

# Courier Correo Courier

October 2013  
Volume 28, Number 4



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

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

**Conférence  
Mennonite Mondiale**  
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## From the Editor's Desk



*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19)*

God is doing a new thing through Mennonite World Conference! Together, we are working to realize the promise of the Kingdom of God – of different peoples, from different nations and tongues, knit together in the unity of Christ.

Newness is evident through the MWC fellowship. It is evident in the ministry, service and leadership happening throughout our global community – as the stories in this issue of *Courier News/Correo Noticias/Courier Nouvelles* describe (insert, pp. i-iv).

Newness is also evident in this very magazine. Earlier this year, we announced a new communication strategy for MWC – a strategy that will allow us to interact more meaningfully and share more effectively the manifest ways in which God is working through MWC.

In this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier*, we roll out some more “newness,” in the form of new sections of our magazine.

The section “Inspiration and Reflection” provides a forum for leaders throughout our fellowship to share stories, insights and words of wisdom. In this issue, Danisa Ndlovu – MWC president and bishop of *Ibandla Labazalwane kuKristu eZimbabwe* (Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe) – reflects on the Anabaptist virtue of following Jesus.

Another new section, “Perspectives,” invites writers from across the globe to share insights on various topics of interest to Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups. In this issue, we tackle this topic of worship.

César Moya of Ecuador describes how his congregation – Quito Mennonite Church – ensures that its worship service integrates all aspects of life: joy and celebration, contrition and confession, pain and suffering.

Don McNiven of Canada, who is coordinating worship for the Pennsylvania 2015 assembly, writes about the struggles among North Americans to avoid individualism and consumerism in their worship.

Philippe Gonzalez of Switzerland tells of the struggles of French Mennonites in cultivating a distinctive Anabaptist identity in their worship practices, since they lack a uniquely “Mennonite” hymnody.

Of course, this issue also contains coverage familiar to long-time readers of *C/C/C* – a country profile (this time, of Indonesia), descriptions of new MWC resources and an update on the preparation for the Pennsylvania 2015 assembly.

We rejoice that God is doing a new thing through MWC! We hope this magazine will be a vehicle through which members of our global fellowship can perceive what God is doing in and through us, all around the world.

**Devin Manzullo-Thomas is editor for Mennonite World Conference.**

### Cover Photo:

**A transcultural worship service at the 2009 Mennonite World Conference assembly in Asunción, Paraguay. See articles on worship in a global Anabaptist perspective, beginning on page 3. Photo by Lowell Brown**

## Courier Correo Courier



### Volume 28, Number 4

*Courier/Correo/Courier* is a publication of Mennonite World Conference. Six times a year it is published as a four-page newsletter – with the subtitle “News/Noticias/Nouvelles” – containing current news and updates. Twice a year, the newsletter becomes one section in a sixteen-page magazine, which carries inspirational essays, study and teaching documents and feature-length articles. Each edition is published in English, Spanish and French.

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# Worship

## Exploring our shared commitment to worship

As a global communion of Anabaptist-related churches, we share a common commitment to gathering regularly for worship. Yet our tremendous diversity means that we carry out this commitment in very different ways. In this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier*, leaders from across our fellowship write about different ways in which Anabaptists approach worship – the sights and sounds, the challenges and the blessings.

## Integrating All Areas of Life

by César Moya

**P**lant a new church? Yes, but... what style of worship service will we follow? This was the question asked by several people twelve years ago, when we became interested in starting the Quito Mennonite Church. These people came from different traditions of faith and so the question was one that required real reflection.

The answer to this question was a challenge for several reasons. One is that in Ecuador, like in the rest of Latin America, the typical worship service of evangelical churches reflects the influence of the “movement of worship and praise” brought from the United States during the 1980s. Aspects of this worship service include professional musicians, classical instruments, songs that start on the same note with which the one before ended, a designated “time to praise” for soft-rhythm songs, prophetic songs called the “new song,” Hebrew dance, the use of flags, shouts of joy (like warriors who have won a battle) and war-mongering songs, among others. We did not want to replicate this kind of service entirely, as some of its aspects are not consistent with our Anabaptist principles.

A second reason why the question was challenging is that churches of historical origin – Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, and Presbyterian – follow a worship service that was not flexible for improvisation.

The people who came to the new Quito church appreciated the Anabaptist tradition and, even though they came from different origins, wished for the Latin American identity to be reflected in the worship service.

Due to all of these considerations, the church of Quito rescued the Latin American rhythms, including *son cubano* (Cuba), *chamame* and *tango* (Argentina), *sanjuanitos* and *pasillos* (Ecuador) and *guabinas* and *cumbias* (Colombia). These rhythms are accompanied by local instruments: acoustic guitar, *charango*, *bombo* (big drum), *maracas* (shakers) and a rain stick. Of course, the music of the songs is not all that matters; it is also important that the words to the



Worship at the Quito (Ecuador) Mennonite Church. Photo by Daniela Sánchez

songs do not contradict the gospel.

Symbols are another aspect of the worship service, and an element to which we gave thought in starting our church. For Latin American peoples, the empty cross is both an expression of identifying with those who suffer, and a symbol of hope. The cross is a reminder of the confrontation of Jesus and the powers; it is also a reminder that we are Christ-centered.

Other symbols are also important. The liturgical colors are ones that come from Ecuadorian indigenous fabrics. These fabrics are placed on a table, so that people may meditate and reflect on the value and beauty of diversity in a world that is surrounded by homogenizing imperial models. The peace candle reminds us that we are the light and are committed to the peace of Christ. The chairs are organized in the shape of a semi-circle and there is no platform/stage; both of these elements symbolize an intentional push against the current of a religious context that relates holiness with being closer to the pulpit.

Another aspect of the worship service is the revision of the life of those who are worshipping – in other words, the confession. At Quito, this confession is expressed in a litany inspired in biblical texts that correspond to the liturgical calendar. Such an approach helps us to know that we are

walking in the footprints of our Teacher, and it invites those who are involved in armed groups to follow Christ and the way of peace. The confession is not a recitation or a *mea culpa*; it is a confrontation with the gospel of peace. This part of the service ends in a song of peace and a time for all attendants to greet each other.

The reading of Old and New Testament scripture is another part of the service at the Quito church. In this way, we follow the Anabaptist principle in which scripture interprets itself. This part of the service ends with community hermeneutics, where other interpretations and life experiences are shared.

At the end of the service, we all bless each other with a verbal commitment to announce the gospel of peace and serve in each of our contexts.

The Quito Mennonite Church understands that the worship service integrates all areas of life; these are presented to God and our neighbors, especially those who are in the most need.



César Moya co-pastors the Quito Mennonite Church in Ecuador with his wife, Patricia Uruña.

# Resisting North American “Magic Kingdom” Worship

by Don McNiven

**W**riting in his book *Unfinished: Believing Is Only the Beginning* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2013), Rich Stearns asks the question, “What would people be like if they had been born and raised inside Magic Kingdom park and had never seen the outside world?” By “Magic Kingdom,” Stearns is referring to the Disneyland amusement park in the USA built by the Walt Disney Corporation – a place that is associated, for many people, with perfect conditions, make-believe characters and whimsical imagination.

This “Magic Kingdom” vision, he says, is exactly how we could describe much of the church living in the “First-World” (or Global North). Many of us live in a kind of fantasyland, very distant from and largely unaware of the day-to-day struggles impacting the lives of those living in what Stearns calls the “Tragic Kingdom” (or Global South) across the rest of the world.

Despite the disparity in our circumstances, God’s kingdom is the common denominator between the Magic and Tragic kingdoms. As Christ-followers, no matter where we find ourselves geographically, politically, culturally or economically, our loyalty is to the Kingdom of God. We share similar goals as disciples of Christ. We want to speak of hope and grace to those in our cultural context. We desire to build bridges to show that Jesus is transcultural and relevant. In his kingdom, worship flows out of our image and understanding of who God is. In the worldly kingdom, humanity’s actions evoke response from their gods. In the heavenly kingdom, God’s actions evoke a response of worship and wonder from his creation.

As believers, we may come from different places, but we stand on the common ground of citizenship in God’s kingdom. Therefore, there should be unity among believers – locally, nationally and globally.

This is the vision of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6. These three verses contain seven “ones” of Christian unity, and they have integrity both vertically and horizontally. There is only one body, one hope, one faith and one baptism (horizontal unity) because there is only one God – Father, Son and Spirit – to whom we all belong (vertical unity).

But how does this play out in worship, especially as we think about our global church community?

Christian unity is expressed across time, space and culture. Although our worship

style, location and leadership may vary, we should be able to discern unity among our diversity in the common threads of our theology. The act of meeting together, for example, is a common expression of our unity, no matter what the cultural differences.

Christian unity is also expressed in the way we live out our citizenship in the Kingdom of God, challenging oppression and injustice and working to transform the patterns of self and wealth into care of the poor and the earth – another expression of our worship.

Unfortunately, today, in North America, we live in a highly individualistic culture. Oblivious to their surroundings, young and

**“Worship is our response to God’s Word and God’s creation. Worship is life-encompassing.”**

old walk, drive, eat and even sleep plugged into their own conversations and personalized mixes of entertainment. Our “Magic Kingdom” culture even leads us to commoditize worship. As Tom Kraeutner states in his 1992 article, “Worship is a Verb,” “We can become so interested in doing things ‘right’ to get the ‘right’ response from people that we miss the whole point – worshiping God.”

Our Anabaptist theology can provide a helpful lens as we think about this tendency. Worship is our response to God’s Word and his creation. Worship is life-encompassing, and this worldview informs our choices as followers of Jesus. Our emphasis on community and the value of diverse gifting that each person brings to the body, is inclusive and participatory.

The reality is, many of us who live in the “Magic Kingdom” need to recognize that our “stuff” distracts us from worship. We need to work a lot harder at walking our talk. This was highlighted for me as I overheard two conversations following a worship service: in Africa, I heard, “I wish we could stay and worship for another hour. It is so good to be together”; in North America, I heard, “I loved worship today – the worship leader was awesome and the sound was great. I just wish they would keep more closely to the time. I am late for lunch.”

I know these comments are generalizations, and I am thankful that many North Americans work diligently to be counter-

cultural. There are many resources available to help us think about whom we worship and how we worship. Here are some questions I ask myself as I think about Anabaptist worship in North America:

1. Is our stated theology reflected in the form and function of our worship? For example, given our diversity, style should not be an important criterion in evaluating worship (form). And yet, one of the ways our theology is expressed is in the style we choose.
2. As we reflect on our corporate worship genre, style or themes over the past year, do we incorporate the full range of human emotion in our worship experiences? Do we only sing happy songs, or is there room for reflection and lament in our worship? Are we so focused on a single dimension of worship that we fail to minister holistically?
3. Do we endeavour to have our corporate worship be an expression of our community rather than cater to the cultural trend of individualism?
4. Whenever particular activities and experiences are included as we gather to worship, do we creatively make space for significant congregational involvement? Inclusivity is multilayered. How are we intentionally inclusive?
5. In planning our worship “experiences,” do we sometimes overthink the detail of how we will “do” it and under-think how this choice informs our understanding of God?

Perhaps, like me, you have experienced some “special moments” as a worshipper, at Mennonite World Conference assemblies. Unified voices, lifted in multi-cultural worship that responds to the greatness of our Creator, Saviour and Lord, gives me a snapshot of worship as pictured in the book of Revelation. I look forward to sharing that glimpse of eternity with many of my sisters and brothers from around the world as we gather for Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, in 2015.



**Don McNiven** (Kitchener, Ontario, Canada) serves as the executive director of the International Brethren In Christ Association (IBICA), an associate member of MWC. He is a member of the Program Oversight Committee for Assembly 16, heading up the Music and Worship planning section.

# The Book or the Wall?

by Philippe Gonzalez

If you were to attend a Sunday service in a European Mennonite congregation, you would probably encounter two different styles of worship. In one kind of service, the congregation sings from a book. This style is fond of four-part harmony, and often uses an organ, a harmonium or a piano as an accompanying instrument.

In the other kind of service, the congregation relies on a video projector to display the lyrics of the hymns on the wall. This style is more into “contemporary worship”: its melodies and rhythms have a distinctive pop flavor and are usually supported by electric guitars, bass and drums.

Of course, distinctions are not always this neatly made. For instance, in my congregation, which is a member of the French Mennonite conference, old revivalist hymnals are used along with contemporary Evangelical – if not charismatic – songs projected on the wall. We departed from our harmonium long ago, and the drums are doing well. Some brothers and sisters – most of them elderly – are still able to sing four-part harmony, but the skill is vanishing among their younger counterparts. This seems like a transition process: how long will we continue singing from those dusty books? How long will it take before a technological change erases another part of our memories, practices and spirituality?

My tone may sound a bit nostalgic, but I do not think it is. Neither is it technophobic: video projectors can be convenient tools. Yet we have to reflect on how we use them, for objects play an important role in our worship. They are instruments that shape our spirituality. Sometimes, we are aware of this fact. Most of the time, we are not. And when we are not, technology is left unchecked and becomes a silent master whom we obey without noticing.

There is a cultural contrast among European Mennonite worship styles, and it impacts the different ways in which we cultivate spirituality. The objects we use as we congregate to celebrate our faith, Sunday after Sunday, play an important part in those differences. And the tools we employ to sing together are telling of the kind of Christians we might become in the long run.



Worship at the Saint-Genis-Pouilly Church in Switzerland. Photo by Stéphanie Gonzalez

Singing is a powerful activity that profoundly shapes what we believe. Our minds might wander as we listen to a sermon that we will probably hear only once. It is quite another thing with psalms, hymns and songs of praise, for they belong to a repertoire that our community – which includes each one of us – will often sing. Theological ideas expressed in a sermon may come and go, no matter how fancy, interesting and profound they sound. Communicated by a song, the same ideas probably have longevity. They settle somewhere in our subconscious.

Once again, Mennonite European churches are interesting in this regard. As mentioned before, some of them sing from a book – by which I mean a Mennonite hymnal that exists in the language of a conference, and that communities use for their worship.

Northern Europe has a tradition of Mennonite hymnals: Dutch *Doopsgezinden* have theirs, and German-speaking Mennonites from Germany and Switzerland share one. Of course, Anabaptists did not compose all the hymns enclosed in those books. Many of those songs come from a Reformed, Catholic or ecumenical background. However, the repertoire enclosed between the covers of those hymnals is in tune with an Anabaptist theology and spirituality. In that sense, as they worship, these believers and their communities voice a distinctive way of being a Christian.

The matter is different in Southern Europe. Spaniards or French-speaking Mennonites (think Belgium, France or Swit-

zerland) do not enjoy the privilege of having a “book.” They tend to sing what gets projected on the wall. Most of the time, their repertoire borrows from more Evangelical and charismatic sources. The distinctiveness of Anabaptism tends to get blurred, especially as those songs emphasize the “powerfulness” of God, and often downplay the fact that, in Jesus, God emptied himself and became weak in order to reach for us.

Over the last decade, Anabaptist scholarship has moved in a tremendous way to remind we European Mennonites of our historical roots. It has given us a sense of identity. Nevertheless, to convert that insight into a deeper spirituality, we may need a generation of authors, composers and theologians who offer us, here in Southern Europe, a “book” in tune with our beliefs. And if that book is compatible with a video projector or a tablet, that sounds even better.



Philippe Gonzalez is lay minister in a French Mennonite Church (Saint-Genis-Pouilly) and a lecturer at a Swiss University.

# Worshipping with the global faith family

## Preparing for World Fellowship Sunday 2014

*There before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb... And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." Revelation 7:9-10*

**T**his New Testament vision of the global church forms the basis for the work of Mennonite World Conference – to be a communion of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service and witness.

And each year, we seek to realize in our local congregations this vision through a global worship experience known as World Fellowship Sunday (WFS).

On WFS, churches on every continent are encouraged to worship around a common theme, and plan a worship service that will help them enter more fully into fellowship, intercession and thanksgiving with the global faith family.

The event is held on a Sunday close to 21 January, usually the fourth Sunday in January. On that date in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland.

In preparation for the observance, MWC Executive Committee members from different continental regions designate writers and direct preparation of worship material reflecting life and the church in their part of the world for this celebration. Planning



An illustration used in the 2012 World Fellowship Sunday materials, which focused on crossing cultural, national and other "borders."

for this special day rotates among the five continental regions.

This year, the WFS materials are being prepared by representatives from the Asia Caucus. These materials will soon be available on the MWC website, along with a letter that explains the purposes and vision for WFS.

MWC invites all member-churches to consider participating in this special event. For more information and to download worship resources, visit [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org)

### Churches invited to consider special offering for World Fellowship Sunday

The Executive Committee of Mennonite World Conference invites all congregations participating in World Fellowship Sunday to consider collecting a special offering to strengthen the work of MWC around the world.

Each member of each congregation is encouraged to contribute the cost of one lunch in their own community to help support the networks and resources of our global Anabaptist church family. (Donations beyond this amount are welcomed.) The MWC Executive Committee – with members from every continental region – is confident that most adults all around the world can give the equivalent of one lunch per year for the work of the global church.

For more information on the offering, ideas on planning an offering in your congregation and details on sending funds to MWC, visit the MWC website at [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org)

## Stories from World Fellowship Sunday

### 2003

"We started our worship at ten in the morning in the presence of God Almighty (Psalm 127:1) who was present throughout the service. Everything went beautifully. We started with an intercession, then the invocation of Psalm 100:1-5, opening prayer, a congregational hymn, four choirs, explanation and testimony of three pastors about the beginning of the Mennonite church in Angola and prayers. . . .

After the service we had a reception with a choir singing inside the church and songs, dances and shouts of joy outside in honor of the Lord according to Psalm 150:1-6. We are sure it was the same for our brothers [and sisters] around the world."

– José Ndongala Nkiku  
*Igreja Evangélica Menonitas em Angola*  
(Evangelical Mennonite Church in Angola)

### 2013

"There are currently several young women participating in Mennonite international service programs in Indonesia, and three were invited as guests to the worship service: myself (Lisi Schrottner), Fang from China, and Shammah Nakawesi from Uganda. . . .

[As part of the service,] we were able to share music with our fellow believers. We began with a well-known chorus, "As the Deer", in English; it was followed by readings of Psalm 42:1-3 in [three] languages: Mandarin, Luganda and German. We closed the song by repeating it in the Indonesian language. As the three of us sang with slight hesitation, the joyful noise lifted from the worshipping congregation was beautiful!

To wrap up our presentation, Shammah led us in a traditional Zulu song called "Bambelela"; by adding "Yesu" it means "hold on to Jesus". There was a dance included and we got most of the congregation moving with us. It was a simple song and the steps were straightforward but there is such joy that comes from dancing and singing together for the Lord. Many people approached me afterwards and commented that we must do that song again!"

– Lisi Schrottner  
GKMI Jogja Yogyakarta, Indonesia

walking with God  
 caminemos con Dios  
 en marche avec Dieu



# MWC announces theme, program details for Assembly 2015

Preparations are moving forward for both the Mennonite World Conference Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015, at the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA 21-26 July, 2015, and the Global Youth Summit 18+ at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, USA, 17-19 July, 2015.

## Assembly theme: "Walking with God"

"Walking with God" will be the theme for Pennsylvania 2015. The theme will work with biblical texts and our own stories and experiences of joy and grief – stories that will encourage us to continue our walk with God and invite others to walk with us. Subthemes will give special focus to each day of Assembly.

### Program

The daily program will start with music and singing accompanied by an international choir. Each morning will include a presentation and time for meeting as friendship groups, small gatherings of people from different areas of the world who will have the opportunity to meet, discuss relevant topics and build relationships. Each afternoon, participants will choose from a variety of sessions: from workshops to service opportunities, from sports to local tours to the Global Church Village. Each evening will feature



a worship service with a focus on a different continent every day. During the worship service we will share our gifts and learn from each other.



### Children's Activities

Children will meet in their own space and celebrate their own Assembly each day. A special program will allow children of different languages and backgrounds to come together.

### Youth Activities

Youth 18 and under will meet every morning in the Global Church Village space and enjoy their own program. In the afternoons they will participate in special workshops, service opportunities, sports and tours.

### Global Church Village

The Global Church Village will be a meeting point throughout Assembly. Churches of each continent will have a space for displays. A stage in the center of the Global Church Village will

feature international and local artists performing live throughout the Assembly. This space will provide one means by which to share and celebrate the gifts of our worldwide family. If you are a performer (visual artist, musician, etc.), you will be able to apply to perform on the Global Church Village stage with your registration.

### Program Oversight Committee

People from five different continents were chosen for the Assembly Program Oversight Committee: Don McNiven, USA/Canada, will be responsible for music and worship; Vikal Rao, India, for the Global Church Village; Marius van Hoogstraten, Netherlands/Germany, for



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workshops; Thobekile Ncube, Zimbabwe, for morning speakers and friendship groups; and Egon Sawatzky, Paraguay, for children's and high-school youth program. Liesa Unger, MWC International Events Officer, Germany, will lead the team.

### Cost and Registration Procedures

Registration for Assembly will start in August 2014, both online and through printed forms. Registration with a full meal plan for an adult from the Global North will be roughly \$575 US; for participants from the Global South, roughly \$90 US. Family discounts and sponsorships will be available. Housing options will include home stays with area families, dormitories and hotel rooms of different price ranges. Shuttle service will be arranged from hotels, dormitories and meeting points for home stays.

### Travel

Harrisburg International Airport is the closest hub to the Assembly location; other international airports in the greater area



include Philadelphia, Washington/Baltimore and New York. Shuttle buses will be arranged from major airports to the Assembly site. An excellent train system connects Harrisburg to Philadelphia and New York.

### Volunteer opportunities

Many volunteers are needed to help make the Assembly an unforgettable event. Volunteer sign-up will go online in September 2013. Volunteers will get a reduced registration rate. If



you are interested in volunteering before and/or during Assembly, please check the MWC website ([www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org)) for more information in the coming months.

### Assembly Scattered

Options to visit with churches in North America will be developed in the next several months. Information will be available online and with your registration material.

### Global Youth Summit 18+

The third MWC Global Youth Summit (GYS) will take place just before Assembly Gathered at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, USA, from 17-19 July, 2015. The theme will be "Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts." Delegates and participants from around the world will gather to listen, learn, share and celebrate together. All GYS delegates and participants can remain in the lodgings at Messiah College during the Assembly Gathered experience and continue building relationships among young adults from all parts of the world.

### Other Meetings

MWC General Council, Commissions and Networks will meet in Harrisburg during the week prior to Assembly Gathered. Different Anabaptist organizations are planning their meetings in close proximity to Assembly



Gathered. If your organization is planning a meeting, MWC staff will be happy to help find the best time and place to do so. Please contact us at [pennsylvania2015@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:pennsylvania2015@mwc-cmm.org)

### Bookmarks

Beginning in January 2013, MWC has released a different bookmark each month featuring the faces of people planning to attend Assembly 2015. Maybe your face is among them? If not, you can still send in pictures for future bookmarks. Visit [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org) to download the bookmarks; email photos to be considered for future bookmarks to [pennsylvania2015@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:pennsylvania2015@mwc-cmm.org)

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**News Briefs**



**Karen Flores of Honduras (front) and Ana Yessica Maya of Mexico (back) sign the t-shirt of another participant in the 2013 Central American Mennonite Youth Conference, as a memento of their time together at the event. Photo by Rodrigo Pedroza**

**Anabaptist youth gather in Costa Rica**

**Heredia, Costa Rica –** Mennonite young people from a variety of countries came together for the annual Central American Mennonite Youth Conference in Costa Rica, 27-30 March 2013.

One hundred and twenty youth representatives from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Puerto Rico and Mexico shared with each other around the theme of “Mennonite Identity.” They were also joined by several North Americans who work with Mennonite Central Committee in Central America.

This is the third year that Costa Rica has participated in the conference and the first time they have hosted it. The conference began 19 years ago, with a retreat between young people of the *Iglesia Casa Horeb of Guatemala* and

the *Iglesia Menonita Aurora* of Honduras, and – due to its popularity – has grown ever since.

This year’s conference included devotionals, workshops and group reflection times. The workshops explored various themes, including gender identity, peace and conflict resolution, and how to read the Bible in community.

Fellowship with fellow Anabaptists from various countries played a major role in the conference program. Activities included an afternoon rally, with numerous games and team building activities; a cultural night celebrating the different countries represented; and a fireside event on the closing night, where participants told jokes, sang and played games.

During observances like the Lord’s Supper, remarked attendee Rodrigo Pedroza, participants recognized that,

“despite borders and national differences, Christ has made us one. We closed with a hug, as a sign of love and the fraternal ties that the Lord formed during his event.”

– Kristina Toews, with a report by Karoline Mora

**Exploring the Anabaptist vision in South Korea**

**Chuncheon, South Korea –** U.K. Anabaptist leader Stuart Murray explored the basics of Anabaptist theology, history and ministry with Mennonites in South Korea during a country-wide speaking tour 20 April-3 May.

During his visit, Murray engaged in conversation with Anabaptist leaders about ministry in a postmodern age.

“Stuart’s lessons had a great impact,” said Kyong-Jung Kim, director of the Korea Anabaptist Center and the Mennonite World Conference General Council member from Jesus Village Church, an MWC associate member-church. “Everyone walked away with something of value.”

For Kim, lessons about how the church can approach a post-Christendom era were important. “Even though Korea was never influenced by Christendom,” he said, “it was Christendom-influenced Christianity that western missionaries brought to Korea about 200 years ago.” The theologies of both the Catholic and Protestant churches in Korea were developed under the auspices of Christendom, which differs from the Anabaptist free, peace church tradition, he said.

“No wonder it has been so difficult for Korean churches to adapt a different understanding of theology and practices from an Anabaptist perspective,” Kim noted. “Stuart Murray’s insights and teachings helped us to find different approaches to understand what it means to be a church and how to live out accordingly.”

Mennonite Church Canada – an MWC member-church – cooperated in bringing Murray to South Korea for the speaking tour.

**Adapted from a Mennonite Church Canada news release by Deborah Froese**



**Stuart Murray (left), a U.K. Anabaptist leader and author, poses with Kyong-Jung Kim, director of the Korea Anabaptist Center. Photo by Kyong-Jung Kim**

## Theological training scholarships awarded to 21 women

**Goshen Indiana, USA** – In 2013, Mennonite Women USA's International Women's Fund (IWF) awarded scholarships totaling \$10,500 to 21 women in India, Africa and Latin America. Scholarships are used by recipients in pursuit of theological training for church leadership.

Prospective students are referred to Mennonite Women USA by church leaders in their countries, or by North



Latin American recipients of IWF funds, some of whom have completed their theological training and some who are still enrolled. Front row (from left): Yanett Palacios (Guatemala), Albania Molina (Honduras), Ofelia Garcia (Mexico); back row (from left): Elizabeth Vado (Nicaragua), Rosario Rosales (Honduras). Garcia is a member of the MWC Mission Commission, and Vado served on the MWC Executive Committee from 2006-2009.

Americans who work with the churches in other countries.

Over the past 13 years, 75 women have been awarded scholarships, totaling more than \$98,274. Women in 18 different countries have been assisted in their education through the efforts of the IWF.

Former IWF recipients Rebecca Osiro (Kenya) and Alix Lozano (Colombia) serve on the Faith and Life Commission of Mennonite World Conference. Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, moderator of Mennonite Church USA, received IWF funds to study theology in Colombia, where she was ordained to Christian ministry.

In September five women will be ordained by the *Communauté Mennonite au Congo* in Democratic Republic of Congo, including Sidonie Swana Tangiza Tenda, who is an IWF recipient. Rachel Bagh, another recipient, teaches seminary in India and has participated in the formation of the Asian Women Theologians

group. Other former IWF recipients are currently pastoring churches, teaching in colleges and seminaries, and actively participating in Christian education and community activities.

The training provided by the scholarships is intended to help women across generations and cultures nurture their life in Christ, use their gifts, express their prophetic voice, minister to their local congregations and contribute to the leadership of the broader church.

The International Women's Fund has its origins with the

and Mennonite Women USA, with support from additional churches and agencies.

MTAL, now in its tenth year, has its roots in the 2003 Mennonite World Conference assembly in Zimbabwe.

In the recent workshop held 24-26 May in Chihuahua, the sessions about loss touched the women deeply. They felt both the loss of a pastor, and the loss of their sense of security.

The women came from various conferences and cultures, including Hispanic, Germanic and Tarahumara indigenous. Many are leaders in their churches or conventions. Together they found sisterly similarities and mutual support.

Rosy Guillen, mission worker in Chihuahua, Mexico, did a dramatization of the Samaritan woman with an emphasis on how Jesus helps women to remove their masks.

In small groups participants responded to the questions, "What is the mask that I wear and what do I hide behind it?" Then – one by one – each woman removed her mask and was affirmed by the group.

Women who participated in Chihuahua anticipate reproducing the workshop in the future.

– Linda Shelly

## Delivering living water in Congo

**Mbuji Mayi, Democratic Republic of Congo** – A pastor in the *Communauté Evangélique Mennonite au Congo* has spearheaded a ministry of compassion to suffering prisoners in the Democratic



**Jean-Richard Muteba Wa Mbuyi stands in the doorway of his church in Mbuji Mayi. Photo by Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission**

Republic of Congo.

Jean-Richard Muteba Wa Mbuyi spends a lot of time ministering inside La Prison Centrale de Mbuji Mayi. His outreach began in March 2013, when, while walking by the prison, strains of a song from inside the prison walls gripped his attention: "We are dying of thirst / No water for days."

Muteba laid aside all other responsibilities and entered the prison gates. He was quickly granted access to the rooms where approximately 800 people were being held while awaiting trial. All were desperate for water to drink.

In Congo, people accused of a crime are guilty until proven innocent. It can be several years before a judge reviews their cases. During this time, prisoners struggle to survive in cramped conditions.

Though prisoners' families are expected to provide food for them, the prison normally ensures the availability of enough water to sustain life – except when water shortages in the nearby city create a scarcity. Muteba carried the news of the

Continued on page iv

Women in Mission of the former General Conference Mennonite Church. For 20 years, before the General Conference church merged with the (Old) Mennonite Church in 2002, Women in Mission funded many women with scholarships for theological education.

– Ruth Lapp Guengerich

## 'Sister Care' workshop eases pain of loss

**Chihuahua, Mexico** – Five months has passed since the assassination of Josefina (Chepina) Rempening Diaz in Cuauhtémoc, Mexico. Yet many of her congregants continue to live in fear and sorrow.

A recent workshop series, however, is helping to heal the pain. Called *Cuidándonos entre mujeres* (Sister Care), this series – which has been held throughout Latin America – is a joint project of the Movement of Latin American Anabaptist Women Theologians (MTAL)

## Give a gift to MWC

Your prayers and financial gifts are deeply appreciated. Your contributions are important. They will:

- Enable expanded communication strategies to nurture a worldwide family of faith
- Strengthen our communion's identity and witness as Anabaptist Christians in our diverse contexts, and
- Build up community through networks and gatherings so that we can learn from and support each other

Go to [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org) and click the "Get Involved" tab for prayer requests and on the "Donate" tab for multiple ways to give online. Or mail your gift to Mennonite World Conference at one of these addresses:

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17606 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 Canada
- 28A No.16-41 Piso 2, Bogota Colombia
- 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg France

## “What do you love about MWC?”

*MWC staffers describe their favorite things about our global fellowship.*

### Rafael Zaracho

Secretary, Missions Commission  
St. Andrews, Scotland



“I love that MWC offers the space and the opportunity to see, smell, taste and hear of the multiform grace and

love of God in and through the lives of brothers and sisters.”

### Eleanor Miller

Communications Assistant  
Strasbourg, France



“I love the people of MWC – people I have worked with, people I have met from around the world, people who have

kept the faith joyfully often in difficult circumstances, people I have come to love and call my own. They form a cloud of witnesses that surround me and encourage me to keep the faith.”

### Ayub Omondi Awich

Staff Mentor, Young Anabaptists  
Kisumu Nyanaa, Kenya



“MWC is a community of great love, joy and support, where brothers and sisters share their gifts without measure.

MWC has made the whole world a small village of fellowship, beyond race and geographical disparity. Oh! how I love to be in this family to share together for the rest of my life.”

## MWC Commission projects gain momentum

The Faith and Life Commission of Mennonite World Conference was hard at work in July and August 2013, launching and reviewing a variety of initiatives developed in recent years.

### Mennonite-Lutheran reconciliation

In early July, a six-member task force appointed by the Commission met at Goshen College (Goshen, Indiana, USA) with counterparts from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to review progress on the commitments that the two global communions made to each other in a service of reconciliation in Stuttgart, Germany in July 2010.

At that service, which culminated nearly five years of dialogue, representatives of the LWF asked forgiveness for the violent persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century, and for the negative portrayals of Anabaptists that have been allowed to continue within their their communities. They also committed their churches and seminaries to interpret the Lutheran confessions in light of this dialogue and to continue conversations with Anabaptists on various topics.

MWC leaders, in turn, committed themselves to promote a more balanced interpretation of the Lutheran-Anabaptist story, to continue conversation on unresolved issues, and to encourage their member-churches to seek greater cooperation among with Lutherans in service to the world.

In their joint meetings at Goshen, the two task forces identified several areas of progress in their mutual commitments. They also focused on issues that need further attention.

“After five hundred years of separation, full reconciliation will not happen overnight,” said John D. Roth, professor of history at Goshen College and secretary of the Faith and Life Commission. “But we praise God for these steps toward healing within the Body of Christ.”

MWC members of the task force included Andre Gingerich Stoner, Gayle Gerber Koontz, James Juhnke, Enrique Rodríguez and John D. Roth. The corresponding LWF task force included Timothy Wengert, Musawenkosi Biyela, Kathryn

is to develop a more robust understanding in this regard.

The project has been under development for several years. Its roots run back to 2010, to an international gathering of Mennonite leaders to assess the results from the Multi-National



Research associates in the MWC Global Anabaptist Profile project. Photo by John D. Roth

Johnson, Selma Chen, Hellen Rios, Anne Burghardt, Michael Martin and Ivo Huber.

Each task force also includes one representative from the other group: for the MWC task force, that role is filled by Kathryn Johnson, a Lutheran professor of history who helped to organize the reconciliation service in 2010. On the Lutheran task force, that role is filled by Roth.

### Surveying global Anabaptism

Just a week later, Faith and Life Commission members gathered with other leaders in the global Anabaptist community to launch the MWC “Global Anabaptist Profile.”

Also held on the Goshen College campus, this gathering drew together nearly 30 people from 18 countries.

The Global Anabaptist Profile, which is organized and funded by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism at Goshen, will be the first systematic study of how the MWC “Shared Convictions” are finding expression among the 25 groups participating in the study.

“The size of the Anabaptist-Mennonite global fellowship has nearly tripled in the past three decades,” notes Roth. Yet he acknowledges that we know very little about the lived experiences of this community – their beliefs, practices and challenges. The goal of the GAP

Anabaptist survey, sponsored by Eastern Mennonite Missions.

“I was convinced that MWC could benefit by a similar, yet more representative project,” notes Roth.

The proposed project received a boost in 2012, with its approval by MWC’s General Council and Executive Committee. Subsequently, 25 MWC member-churches were randomly selected as project participants. (The sample is proportionally representative of each of MWC’s five continental regions.) Following this selection process, each member-church appointed a research associate to carry out the project within her or his respective country.

These twenty-five research associates came together with Faith and Life Commission members at the Goshen gathering, held 29 July-2 August. During the four-day gathering, participants revised the survey, refined additional questions specific to their conference and received basic training in social research methods.

Organizers hope that the Global Anabaptist Profile will be completed in time for the MWC Assembly to be held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA in July 2015.

For more information on the project, visit the MWC website [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org)

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thirsty prisoners to the Sangilay Evangelical Mennonite Church, where he is part of the pastoral team. The church leaders decided to disburse some funds to pay for water for the parched prisoners.

With these funds, Muteba paid for several loads of water to be sent to the prison. The delivery system consists of men and boys going to streams with six 50-gallon jugs strapped to their bicycles.

In addition, Muteba visits the prison weekly to provide pastoral counseling to the prisoners. He reports that his visits are a source of hope for the prisoners he visits.

Rarely does he enter the prison without hearing many thanks for the water his church provided when they were desperate – water that increases the fruitfulness of the gospel seeds he plants.

– Lynda Hollinger-Janzen

Most are church members with full-time jobs and families. One Saturday a month, they gather for a daylong intensive class, only breaking for lunch.

Each curriculum has a different structure, but they all meet the same need in each context: to raise Anabaptist leaders for a new and growing church.

The vision for this network of unique seminary programs began with the *Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia* (SBMC, or Colombia Mennonite Biblical Seminary). For more than 20 years, SBMC has educated and sent leaders for ministry throughout the world.

The fruits of SBMC's labor started seminaries in Ecuador and Venezuela. In 2012, for example, SBMC alumni and Mennonite church-planting pastors César Moya and Patricia Urueña launched *ProPaz* (ProPeace), a seminary in Quito, Ecuador. Years earlier, SBMC administrators Alix Lozano and Zarái Gonzalia laid the groundwork for what is today *Seminario Bíblico Menonita de*



Students María de Melo and Carlos Rodríguez working together during a seminary course.

## Training Anabaptist leaders in Latin America

**Bogotá, Colombia** – This year, 210 leaders will complete Anabaptist education courses at seminaries in Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. Although the seminaries teach by “the book,” their students are far from traditional.

*Venezuela* (Mennonite Biblical Seminary of Venezuela).

Today, SBMC enrolls more than 100 students in at least one course per year in Colombia alone, and serves others through its network of satellite campuses. Enrollment is high, too, at the institutions in Ecuador and Venezuela, yet all three schools face challenges.

Nevertheless, leaders of the three seminaries report the great impact that biblical study makes in communities. “It’s worth the time and energy to develop leaders,” said Urueña, “because they are committed to serving their neighbors.”

## Prayers



MWC officers (left to right) J. Nelson Kraybill (president-elect, USA), Ernst Bergen (treasurer, Paraguay), Danisa Ndlovu (president, Zimbabwe), Janet Plenert (vice-president, Canada), and César García (general secretary, Colombia). Photo by Janet Plenert

- Pray for the people of the province of Alberta, Canada, and the ongoing work of Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) as they are responding to flood damaged areas in this province. Triggered by torrential rain, the extensive flooding killed at least four people and displaced more than 175,000 others. MDS is the leading Mennonite agency in response to the Alberta Flood. Find the latest information on the MDS website at [www.mds.mennonite.net/home/](http://www.mds.mennonite.net/home/)

- Our brothers and sisters from the *Communauté Mennonite au Congo* (CMCo), in the Democratic Republic of Congo, have asked for prayer for the ordination of five women. The ceremony for two of the five women took place on 22 September 2013 in Kinshasa, DRC. These two women are Swana Falanga Sidonie and Ngombe Kidinda Fabienne. Praise God for their continuing faithful service.

- Pray for MWC member churches in Angola that received a visit from members of the Deacons Commission in September after dealing with challenges in the visa

process. Pray that the visit will continue to send a message of encouragement and hope to sisters and brothers in Angola.

- Praise God for the MWC officers who met 26-29 August 2013 in Zimbabwe. Pray for them as they take steps to keep equipping and strengthening our global Anabaptist family.

- Join with PeaceBuilders Community, Inc. (PBCI) in giving thanks for the signing of a new wealth sharing deal, between the Peace Negotiating Panels of the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. May they all enjoy the positive results of this new deal and experience peace. PBCI is a Mennonite peace and reconciliation consulting group, belonging to the Integrated Mennonite Churches, Inc. of the Philippines, a MWC member-church.

- Pray for the Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia as they prepare to hold a first-ever workshop for church leaders, 26 October-1 November in Choma. Pray especially for Bishop Thuma Hamakang’andu, a member of the MWC Executive Committee, as he leads this important event.

## Courier/Correo/Courier

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# Obedience

## A Treasured Inheritance

Reflections on being a disciple of Christ



by Danisa Ndlovu

**A**s I reflect on my Christian journey, one inheritance from my church, the Brethren in Christ, that I treasure is the simple teaching to be obedient as a disciple of Christ. It is a teaching that is life-changing, in that it calls for sacrificial commitment and dedication to Christ and his cause.

Obedience simply means “submission to authority.” It requires a willingness to carry out that authority’s instructions. This is how the early Anabaptists understood Christian discipleship. Run through the pages of history of the early Anabaptists – furnish yourself with the stories of the sacrifices they made – and you will not fail to appreciate that their underlying motivation was to be obedient and faithful to Christ, to the church and to the scriptures as they understood them.

Confessing and embracing Christ as Lord is a call to view Him as the highest authority in our lives. Therefore, whatever he says must be carefully and painstakingly followed

by his disciples. In that spirit, the early Anabaptists took the words of Christ – especially the Sermon on the Mount – seriously, as failure to do so could result in “a great crash,” as indicated in the last verses of Jesus’ sermon (Matthew 7:24-27).

So what does it mean to practice Christian discipleship? Put another way, what is obedience to Christ?

### Trust that sometimes leads to suffering

The need for obedience is fundamentally the need to trust in God and God’s son, Jesus Christ. Failure to put one’s trust in God potentially leads to idolatry. It displeases God. Both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are dotted with stories that emphasize the need and importance of obedience to God and to his Word.

Amazingly, obedience to God – although commended and blessed – does not necessarily lead to a life of bliss. Indeed, for many Christians around the world now and in the past, it often leads to suffering. The early Anabaptists found in this truth their source of strength, and persevered. These disciples, due to their obedience to God, suffered at the hands of those who were opposed to God’s will. In the midst of their

**Dirk Willems, a sixteenth-century Dutch Anabaptist, rescued his enemy and captor when the man fell through an icy river. Willems was subsequently arrested for his beliefs and executed.**

suffering they found encouragement in the biblical stories of people like Moses, Elijah, Daniel, Jeremiah and Shadrack, Meshack and Abednigo – and especially in the life and teachings of Christ.

Our forbearers would have shouted “amen!” to the words of American pastor and writer Chuck Swindoll, who once wrote, “When you suffer and lose, that does not mean you are being disobedient to God. In fact, it might mean you’re right in the centre of His will. The path of obedience is often marked by times of suffering and loss.”

To lead a life of obedience is a *choice* that one makes. God does not coerce us to obey him. We willingly obey God in all circumstances, knowing that God always knows what is best for us and what best can be accomplished through us as we journey together through life’s trials and triumphs. In the words of missionary Elisabeth

Elliot, “God is God. Because he is God, he is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in his holy will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to.”

It is in this lifestyle of trust in God that one can confidently sing with the faithful: “Where he leads me I will follow / I go with Him all the way.” As disciples of Christ, we must understand that suffering is unavoidable. And though we should not blindly embrace it, it is nevertheless a mark of true discipleship – of our trust in God.

### Reliance on God in poverty and plenty

The call for obedience in the church has always been understood as a call for faithfulness to the scriptures. For this reason, Anabaptists view the Sermon on the Mount as a normative guide to conducting their lives in relation to God, one another, their enemies and earthly institutions such as the state.

Consider the lives of the early Anabaptists. The majority were poor, and some were forced into poverty as a result of persecution that came upon them because of their faith in Christ and understanding of the scriptures. It is not surprising that these believers were drawn to passages such as Matthew 6:25-34, which calls for reliance on God for provisions of life. Day-to-day survival was indeed in God’s hands. For them, God was indeed all in all.

Such passages have the same draw for our communities today that experience situations of oppression, conflict or injustice. For those brothers and sisters around the world whose daily bread is the uncertainty of life, obedience to such words as Christ spoke in this passage is not an option – it is a mark of faithfulness, a necessity for perseverance.

On the other hand, those privileged to assist the needy in obedience to the scriptures are challenged to give in ways that will not make their “left hand know what their right hand is doing”; they are thus rewarded by the Father who sees in secret (Matthew 6:1-4). Obedience in this respect means faithfulness to words of Christ in addressing questions that are ethical in nature. It means constantly checking our motivation for the decisions we make and the resultant actions we take, so that we can say with Paul: “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17).



**During World War I, Canadian Brethren in Christ E. J. Swalm was imprisoned because he refused to join the Canadian army. He believed that military service violated Christ’s call to love one’s enemies. Photo courtesy of Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives**

### Living in truth without need for oaths

True disciples of Christ live in truth and by the Truth. There is never an excuse for living a wishy-washy life. Truth must be the signature of their being.

Early Anabaptists modeled this kind of truthful living. For instance, these believers refrained from swearing oaths. In that time, swearing oaths was perceived as an admission that there were times when one’s “yes” was not a “yes” and one’s “no” not a “no” (Matthew 5:33-37). Shouldn’t true Christians live lives of truthfulness *all the time* – not just when speaking to government officials or doing business?

Obedience to Christ in this respect – in a world which glorified taking oaths – meant refusal to engage in such acts and living up to the consequences that followed.

The path of obedience to Christ is infested with practices that are diverse – some national and others cultural, some which may appear innocent yet are cancerous to one’s faith. As Christians, we should never be naïve and fail to carefully study our contexts together, in the light of the scriptures, letting go of practices that inhibit us from living the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, let our “yes” be “yes” and

our “no” be “no”! Our obedience to Christ must be seen in how we address ourselves to both ethical and moral questions of our time.

### A spirit of love and humility, not fear

One cannot talk of Christian obedience without looking at Christ as our model. Jesus, when expressing his obedience to God the Father, said, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and finish his work” (John 4:34). Jesus subjected himself to the authority of God the Father because he loved him. In the priestly prayer in John 17:20-26, we get many glimpses of the intimate relationship between Jesus and God. Phrases like “Father, just as you are in me and I in you” and “as we are one,” give us great insight into the relationship between the two. A concluding remark – “I know you, and they know you sent me, I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them” – shows how that intimacy manifest itself in Jesus’ earthly ministry.

The point I want to make here is that Jesus had an intimate relationship with God the Father and that the love between the two was intense. Most significantly for our discussion of obedience, we note that Jesus obeyed God *out of love* rather than out of fear and coercion.

We, in turn, obey Christ out of love – the same intense love we have for him, as articulated for us in this powerful prayer. Jesus was willing to go all the way and pay the ultimate prize – death on the cross – because he knew God and unconditionally loved him. The church of Jesus Christ today can only stand out by reflecting the glory of Christ as it gives unqualified submission and love for Him.

The life of obedience as demonstrated by Christ not only flows out of a loving heart but also calls us to embrace a very important virtue – humility. The New Testament hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 enables us to see how humility relates to true obedience. There was on the part of Christ a willingness to shed off his God-nature for the less glamorous human/servant nature. He willingly submitted his authority to that of God. Christ willingly listened to that higher authority in order to effectively carry out the mission for which he had come. He was willing to lose that which in the present would be viewed as valuable and important, in order to gain what was not yet seen – but of greater cosmic importance.

Therefore, obedience as exemplified by Christ – to put it in romantic terms – is where love and humility kiss! Genuine

obedience as taught by the church is the willingness for one to submit to the Lordship of Christ and out of love for him and in humble submission to him be willing to do *whatsoever* the Lord has commanded us to do.

**Loving and praying for enemies**

Jesus was not apologetic when he said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). Therefore, we need to take seriously one of the important – yet sometimes difficult – commands given to every true follower of Christ: “You have heard that it is said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... If you love those who love you what reward will you get?... And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others?” (Matthew 5:43-44, 46, 47)

These verses are intimidating, but very profound. Today’s church cannot afford to

read such scriptures without engaging in some soul-searching; the church of yester-years did the same. It is no wonder, therefore, that our theology of nonviolence as Anabaptists is based on such passages.

One cannot obey Jesus’ command to love one’s enemy and then by the same token go out and take the so-called enemy’s life. Paul writes, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners [his enemies!] Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). In other words, God loved his enemies – us – such that instead of annihilating us, he gave us life through Christ! Obedience to Christ means we must love those who persecute us and, like God, wish them life instead of death.

We are commanded to pray for those who persecute us. Many Christians believe in the power of prayer. Many are able to say without much thought: “Prayer changes things.” Many times Christians are not willing or are reluctant to pray for their enemies. Let



Women in the *Communauté Mennonite au Congo* (Congo Mennonite Church) – including Thérèse Tudiakuile, Charlie Kasha Kamba, and Marie-Louise Tumba Yama – are following God’s call to pastoral ministry. Photo: Joseph Nkongolo

me propose a few reasons why this is true. First, they know that prayer changes things. They are afraid that God will show mercy to their enemy. They would rather see their enemy suffer or die! Second, they do not want God to open their enemy’s eyes to the truth and thus accept God’s salvation. They do not want to share with their enemy the glorious inheritance of God’s kingdom.

When we pray for our enemies, God usually and certainly deals with the negative attitudes that we hold against our enemies.



After the triumph of the revolutionaries and the expulsion of missionaries from Cuba in the 1950s, Juana M. García assumed leadership for the *Hermanos en Cristo* (Brethren in Christ) church in her community – obediently following God in ministry even though she was a woman in a male-dominated tradition. Photo courtesy of the Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives

These attitudes cultivate and nurse the spirit of revenge. Therefore, harbouring them derives from a rebellious spirit that says, “God, leave me alone! I will deal with my problems my way.”

It should not surprise us that Christ, at the conclusion of his teaching on prayer (Matthew 6:5-13), makes a strong statement about forgiveness: “For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:14-15). This teaching goes hand in hand with the teaching on loving our enemies and praying for our persecutors.

Those who love and follow God through Christ will love their enemies to the bitter end – even when it is at the cost of their very lives. They will pray for them with anticipation of seeing them accept the Christ as Lord and Saviour. In so doing, they will qualify to be “invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9).

**Conclusion**

This is the teaching I call my inheritance. It is my treasure, and I seek to pass it on to the next generation so that they might do the same.

The world is better served with an obedient church – disciples of Christ committed to surrender all to him in order to gain all from him. Such is our church when it realizes it has all the resources it needs to be an effective transformative force in today’s world.



Danisa Ndlovu is president of Mennonite World Conference and bishop of *Ibandla Labazalwane kuKristu eZimbabwe* (Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe).

# Indonesia

## Struggling, learning, serving

by Adhi Dharma

**T**he Mennonite community in Indonesia is diverse and dynamic! Discussing its origins and development may bring to mind many questions, especially for those in the Global North: How did Mennonitism take root in Indonesia? How did Indonesia become the fifth-largest Mennonite centre in the world? And how did people with names like Dharma, Widjaja, Pasrah, Arum and Sutrisno come to identify as Mennonite, since “familiar” Mennonite names are Yoder, Roth, Neufeld and Rempel?

Just like other countries in the Global South, Indonesia has its own unique story of its inhabitants’ encounter with Anabaptism. Indeed, its story is key to understanding the explosive growth of Anabaptism outside “origin places” like Europe and North America. And yet this particular story also reflects the challenges and opportunities faced by Christians around the world.

### A patchwork of cultures and religions

In order to fully understand the Mennonite community in Indonesia, we must first explore (briefly) the culture, history and religious developments in our country.

Indonesia itself is an archipelago country, comprised of more than 17,000 islands scattered around a 735,000-square-mile region of Southeast Asia. Over its long history it has become a melting pot of various cultures, traditions, languages and religions. Chinese merchants brought elements of their culture to the region beginning in the first through sixth centuries. In the fifth to fifteenth centuries, Hinduism dominated the nation’s religious and cultural horizons. Beginning in the thirteenth century, Islam became a major influence in the region, and today it is the majority religion.

Christianity came to Indonesia in 1522, when Portuguese colonizers built a port on the island of Ternate, in the Moluccas of eastern Indonesia. As implied by its arrival, Christianity was closely coupled to modern European culture, which strongly influenced Indonesia during its colonial period (sixteenth through early twentieth centuries).

Throughout most of this period, Indonesia was controlled by the Dutch, who brought Mennonitism – among other traditions – to the region.

### Indonesian Mennonites today

Nowadays, approximately 108,000 Mennonites call Indonesia home. They worship in more than 350 Mennonite churches affiliated with one of three conferences, or synods: *Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa* (Javanese Evangelical Church, or GITJ); *Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia* (Muria Christian Church of Indonesia, or GKMI); and *Jemaat Kristen Indonesia* (Christian Congregation in Indonesia, or JKI).

### From Mission Church to Independent Synod: The GITJ Story

Mennonitism came to Indonesia during the latter half of Dutch colonial rule, through the efforts of Pieter Jansz. In 1851, Jansz – sent by the *Doopsgezinde Zending Vereniging* (DVZ), a Dutch mission board – landed on the island of Java, and soon settled near Mount Muria. At first, he found little success, as three big challenges stood in his way. First, the location around Mount Muria was not a fertile area for evangelism. Second, conflict developed with the Dutch Indies government. And third, anti-colonial struggles were increasing in strength. Working within this cultural and political dilemma was not easy, and Jansz finally realized that mission work could not depend on foreigners. Evangelism and the work of the church had to arise out of the convictions of indigenous peoples.

Unfortunately, Jansz’s effort to involve indigenous people in his ministry did not have a major impact, since Jansz continued to operate out of a western understanding of leadership – an understanding that in some ways did not fit with Javanese culture. This reality helps to explain Jansz’s conflict with the indigenous Javanese missionary Tunggul Wulung, whom Jansz viewed as too strong in his mystical beliefs (which were very closely related to his Javanese cultural background). Neither Jansz’s nor Wulung’s outreach efforts resulted in significant growth.

A worship service at the *JKI Injii Kerajaan* church in Semarang, one of the largest congregations in the JKI synod.  
Photo by Adhi Dharma







## Anabaptists in Indonesia

### **Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ)** Javanese Evangelical Church

Membership	43,250
Congregations	104
Headquarters	Pati
Presiding Officer	Muhammad Zubaedi Ichsudin

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

Muria Christian Church of Indonesia

Membership	16,208
Congregations	52
Headquarters	Semarang
Presiding Officer	Paulus Widjaja

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

Christian Congregation in Indonesia

Membership	49,070
Congregations	189
Headquarters	Salatiga
Presiding Officer	Sutanto Adi

Source: MWC World Directory 2012  
[www.tinyurl.com/ms8hf5e](http://www.tinyurl.com/ms8hf5e)

Politics also played a role in the slow growth of the Mennonite missionary efforts. Unlike other missionary agencies operating in the country at this time, Mennonites refused to use political authority to spread Christianity. Students of Indonesian history have noted that political authority has long played a key role in the growth and spread of particular religions, including Christianity. Because of their beliefs about church-state separation, Mennonites did not seek political power, relying instead on educational and medical outreaches to spread the gospel in Indonesia.

The growth of the Mennonite church in Indonesia began in earnest following the chartering of the GITJ synod in 1925. The issue of autonomy – of indigenous people assuming leadership from the Western missionaries – had been a tension point for many years. With the maturation of the GITJ congregation in the 1920s, some began to point out the church's dependency on the mission board, especially in terms of finances and leadership. Gradually, indigenous believers determined that self-governance was the only way out of that dependency. Moreover, the political crisis brought on by World War II convinced the mission board of the need to turn leadership over to local church leaders.

The autonomy ultimately strengthened GITJ. A 1957 report noted 11 mature con-

gregations with 2,410 adult members and 2,850 children. Growth of this magnitude continued well into the 1980s.

Yet growth brought with it problems. Achieving independence from the mission board was not easy, as the churches had relied on this body for spiritual direction and financial aid for many years. Despite hard work, conflicts over leadership and finances peaked in the 1980s. The synod struggled to identify a called leader to guide its churches, and to develop revenue streams to replace those from the mission board. Even now, the church continues to wrestle with these issues. At the same time, it continues to experience vitality: in 2012, the synod had 43,250 members in 104 congregations.

### **An Indigenous Church from the Start: The GKMI Story**

As GITJ was moving toward autonomy in the early twentieth century, another Indonesian Mennonite group – GKMI – was born. Unlike GITJ, which started under the auspices of a Western missionary board, GKMI began through the efforts of a Chinese entrepreneur, Tee Siem Tat, in Kudus, Central Java. Before his conversion, Tee was a follower of the Confucian religion; he met Christ during a time of personal sickness from which he experienced deliverance. Healed, he claimed, in body and soul, Tee decided to share the gospel with his Chinese relatives and friends in Kudus and the surrounding environs near Mount Muria.

Three years after his conversion, in 1920, Tee and 24 of his friends were baptized by Nicolai Thiessen, a Dutch Mennonite missionary, at Tee's house. After their baptisms they continued to share the gospel with their friends in the area.

Tee decided to identify with the Mennonites because of their values, and soon began to work with the missionaries near Mount Muria. However, the fruit of his ministry – the GKMI synod – was from the outset independent financially, theologically and administratively from the Mennonite mission board.

Recognizing God's call to share the gospel with all peoples in every land, Tee and his friends extended their ministry beyond their Chinese friends and relatives to the Javanese people living in their area. In 1958, they changed the name of their church from "Chinese Christian Mennonite" to "Muria Christian Church of Indonesia," and elected a Javanese pastor, Soedarsohadji Notodihardjo, as synod's general secretary.

Today, the ministry of GKMI extends to seven islands in Indonesia, and its membership rolls include people from various tribes.



**Menno Si Pendamai (Menno the Peacemaker), a Sunday school resource used by the GKMI synod to strengthen Mennonite identity among their young people. Courtesy of Adhi Dharma**

The synod still struggles to articulate a clear Mennonite identity, to form an appropriate church order and to develop reliable leadership.

### **Reaching Youth: The JKI Story**

The youngest Mennonite community in Indonesia is JKI. In the span of less than 40 years, JKI has planted over 50 congregations; at present, the church includes 45,000 members in a total of 189 congregations. Its churches are clustered in the cities near Mount Muria, as well as in East and West Java, and some places abroad.

This synod began through the efforts of a group of GKMI youth called *Keluarga Sangkakala* (Trumpet Family), who initiated several creative ministries. This group combined revival services with social ministry and used media to spread the gospel message. Over time, the group grew, and soon the necessity of forming an independent church became evident. On March 4, 1979, in Ungaran, Central Java, the baptism of several new believers led to the formal establishment of the JKI church.

JKI continues to show great growth, especially among youth. While most rural congregations are small, larger congregations lie in the cities. In fact, the synod's four largest congregations are urban: Jakarta Praise Community Church in the nation's capitol has 10,000 members; *JKI Injil Kerajaan* in Semarang has 15,000 members; *JKI Bukit Zion* in Surabaya has 5,000 members; and *JKI Maranatha* in Ungaran-Semarang has 1,800 members.

## Challenges and opportunities

All three of these Mennonite communities face similar challenges; four deserve specific mention here.

### 1. Mennonitism does not have deep roots in Indonesian culture, society or politics

Most Indonesians view Christianity as tied to and associated with Western colonialism. As a result, the religion has a negative connotation for most people. Unlike other religions, which have been more smoothly integrated into local cultures, Christianity is seen as an “intruder.” Therefore, reframing the “dark” history of colonialism while introducing the Mennonite vision is a big challenge for our communities.

### 2. Churches sense a kind of “competition” with other Christian denominations

We cannot deny that today’s churches feel a kind of “competition” with other Christian denominations. What’s more, in the cities, many churches tend to direct their ministry toward interdenominational agencies, rather than develop projects in their local communities. Over time, these “para-church” agencies develop into their own churches, further eclipsing local congregations. Thus, strengthening the local church has become a major issue for Mennonites in Indonesia.

### 3. Ministries tend to emphasize pragmatism, ritual (entertainment) and fulfilling people’s needs

In my opinion, many contemporary churches are making every effort to fulfill people’s needs – their desire to be entertained and to be ministered to personally. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this tendency toward pragmatism in ministry – so long as we maintain the values of Christianity. As Mennonites, we are challenged to hold strongly to our emphasis on community while also giving people what they want (or expect).

### 4. Politicians see religion as a commodity

Following the resignation of President Soeharto in 1998, reformation transformed the political landscape of Indonesia. The development of democracy resulted in the formation of many new social and political groups. The new political groups especially have sought to create networks for political mass, and have courted many religious groups for these efforts. Churches – especially Mennonite churches – should remain aware of these efforts, and should resist efforts to make religion a practical political commodity.

In the midst of these challenges, the Mennonite community in Indonesia is also embracing many opportunities for renewal and revitalized ministry. One opportunity before us is a return to the four basic pillars of the church: history, theology, ecclesiology and missiology. We need to remember and review the history and values of our Mennonite ancestors. In so doing we will be strengthened to face today’s challenges.

Moreover, we need to strengthen our Mennonite identity. In part, this will happen as we translate and publish books that offer instruction on Mennonite history and theology. At the same time, we need to think about how to more effectively contextualize Mennonite values for the Indonesian setting. This is not an easy task, and yet we know that nothing is impossible with our God.

Another opportunity embraced by the Indonesian Mennonite community relates to the global family of faith. All three Indonesian Mennonite synods are members of Mennonite World Conference. We welcome the support of our MWC brothers and sisters around the world, and we hope to offer the same kind of support as we invest more and more in the work of MWC.

## Many faces, same mission

The Mennonite community in Indonesia has three “faces” – GITJ, GKMI and JKI. Each “face” reflects a different background and set of experiences. At the same time, the challenges and opportunities facing these three groups are – in some ways – the same challenges and opportunities face by other Mennonite communities around the world. We all have our struggles in this modern world: we all struggle to contextualize Christian faith in appropriate ways; we all struggle to develop local ministries without stirring up a spirit of competition; we all struggle with shifting cultural landscapes and personal expectations; we all struggle to speak truth to power, whether in poverty or in plenty. As a global family of faith, shall we work together – hand in hand – to help one another? In this way, we not only struggle together – we also learn together and serve together.

Adhi Dharma is general secretary of the GKMI synod.

## MWC regional representatives appointed for Asia

**Bogotá, Colombia** – Mennonite World Conference has appointed three regional representatives to nurture relations with member and associate member churches in Asia and the Pacific. The representatives began their work on 1 September.

The announcement was made by MWC general secretary, César García. “Having persons like this to help connect member churches in a widespread region,” he said, “will help to build a stronger identity and interdependency as Anabaptist Christians.”

The proposal to appoint three part-time representatives was developed by MWC’s Asia Caucus and drew support from the MWC Executive Committee at its recent meeting in May 2013.

The three representatives are: Adhi Dharma, from Indonesia; Cynthia Peacock, from India; and Kyong-Jung Kim, from South Korea.



**Adhi Dharma** is general secretary of the *Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia* (Muria Christian Church of Indonesia, or GKMI). He was one of the writers for the Asia

Global Mennonite History Project. As Southeast Asia representative, he will be responsible for relationships with churches in Indonesia, Australia/New Zealand, Myanmar, Singapore, Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand.



**Cynthia Peacock** served as a social worker with Mennonite Central Committee for 38 years prior to her retirement in 2006. She chairs the MWC Deacons Commission.

As South Asia representative, she will be responsible for relationships with churches in India and Nepal.



**Kyong-Jung Kim** has served with the Korea Anabaptist Center for the past 11 years and is also an active member/co-leader of the Jesus Village Church. As Northeast

Asia representative, he will be responsible for relationships with churches in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong/China and Taiwan.

– Ron Rempel

## A Foretaste of Heaven on Earth



The last few weeks of August were hectic ones for Mennonite World Conference! We produced hundreds of documents to support visa application procedures for several of our members. Our Deacons Commission organized a delegation from five continental regions for a fraternal visit to the churches in Angola. Our board members planned their meeting in Zimbabwe and I, as general secretary, made plans to visit our churches in Malawi. (A few weeks later we sent applications for my upcoming travel to the embassies of Japan, Korea, Indonesia, the Netherlands and Switzerland, too!)

Despite the tireless effort of many people, it appeared that some visas would be denied. Frustrations ran high, as those of us who'd worked tirelessly recalled the time invested in the attainment of the

documents, the countless emails and phone calls to the embassies and the economic cost these efforts entail. How can we rest in God in the midst of obstacles that are imposed on us as a church by the secular governments?

In the midst of this frustration, I recalled a recent interaction with a colleague in Bogotá: "We should do this again," were the words from a pastor after our celebration of World Fellowship Sunday in January of this year. This celebration brought together – for the first time! – all the Mennonite Brethren, Brethren in Christ and the Mennonite Church congregations in Bogotá. Each local fellowship cancelled its services and closed its buildings to facilitate the coming together of these churches in one place.

Our gathering included hundreds of people from the three Anabaptist groups in Bogotá, along with representatives of the Anabaptist agencies of mission, peace, community development, health and education.

In that meeting each church and its leadership participated in a united celebration. Everyone served according to their gifts and unique identity. It was a tremendous blessing!

Why is it so special to celebrate World Fellowship Sunday? What does this have to do with the visa procedures mentioned above?

I personally believe that the special service that we commemorate the Sunday of the month closest to the date of the first baptism in Zurich (21 January 1525), is comparable only to the Global Assembly meetings MWC holds every six years. At these meetings, we focus our attention on God in order to express our gratitude for moving in the midst of our global community.

We are grateful for the gifts we share in our family of faith: missionaries who have given their lives to bear witness to Christ; brothers and sisters willing to serve the needy; teachers who disciple others with their life and character; pastors who care for local congregations; donors who give generously to the work of Christ; peacemakers who model a new way of dealing with conflicts in the manner of Jesus. Our global community is greatly blessed! World Fellowship Sunday gives us the opportunity to recognize it and to express our gratitude to God.

World Fellowship Sunday sends a clear message to those barriers that inhibit the work of the church – including visa problems. As we meet in these celebrations, we remember that we are one in Christ and that Christ has defeated the reality of administrative, theological, cultural, geographical, national, political, gender, racial and economic differences on the cross. He has made us one body, and by his Spirit the miracle of unity is now possible!

In services where local congregations from different Anabaptist conferences gather – overcoming social and ethnic differences – we proclaim that Christ has destroyed the walls that once separated us. We proclaim that the new creation is already a reality in our midst. In meetings where offerings for the global church are given, we realize that our reason for being goes far beyond the personal or local need. We are here to bless peoples of all the earth!

For all the above, we find Jesus in a special way in World Fellowship Sunday. It is where we see our character transformed in many ways.

What a comfort I feel as I remember all this – and what a comfort such thoughts will be the next time I'm frustrated by the visa application process! How good it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity!

César García, MWC general secretary, works out of the head office in Bogotá, Colombia.

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