and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness. In this position she arranged regional health conferences and traveled to the United Kingdom, Argentina, and Brazil.

After five years, Cristina returned to Asunción and began working on her degree in International Relations with the *Universidad del Norte Asunción*. The radio station OBEDIRA offered her a job, and she was soon the producer of a daily afternoon show of music, devotionals, and talk.

Every day people from around the world call the station grateful for the inspiration that her show has given them at just the right moment. "If God can use me to reach people in this way, then I am grateful," Cristina says.

The future? "I have felt guided every step of the way in my life," Cristina says. One thing for sure: however she is guided, she will be thorough in her preparation, and, like her mother and grandmother before her, she will not miss a stitch or drop a thread.

The author of these three articles, Katherine Arnoldi, is a member of Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship in New York City. She wrote these articles while in Paraguay in 2008-09 as a Fulbright Fellow. Melvin Warkentin assisted with the article about Ernesto Unruh. That article, as well as the one about Helga Dueck, was written specifically for the Mennonite Brethren Herald of Canada. Both are used here by permission.

Learning more about Paraguay

Tools to help prepare for Assembly 15

The following resources can help participants in MWC's gathering in Asunción in July get a better understanding of Paraguay and the Mennonites there. Those not traveling to Paraguay may also want to read one or more of these resources for a glimpse of this part of the global church.

1. *Like a Mustard Seed: Mennonites in Paraguay*, by Edgar Stoesz (Herald Press, English 2008).

The author, who has travelled extensively in Paraguay, sees the present prosperity of many Mennonites there as a miracle of perseverance, hard work, and the grace of God.

Stoesz provides a concise history of each of the German-speaking Mennonite groups in migrations from Canada, Germany, and Mexico and the development of their colonies as well as the story of the Latin Paraguayan and Indigenous Mennonites. Available: www.pandorapress.com

2. *Paraguay: a tour guide, with special emphasis on the Mennonites*, by Erwin Boschmann (2008, English).

This colourful tour guide provides basic facts and figures on Paraguay's geography, economy, weather, customs, and how to get around. Several chapters are devoted to Paraguay's history, culture, the city of Asunción, the areas surrounding the capital city, the Mennonite impact—including "domesticating" the Chaco—and the life of Indigenous peoples. The book includes human interest stories. Available: www.pandorapress.com

3. *Ein Leib - viele Glieder: Die mennonitischen Gemeinden in Paraguay* (German 2001) *One Body - Many Parts: The Mennonite Churches in Paraguay* (English 2008), by Gerhard Ratzlaff, English translation by Jake Balzer.

The author, a Paraguayan Mennonite historian, surveys all Mennonite churches in Paraguay, including those

of immigrant Mennonites from Europe and Canada, Latin Paraguayans, and Indigenous peoples.

What characterizes these churches is their great diversity in origin and traditions and their joint institutions, testifying to their faith and love for God and humankind, Ratzlaff notes. He believes that integration—adapting national culture without surrendering biblical values—will happen. The author also explores the close relationship between the religious and secular aspects of the lives of Paraguayan Mennonites.

Available: www.pandorapress.com

4. *Jumping into Empty Space: A Reluctant Mennonite Businessman Serves in Paraguay's Presidential Cabinet* (English 2008), *Un salto a lo desconocido. Lo que yo aprendi como ministro* (Spanish 2008), *Entwicklung, Macht und Korruption. Als Christ in der Regierung Paraguays* (German 2009), by Ernst Bergen, as told to Phyllis Pellman Good.

Ernst Bergen, a young, successful, Mennonite businessman with no interest in politics, struggled with a response to the invitation of then Paraguayan President Nicanor Duarte Frutos to join the cabinet in the government of Paraguay, which was plagued with corruption. Bergen agreed and served as Minister of Industry and Commerce and later as Minister of Finance, helping to begin the country's financial and economic recovery.

Before he accepted the president's invitation, Bergen "made a deal with God," asking God to stay close to him, allowing him to leave the office "more faithful to Jesus than I am today."

English: www.GoodBooks.com

Spanish:

iba@rieder.net.py

biblioteca@cemta.org.py

German: www.neufeld-verlag.de

Special interest groups keen to

Asunción, Paraguay— Numerous groups organized around special interests are using MWC's Assembly 15 as an opportunity to confer with colleagues from around the world. As a result assembly planners are scrambling to find space for workshops, conversations, and displays for the hundreds of people

expected to attend one or more of these groups.

They will convene before, during, and after Assembly Gathered, July 14-19, outside of morning and evening worship services. Some of the groups will welcome observers.

More information on several of these special interest groups is included on the

following pages. In addition, these groups have indicated to MWC that they are planning reunions, discussions, or informal get-togethers:

- Latin American and African women theologians;
- Consultation on business and faith;
- Mennonite secondary school leaders;

- Associacao Evangélica Menonita (Brasil) leaders;
- International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB);
- International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA);
- Francophone network;
- Church-to-Church participants.

In addition, MWC's offi-

Trans-Chaco road builders will hold reunion

Pax volunteers, including those who built 200 miles of road linking Asunción with the Mennonite colonies in the Chaco, will have the opportunity to travel "the lonely sliver of asphalt" as part of Assembly 15.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) created the Pax (Peace) program as alternative service for U.S. conscientious objectors being drafted by the military to serve in the Korean War and

later in Vietnam. More than 100 Canadians also served in Pax. The program called for volunteers to commit to two years of service and to donate \$75 per month for their food and housing.

At least 1,100 Pax volunteers served in more than 40 countries between 1951 and 1976. Their projects included building houses for war refugees and doing agricultural development work to address hunger and poverty.

In Paraguay, the Pax project was building the trans-Chaco highway from 1956 to 1961. This highway was to provide access to Asunción and international markets for the Chaco.

Partners in the project were MCC, which coordinated building the road; the Paraguayan government; Paraguayan ranchers whose land the road crossed; the U.S. government, which provided heavy road-building equipment; and the Chaco Mennonites. Pax men completed the road in 1961, but it took several decades for the government to asphalt it.

Pax volunteers attending the reunion during Assembly 15 will travel by bus along the road they built, stopping at key points to recall their experiences.

In addition to this "pilgrimage of memories," the reunion of Pax volunteers will include space at the assembly site for workshops and visiting.

Health care workers to

Health care workers from around the world who share a common Anabaptist faith will discuss together their mission as Christian medical practitioners July 15 and 16 in Paraguay in conjunction with Assembly 15.

Picking up on the assembly theme, "Come together in the way of Jesus Christ," health care workers will seek answers to the question, "How do we follow the way of Jesus Christ in the health field?"

Health care was among the earliest services developed by Mennonite immigrants who settled in Paraguay. The leprosy hospi-

Theological education c

Theological educators in Anabaptist-related institutions around the world have been invited to a consultation just before Assembly 15. Theme of the consultation is "Theological Education and Meta-Theology: Our Cultures in Light of the Bible."

The consultation will be held at CEMTA (Centro Evangélico Menonita de Teología Asunción) in San Lorenzo, a city close to Asunción, July 9-11.

Topics include: the search for a biblical theology



MCC photo

Pax men in 1959, preparing for work in Paraguay. Front, from left: Floyd Bauman, Waterloo, Ont.; Roger Haines, Elkhart, Ind.; Harry Harder, Mountain Lake, Minn. (foreman); LaVerne Graber, Freeman, S.D. Back, from left: Herman Konrad, Abbotsford, B.C.; Robert Ediger, Henderson, Neb.; Pete Harder, Abbotsford, B.C.; Johnny Huebert, Henderson, Neb.

to meet during Assembly 15

cers, Executive Committee, General Council, commissions, continental caucuses, and the communication team will hold meetings to attend to the business of MWC. Also scheduled during this time is the second Global Youth Summit (GYS) and the Global Mission Fellowship.

Confer at Paraguay 2009

tal east of Asunción, Km 81, has gained respect throughout the country for its innovative treatment of victims of leprosy.

Health care professionals have also played major roles in Anabaptist missions around the world as well as in their homelands.

The Paraguay meetings are open to anyone in health care professions: doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, dentists, medical laboratory technologists and chaplains. The meetings will be held at the Hospital of Foundation Vision at Fernando de la Mora, Paraguay.

Consultation scheduled

beyond cultural identities; community hermeneutics; culture, liturgy and Christian worship; the contribution of the interaction of numerous cultures in the Paraguayan Chaco; Meta-theology in relation to discipleship, the reign of God and the local congregation, God's mission and eschatology.

Speakers include Werner Franz, Artur Dück, Jakob Lepp, Antonio González, Jacob Thiessen, Heinz Fast, Martín Eitzen and Alfred Neufeld.



Indigenous church leaders from South America and North America gather in Yalve Sanga, Paraguay, to prepare for a gathering of Indigenous Mennonite conferences that will

follow MWC's Assembly 15 (from left): Máximo Aranda, Manuel Mendoza, Norman Meade, Juan Ramos, Willis Busenitz, Cesar Mendoza, and Estéban Antonio.

Indigenous Mennonites to meet for first time in Paraguay

Indigenous Mennonites from around the world are preparing to meet for the first time in connection with MWC's Assembly 15.

Close to 1,000 Indigenous Mennonites from the Paraguayan Chaco are expected to attend the assembly. There they will be joined by 30 Mennonites living and ministering in Indigenous context in the United States and Canada and 10 representatives from Indigenous Mennonite communities in Guatemala, Panama, and Peru.

One of the questions they will address—and as they gather immediately following—is their common identity and history.

“Our spirits are still intertwined,” says Norman Meade of the Metis and Ojibwe Nations in North America, who traveled with Willis Busenitz, pastor of the White River Cheyenne

Mennonite Church in Busby Montana, USA, to meet Indigenous leaders in Paraguay and to begin preparations for their meeting. “The spiritual connection was quickly felt,” Meade said.

“This meeting will bring together Indigenous hearts and spirits,” Meade said. “We may come from different countries, but we share the experience of being

Creation care focus of Assembly workshop

Global Anabaptist with special interest in care of the environment will meet in four workshop sessions during MWC's Assembly 15.

Stuart Clark, formerly with MCC and now senior policy advisor with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, will lead the workshops titled, “Refinding Our Place in Creation.” He will be assisted by Albert C. Lobe representing MWC and

Indigenous to the land. We are never to be separated in God.

In addition to meeting together at the assembly, the Indigenous Mennonite groups of Paraguay have invited Indigenous from other countries to visit their congregations and communities, most of them in the Chaco. These visits will take place immediately after Assembly 15.

Gerhard Pries, representing MEDA.

The first workshop will address key questions related to the environment. The second will feature story telling from workshop participants while a third will focus on stories of broken creation in various countries. In the final workshop participants will work on a statement that calls the assembly to repentance and action.



A cart of manioc waits on a scale at one of the CODIPSA starch processing plants. CODIPSA is a joint venture between MEDA Paraguay and local Mennonite business people.

Special interest groups at Assembly 15:

MEDA returns to deep roots

Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) members will return to their roots during MWC's assembly July 14-19, 2009, in Asunción, Paraguay.

MEDA was formed 55 years ago by a small group of North American businessmen who wanted to help Mennonite refugees struggling to survive in what was then known as "the green hell"—the Chaco region of Paraguay.

In commemoration of this beginning, MEDA has planned a 17-day tour that includes the assembly. Led by MEDA president Allan Sauder and his wife, Donna Snyder, the tour will focus on MEDA projects in Paraguay, where it all began. Then the group will travel to Peru, where MEDA continues to create new and innovative solutions to poverty.

MEDA's first investment in Paraguay was in the Sarona Dairy in the Chaco, a business set up to process and sell milk products into larger markets. The Sarona Dairy repaid MEDA's investment in full over the next 20 years and went on to spin off other dairies that today provide more than half of Paraguay's milk products.

Today MEDA continues to be involved in Paraguay with two projects:

- CODIPSA, with two plants and a third to be built this year, is the largest producer of manioc starch in Paraguay, with exports to Brazil and Argentina and 2008 revenues of \$4.8 million. The project is led by MEDA Paraguay and a group of local Mennonite business people.

- ERPAR will produce ethanol from a mix of sugar cane and manioc starting later this year, with an annual capacity of 10 million liters per year. Local Paraguayan entrepreneurs, MEDA Paraguay, and MEDA North America have joined forces to provide the start-up capital needed to get the project going.

Five USA churches join forces to fund General Council delegate from Congo

Strasbourg, France—Vincent Ndandula Mulebo, a Mennonite leader from the Congo, will go to MWC's Assembly 15 in Paraguay in July this year because of a gift from five churches in Indiana and Michigan, USA.

The five have each contributed \$500 toward making his trip possible. Mulebo is the coordinator of education and schools for the Mennonite churches of Congo. He is also a delegate to the General Council from the *Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCo)*.

Eldon Stoltzfus, pastor of one of the congregations—Forks Mennonite Church in Middlebury, Indiana—says he is delighted that the money will help a Congolese Mennonite. Stoltzfus served in the Congo from 1969-1971 with Pax, a Mennonite Central Committee program that provided alternative service opportunities for young conscientious objectors during the Korean and Vietnam wars.

The other four churches joining Forks in this sponsorship are Emma Mennonite Church, Topeka, Indiana; Locust Grove Mennonite Church, Sturgis, Michigan; Pleasant View Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana; and Shore Mennonite Church,

Shipshewana, Indiana.

Several men from these churches also served with Pax in areas where there are now Congolese Mennonite churches.

The sponsorship plan began with the Forks Missions Committee when information from MWC presented the challenge to assist someone unable to attend Assembly 15 without help. After prayer and reflection, Forks asked the four other congregations to join them so together they could raise \$2,500 by September 2008. All agreed to do so, and they raised the funds by the deadline.

How did Forks meet its \$500 challenge? Each year the congregation invites neighbours, family, and friends to a missions fund-raising dinner and evening of music. The church designated \$500 from the proceeds of the 2008 fund raiser for an MWC registrant.

Forks also hoped to help one of its members to attend Assembly 15 in Paraguay, but the economic downturn in the USA has put that part of the plan in jeopardy.

The five supporting churches are working on plans for Ndandula to visit northern Indiana and Michigan after the Paraguay assembly.

Follow Assembly 15 on the Internet

Can't attend MWC's assembly in Asunción, Paraguay, July 14-19? You can keep up with what's happening each day. While plans were being finalized at press time, MWC's web site will likely include daily notes about assembly activities. Check it out each day at:

www.mwc-cmm.org

Plans also call for several persons to post entries about the assembly on YouTube and Facebook.



High school young people participate in a worship service during a training session to be “peace servants” at Assembly

15. Peace servants will volunteer their time to help local committees in providing information and guest services, youth

and children’s activities, service opportunities, the Global Church Village, ushering, local tours, and security.

Youth train to be ‘peace servants’ during Asunción assembly

Strasbourg, France—Eighty-one high school students from Mennonite schools in Paraguay are training to be “peace servants” for MWC’s Assembly 15 in July.

Peace servants will volunteer at Paraguay 2009 with committees for information and guest services, food services, youth and children’s activities, service opportunities, the Global Church Village, ushering, local tours, and security.

The 27 boys and 54 girls come from eight German-speaking high schools, three Latino high schools, and one Indigenous high school. The schools are located in Asunción, the Chaco, and eastern Paraguay.

These students form a microcosm of the diversity found among Paraguayan Mennonites, but all claim practical Christian service as part of their background.

Aged 16 to 19, students from the 12 schools got together in February for a training camp for the experience. This is the first time students from so many Mennonite high schools have gathered together in Paraguay.

“These volunteers won’t have much time to participate in Assembly 15 itself, but beginning July 11, they will definitely be there, helping make it possible,” says

Robert Penner, MWC Asunción staff member responsible for organizing the peace servants.

“They are excited and proud to participate in such a big event,” Penner says. He considers his involvement with the peace servants “a great privilege and blessing.”

Although the students already identify with a diverse Mennonite community, they hope to get to know many people their own age from different countries through their experience.

They anticipate learning new ways of worshipping as they join with other cultures from around the world, Penner says. Only a few of them will be old enough to attend the Global Youth Summit.

Penner expects that the students’ faith will be strengthened through their assembly experiences, which he hopes will include participation in some worship services as well as cross-cultural dialogues. And he hopes that international friendships will be created.

“They’ve [already] recognized benefits and riches when they put racism aside, and ... I hope they can understand better the social, cultural, and political environment of Mennonites around the world,” he says.

“We’re thankful that Assembly 15 is coming to Paraguay. It’s already united us in a direct way with our brothers and sisters in faith from other cultures in Paraguay. It sparks our interest and concern for the well-being of our neighbour,” Penner says.

He hopes having these young people work together will lead to more national

Gift suggestion:

Unique Paraguay program provides musical instruments to disadvantaged

International guests planning to attend Assembly 15 are being asked to consider tucking a musical instrument into their flight bag and leaving it behind as a gift to the host country.

The instruments will go to a unique Paraguay program, *Sonidos de la Tierra* (Sounds of the Earth). Begun by Luis Szaran, conductor of the Asunción Municipal Orchestra, *Sonidos de la Tierra* provides instruments and teachers in poor sections of Asunción and numerous nearby small towns.

“The young person who plays Mozart by day does not break shop windows at night” is the program’s slogan.

The music department at *Centro Evangélico Menonita*

gatherings among the three Mennonite cultures within Paraguay. He muses about the formation of a national committee of Mennonite high schools in Paraguay and maybe an exchange program between them.

There are currently 16 Mennonite high schools in Paraguay, 14 of which are part of MWC member conferences.

de Teología Asunción (CEMTA), the Mennonite seminary, works closely with *Sonidos de la Tierra*, providing lessons and performance opportunities for area children.

Additional musical instruments of all kinds (string, woodwind, percussion and especially brass), new, used, even in disrepair, are welcomed. Shops at several locations are set up to repair instruments.

The best way to move instruments to Paraguay is in the luggage of travellers. Larger instruments need to be boxed and checked as a second personal bag. Instrument donors should check with their airline on regulations for transporting instruments.

GYS survey results:

Service through the eyes of youth

by Sarah Thompson

Serving as a delegate to MWC's second Global Youth Summit (GYS), scheduled for July 10-12 in Asunción, Paraguay, is not just a simple matter of travel and attending meetings. Each GYS delegate also had work to do beforehand.

AMIGOS, GYS planners, asked each delegate to survey at least 50 people from all over their national church on the GYS 2009 theme: service. The results of this survey will form the basis for the deliberations in Asunción.

AMIGOS did not provide strict guidelines for how to submit these survey reports. As a result, each is in a unique format. Some include charts, tables, and graphics. Some are written in prose, synthesizing the answers that came from the constituents; others are a mélange of phrases. Reports were accepted in any of MWC's official languages—English, Spanish, and French.

This "diversity of reporting ... shows the wealth of ways that humans process information," say Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, AMIGOS president and Asia GYS representative. "Seeing this diversity helps AMIGOS prepare to create an environment at the Global Youth Summit that

The AMIGOS team, planners for GYS 2009 (from left): Barbara Kärcher, Khohlwani Moyo, Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, Amandus Reimer, Sarah Thompson.



will be welcoming to many different languages, learning, and communication styles.

Biblically grounded service. GYS delegates believe that Christian service is a significant way to respond to the world's crises. Delegates were asked to name biblical passages that outline the attitudes of a servant or inspired them to serve. Out of the 53 reports, some of which offered two or three verses, there were 45 different verses chosen.

"This large selection demonstrates that one can find the theme of service throughout the biblical story," Khohlwani Moyo, AMIGOS Africa representative observes. It also exposes the multiple orientations toward and motivations for service. The most commonly noted passages were Matthew 25:31-46, Mark 10:43-45, John 12-13, Romans 12:1, Philippians 2:1-11 and Colossians 3:23-24.

Some delegates talked about service in a much more spiritualized fashion than others. Some characterized it as specific actions; others saw it more as a way of doing these actions.

While in 2007, as they were planning the Asunción gathering, AMIGOS were unsure if the theme of service was going to be broad enough to sustain engaged dialogue for an entire weekend, the delegate responses prove that there will be more than enough to talk about.

Definition of service. The survey asked youth and young adults to define service in their own terms as well as note the impact that it had on their lives.

Etienne Tshibamba of the Congo notes that service is "the appropriate response to spiritual and material needs." Angelica Rincón-Alonso of Colombia lists a number of elements of service, including collaboration, love, solidarity, humility, solutions, compassion, gifts and talents, and sharing.

Service has impacted the lives of the people Leo Elsner of Germany surveyed. Many mentioned that "doing service" facilitated a connection for them between different cultures.

Keisha Littlebear from the United States heard responses that asserted service must be about the long-term work of collective liberation and building relationships.

Yu-Lin Liao from Taiwan mentioned stewardship of all resources (including one's own body) to be a major way to live the difference of service.

Preliminary conclusions. While AMIGOS is still analyzing the wealth of information in the GYS delegate surveys, it appears that Anabaptist youth understand service as both a personal and political act. But above all, service is about giving glory and honor to God.

Barbara Kärcher, AMIGOS Europe representative, says, "The hope is that, after sharing perspectives with one another during GYS ... delegates can present a clear affirmation of holistic service to the General Council and let the Council know how to continue to nurture attitudes of service in youth and young adults."

Completing the survey was not easy for many of the delegates, who needed to make phone calls and visits to churches in other parts of their country with which they were not familiar. "The determination required to finish the survey not only showed a level of commitment from the delegates, but it also promoted ongoing conversation on the local, regional, and national level of church," says Amandus Reimer, AMIGOS vice-president and Latin America representative.

Sarah Thompson, Elkhart, Indiana, USA, serves as AMIGOS secretary and North American representative.

Erland Waltner:

Former MWC president, church leader dies at 94

Strasbourg, France—Erland Waltner, a long-time MWC leader, died in Goshen, Indiana, USA, on Easter Sunday evening, April 12, 2009 at age 94.

Erland had served as president of MWC from 1963-1973. Previous to that, from 1957-1963, he was a member of the MWC Presidium (now the Executive Committee).

Erland began his service with MWC in 1962 by reading the opening address for then-president Harold S. Bender to a crowd of about 7,000 people at the MWC assembly in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. Bender, who was suffering from terminal cancer but was able to attend the assembly for a few days, could not be at the opening service. He died in September, and Erland succeeded him as president.

In 1972, Erland presided at the MWC assembly in Curitiba, Brazil, the first to be held outside of either Europe or North America.

At his death, Erland was president



Erland Waltner

emeritus of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, USA.

In 1949, Erland became professor of Bible at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, USA, and he served

on the board of Mennonite Biblical Seminary (MBS) in Chicago. In 1958, he became president of MBS, retiring 20 years later. Erland gave significant leadership to MBS' move from Chicago and its integration with Goshen Biblical Seminary to become AMBS. He remained part-time on the faculty there until 1998.

“Wise, gracious, faithful, and humble are words being used to describe this man who opened so many doors of cooperation,” notes a tribute prepared by AMBS.

“A friend, teacher, and mentor to generations of church leaders and students, Erland continued to give spiritu-



BRAIDED TOGETHER

people from area Mennonite congregations and from the local Catholic church.

In the photo above, one of the visitors—Matias Giron, pastor at San Marcos Mennonite Church—helps braid the multi-colored strands while Ovidio Flores, pastor of Llano del Horcon, looks on. As part of the service, Llano members decided to send funds from their dedication offering to help suffering believers in Zimbabwe.

The inset shows the finished braids made at La Floresta Mennonite Church, Montevideo, Uruguay. According to pastor Beatriz Barrios, the activity symbolized being strengthened together to grow and work for God's kingdom on earth.

Many Anabaptist churches around the globe found themselves braiding strands of yarn or fabric when they celebrated World Fellowship Sunday (WFS) in January 2009.

The braiding idea was one of several children's activities around the theme, “Come together in the way of Jesus Christ,” which MWC suggested in its WFS materials. The braid was to symbolize the strength that comes through unity.

At the Llano del Horcon church near San Marcos, Honduras, braid weaving also became part of a dedication of a new church building. Nine North Americans who had helped build the church attended the celebration as well as more than 150

al direction in his later years. He maintained an office at AMBS until a few months ago. He was a constant source of encouragement and inspiration to me,” notes J. Nelson Kraybill, current AMBS president.

Before his ministry shifted to education, Erland had served as pastor of congregations in Nebraska, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota, all in the United States. He later became active in various church leadership positions:

member and vice-president of the General Conference Mennonite Church Board of Education, 1941–1957; conference president and chair of the Executive Committee, 1956–1962; and executive secretary of Mennonite Health Association, 1979–1992.

A funeral service for Erland was held at the AMBS Chapel of the Sermon on the Mount on Friday, April 17. Erland is survived by his wife Winifred and four daughters.



Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle, MWC's interim at the MCC United Nations Liaison Office, outside the building where she works.

YAMEN!

Young adults from around the world currently in international service work

Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, & Strasbourg, France—Nine young adults from five different countries are currently in service assignments with YAMEN!, a joint MWC-Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) program offering service opportunities to youth.

YAMEN! participants are single young adults aged 18 to 30, primarily but not exclusively from the global South. These young people are committed to service and to building church-to-church relationships through their work. Assignments are for one year, from August through July. Assignments

are in Anabaptist churches in other countries (except for the USA and Canada).

Since 2004, 12 young people have served in congregations, at church retreat centers and offices, and with programs for youth and children, including street children. They have come from Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Mexico, Congo, Kenya, Zambia, India, Philippines, Nicaragua, and Zimbabwe.

Seventeen young adults have been accepted in YAMEN! for 2009-10. The 17 come from Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia, Indonesia, Korea, Nicaragua, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

2008-09 YAMEN! PARTICIPANTS		
Name	From	Service assignment
Fairchild Dube	Zimbabwe	Tanzania
Ana Julia Lopez Villavicencio	Nicaragua	Mexico
Passionate Ncube	Zimbabwe	Indonesia
Ntuthuko Ndlovu	Zimbabwe	Indonesia
Sithabile Ndlovu	Zimbabwe	Bolivia
Maritza Masavi Hurtado	Bolivia	Nicaragua
Yunarso Rosandono	Indonesia	Zimbabwe
Erika Suhartono	Indonesia	Brazil
Osée Tshiwape	DR of Congo	South Korea

MWC intern at the United Nations:

Young Ethiopian Mennonite seeks to strengthen interfaith bridges

Strasbourg, France—Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle, a 25-year-old Mennonite from Ethiopia, has a keen interest in people outside her culture and context and in interfaith bridge building.

Those interests brought her to Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC's) United Nations Liaison Office in New York City as MWC's intern through MCC's International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP).

Prior to becoming an intern, Tigist was a student in global studies and international relations at New Generation University College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Tigist brings to her position experience as a youth and choir leader and discipleship teacher in her home congregation in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC). It is located in Addis Ababa.

MKC, the largest MWC-related conference in the world, is the only Mennonite conference in Ethiopia.

African issues. At the UN Liaison Office, Tigist works with various non-governmental organizations, particularly on issues related to African countries. She also works at building interfaith bridges.

One of these has been with leaders from Iran, including President Ahmadinejad. Through this contact, Tigist says, she came to realize that living in peace as children of God is about living in God's harmony, regardless of race or religion.

"God doesn't want

human beings to be oppressed [yet] many people suffer from corrupt leaders and a global economic system. ... We, God's people, are the voice of the unheard, a bridge between the powerful and the powerless ... a tool for God's work to set people free," she says.

In February and March, Tigist was part of an MWC delegation touring the United States.

The tour promoted MWC's Assembly 15, where Tigist will be part of the Global Youth Summit (GYS).

Youth solidarity. As a GYS delegate, Tigist will share about youth in Ethiopia and encourage solidarity among young global Anabaptists. For some youth, she observes, suffering is the challenge, while for others it is an abundance of wealth and learning to live with enough.

Tigist's one-year internship began in August 2008, following that of Melani Susanti, Salatiga, Indonesia.

"Both Melani and Tigist have contributed greatly to the work of our office and to our understanding of Mennonites from the global South," says Doug Hostetter, director of the United Nations Liaison Office.

"I see the MWC internship as a vital link in helping build understanding and strengthening the links among Mennonites world wide," he says.

In August 2009, Karen Esther Flores Vindel from La Ceiba, Atlántida, Honduras, will replace Tigist as the MWC intern to the MCC United Nations Liaison Office through IVEP.

The glory that comes with unity

by Antonio González

This is another in the series introducing the morning Bible studies of Assembly 15. These introductions, written by the Bible study leaders, are intended not only to prepare those who will attend the assembly but also to unite the global church in a common study of the Scriptures.—Editor

In this priestly prayer, Jesus asks that the glory the Father has given him may also be bestowed on his disciples, “so they may be one as we are one.” What is the nature of the glory that

the Father has given Jesus and that Jesus requests for us, so that it becomes the foundation of unity?

In its fullest sense, the glory of God involves being united to him, being totally independent from the world, just as Jesus was before the world was created. But the glory can also be experienced in the world, just as Jesus did.

But it is important to realize that this glory is not about recognition from the world; it is about transferring something that begins in God and that Jesus gives in behalf of others.

Perhaps this is why the glory of God entails emptying out oneself. In the gospel of John, the glorification of Jesus is related to his “hour,” a clear reference to what was going to happen during Passover.

Contrary to what one may think, this glory does not refer first of all to resurrection. The glorification of Jesus consists precisely in the fact that a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies. And this means a break with the world.

Obviously, the world does not praise or follow those who have been crucified or have failed. Jesus, having been crucified, is precisely who has received, not the glory of humankind, but its rejection. Nevertheless, because of this rejection, Jesus receives the glory of God. It is hardly surprising that in the gospel of John, death, resurrection, and the

giving of the Spirit are so intimately related.

John tells us that the glory Jesus received has already been bestowed on us. It is not something we have to conquer by our own power; it is a gift from God.

We have already received the glory of God: eternal unity with the Father, life in grace and truth, the possibility of giving others what we have received. Glory involves a gift that is already ours.

This gift of glory is directly related to unity, for at least two reasons: (1) The glory of God removes us from the system of recognition and approval that is part of the world, making us members of the community of Jesus. (2) The glory of God allows us to die to ourselves, and only those who die to themselves may reach full unity with others.

This unity does not imply a lack of interest in the world but rather a service to the world. Christian unity is not something that emerges from a system of this world but rather witnesses to the world the radical newness of what God has done.

The gospel of John asks us to focus on some very important questions: Where does glory come from? To whom do we look for approval? What are our significant relationships? Do we have a vested interest in defending a particular social position?

The alternative to the system of recognition of the

world lies in the glory of God. As Anabaptists we can defend certain ideals and principles that are occasionally praised by the world: pacifism, community, or social service. But even with these we may also experience rejection and persecution.


Without true unity with God, without a true passion for his glory, it will be difficult to withstand rejection. How is our relationship with God? Will it enable us to overcome rejection by others? Do we rejoice in the glory that we have already received from God?

The glory of God also includes the emptying out of our own interests and our willingness to give our life for others. Dying to oneself does not mean the annihilation of our personality, submitting it to rules and norms. It is about freeing ourselves from our own interests, from our fears and certainties, in order to live our lives fully in grace and truth.

What are the fears that keep us from dying to ourselves? What are the crosses we are escaping from? Have we experienced the fact that death gives us life?

Antonio González is director of research and publications at Fundación Xavier Zubiri in Madrid, Spain. He will lead the Bible study on Thursday, July 16, at Assembly 15.



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Ephesians 4:1-6

One community of grace and peace

by Chris Marshall

This study concludes the series introducing the morning Bible studies of Assembly 15.

Paul opens his letter to the Ephesians with the words “grace” and “peace.” These are important clues to the message of the entire epistle.

In the first half of the letter, the author recounts the “glorious grace” (1:6, cf. 2:4, 7-8) that God has shown in sending Jesus to secure the healing of the universe and to “make peace” (2:14-15) between hostile peoples. He reminds his readers of the transforming impact this grace-initiative has had on their past moral and spiritual experience. Once they had been alienated from God, but as a result of God’s “immeasurably rich grace” (2:7-8) and “great love” (2:4), they have been set free from spiritual bondage, forgiven of their sins, adopted as God’s children, incorporated into the commonwealth of God’s people, and filled with hope for the future.

The second half of the letter opens with the important little word “therefore” (4:1). Therefore refers back to all that has been said so far about God’s amazing grace. In view of what God has done, Paul is saying, you must commit yourselves to a new way of living. You have been “saved by grace,” but with the intention that you will do “good works” (2:8-10).

This is a feature of Paul’s theology that Anabaptists have always recognised. Faith and works cannot be sep-

rated. It is not enough to know the truth of God’s saving grace in our heads and hearts alone; we must live it out in daily moral experience. If our theology is all about grace and peace, so too must be our ethics. An ethics of grace means relationships of “humility,” “gentleness,” “patience,” “love,” and “mutual care” (4:2). An ethics of peace means a dedication to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3).

It is significant that Paul tells his readers, not to create unity in the body of Christ, but to maintain it. The unity of the church is something that already exists, created by the Spirit of God. Notwithstanding the church’s immense diversity and often fractious history, the truth is that there is only “one body and one Spirit” (4:4). The oneness of the church is every bit as essential to Christian belief as the oneness of God.

Why is this so? In the preceding chapters, Paul has explained how God’s ultimate intention is to heal every rupture in the universe, to bring violence and antagonism to an end and restore universal harmony to all creation. But this great work of cosmic reconciliation is not simply a dream; it has already begun through the existence of the church.

The church is a new kind of human community, one that is held together—not by the bonds of race, class, lan-

guage or culture—but by “the bond of peace” (4:3).

The reason why there can only ever be one church is because the church is, by definition, a community of the reconciled. A divided community of the reconciled is a contradiction in terms! That is why peacemaking and reconciliation are so basic to the church’s identity.

The objective unity of the body of Christ must be made visible at a practical level. It must be translated into the concrete practice of peaceful relationships among believers. These can only be attained by the practice of gentleness, humility, patience, mutual care, and love (4:2).

Questions for reflection:

1. If there is only one body of Christ, why is the church so divided?
2. How can Anabaptists demonstrate the oneness of Christ’s church in the way we relate to other believers?
3. What stops us from “leading a life worthy of our calling”?

Chris Marshall is associate professor of Christian Studies in the Religious Studies Department at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. He will lead the Bible study on Saturday, July 18, at Assembly 15.

