



# *courrier* • *correo* *courrier*

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Conférence Mennonite Mondiale • Mennonite World Conference • Congreso Mundial Menonita



**Coming together in the  
way of Jesus Christ**

*A report of MWC Assembly 15,  
July 2009, Asunción, Paraguay*



photo by Wilhelm Unger

From every tribe:

# *The global church unites*

*MWC's 15th world assembly draws participants from 63 nations to celebrate bonds of faith that cross all ethnic barriers.*

by Paul Schrag

‘Are you a Mennonite?’ a policeman asked Ditrich Pana as he approached the huge white church where more than 6,200 Anabaptists from around the world were gathering.

In Paraguay, Mennonites are known as fair-skinned, German-speaking farmers and ranchers who live in isolated

colonies and produce much of the country's cheese.

Pana doesn't fit that profile. He is Enlhet, an Indigenous group that—as much as it might surprise most Paraguayans—includes 6,000 Mennonites.

The Enlhet churches—and those of another Indigenous group, the Nivacle—grew from mission work by Mennonite immigrants of Germanic and Canadian background who made Paraguay their refuge from war and worldliness beginning in the 1920s.

Pana, a radio evangelist, told how he answered his uninformed questioner: “Through the Holy Spirit, I said, ‘Yes, I am a Mennonite.’”

Pana's story of claiming the Mennonite name as a label of faith

rather than of ethnicity captured a leading theme of the 15th Mennonite World Conference assembly July 14-19.

In a sermon to the global Anabaptist gathering—which drew Mennonites and Brethren in Christ from 63 countries—Pana praised Christ's power to bridge the world's divisions.

“This gathering unites us with glad hearts,” he said. “We belong to each other and to [God] this week as brothers and sisters and friends.”

In that spirit of unity, Paraguay's 32,000 Mennonites hosted a weeklong reunion of the 1.6-million-member global Anabaptist body.

MWC assemblies usually are held every six years.

The 6,200 people who registered for the Asunción conference gathered twice a day in the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* (Family Worship Center), a Pentecostal church with a three-level, 10,000-seat sanctuary in the final stages of construction.

For worship services, the “platform language” was Spanish, so those who spoke English or other languages listened to interpreters through headsets.

They heard sermons and Bible study

Cover: A first-balcony view of the opening worship celebration of MWC's Assembly 15 on Tuesday, July 14, 2009. A total of 6,204 Anabaptists from the world gathered for six days of worship, study, and fellowship in the Centro Familiar de Adoración, a three-tiered worship center in Asunción, Paraguay, seating 10,000. The large church also had facilities for workshops and other activities—as well as dining in the first level of the underground parking garage.

Photo by Wilhelm Unger

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*Opposite page: Stefan Goertzen, a member of the International Music / Worship Team, accompanies congregational singing during the opening celebration at MWC's Assembly 15.*

messages—under the theme, “Come Together in the Way of Jesus Christ”—that emphasized living in unity and working for equality and justice, especially within the Anabaptist fellowship.

“Our conduct must reflect a change of thinking and attitude evidenced in how we relate to one another,” said Danisa Ndlovu, bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe and the new MWC president, on Saturday night.

“This is a clarion call for mutual respect, acceptance, and, above all, unity in the household of faith.”

While sermons needed interpretation, music crossed language barriers—and turned a sudden difficulty into a joyful moment.

During Thursday morning’s worship service, the windowless sanctuary went dark while Clair Brenneman of the United States was telling about the building of Paraguay’s Trans-Chaco Road by Mennonite Central Committee Pax workers in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Songleader Paul Dueck of Canada and his team of musicians bounded to the stage and led the congregation in “Alabare,” “Grosser Gott, wir loben

*Relatively mild winter weather allowed Assembly 15 participants to gather on the large patio outside the Centro Familiar de Adoración entrance for conversation with friends both old and new.*

## Together in the name of Jesus Christ

What happens when Mennonites and Brethren in Christ from around the globe gather in one place for almost a week?

In this issue of *Courier-Correo-Courrier*, we attempt an answer through words and photographs of the activities of MWC’s Assembly 15, held in Asunción, Paraguay, July 14-19, 2009.

This larger issue (combining quarters 3 and 4 for 2009) also includes reports of some activities both preceding and following Assembly Gathered. More coverage of those events, as well as of Assembly Scattered, will appear in our next issue in early 2010.

C-C-C wishes to thank all those people without whom this issue would not have been possible:

*Photographers:* Lowell Brown, Ray Dirks, Merle Good, Jon Hines, Klaus Hübert, Barbara Kärcher, Markus Rediger, Paul Schrag, Mark Smucker, Wilhelm Unger. Thanks also to Wilhelm and Liesa Unger for their work in processing more than 13,000 photos of the assembly.

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*Bloggers:* Written specifically for [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org) during Assembly Gathered, some of these blogs also appear in this issue. Thanks to Dothan Moyo and Janet Plenert.

The C-C-C staff hopes what we produce here will be a memory gift to those who participated in Paraguay 2009. We also offer this issue as a window to the global Anabaptist world for those not able to be in Asunción for Assembly 15.—*Editor*

photo by Merle Good





Assembly 15 leadership (from left): MWC general secretary Larry Miller welcomes participants to the opening cele-

dich," "We are walking in the light of God," and other songs until power was restored.

On Wednesday morning, a poignant moment with historic overtones occurred when leaders of two global church bodies affirmed the healing of centuries-old wounds.

MWC President Ndlovu embraced Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, after Noko

Registration meant waiting, sometimes in long lines when large groups arrived at the same time, such as this one of Indigenous from the Paraguayan Chaco.

photo by Lowell Brown



bration. Interpreting his greeting into Spanish is Alfred Neufeld, chair of the National Coordinating Council. Co-mod-

erators and worship leaders throughout the week were Cristina Caballero (above) and Werner Franz (opposite page).

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Helmut said. "At that tragic confrontation, Kornelius lost his life. Today we are not enemies, we are brothers in Jesus Christ and warriors together, for the kingdom of God."

Close to 8,500 people attended the Sunday morning service. Local Mennonite churches were closed; members were encouraged to participate in Assembly 15.

In addition to the worship services, 77 workshops were held during afternoon sessions during four days on topics such as violence against women and children in Congo and the shared convictions of global Anabaptists.

Special-interest groups, such as women theologians from Africa and Latin America, held meetings.

Many conference goers spent their free time at the Global Church Village, an outdoor area featuring displays organized by continents.

Global Church Village visitors stood in long lines to buy ice cream from a Mennonite-owned dairy franchise and ate it with tiny spoons while listening to music at the outdoor stage.

**Assembly 15 participants**

Paraguay . . . . .	3,476
North America . . . . .	1,496
Latin America . . . . .	592
Europe . . . . .	370
Africa . . . . .	180
Asia / Pacific . . . . .	90
Total . . . . .	6,204



Meals were served in the church's underground parking garage.

Due to health concerns, especially the need to guard against the H1N1 (swine flu) virus, some conference-goers wore masks over their mouths and noses, and volunteers sprayed disinfectant on people's hands before meals.

Activities for youth, including music and sports, took place in the "Teen Zone," a fenced field across the street from the church.

Before the assembly, a Global Youth Summit on July 10-12 drew more than 700 participants, including 48 delegates from 34 countries. MWC's governing body, the General Council, also met before the assembly.

The words of a young Nivacle

*This choir from the Mennonite Church of Switzerland was one of several that sang during either the morning or evening worship services.*

woman may have summed up the week for many.

"I learned that God has different gifts for each of us," said Mirta Pérez of Paraguay, reporting on the Global Youth Summit during a worship service.

"My dream is that the Mennonite family can remain in unity, because before God we are all the same, we are all valuable."

*Paul Schrag, Newton, Kansas, USA, is editor of Mennonite Weekly Review and chair of Meetinghouse, for which this article was written.*

Tuesday, July 14

# Assembly 15 opening celebration features procession of banners

With the music of a Paraguayan harp orchestra in the background, a procession of banners from congregations, conferences, and other groups from around the world opened MWC's Assembly 15 on July 14.

Following the procession, worship leader Werner Franz of Paraguay read from John's vision in Revelation about the thousands around the throne of the Lamb. "This church is on the way," he said.

MWC general secretary Larry Miller welcomed the diverse throng of people and then introduced guests from other Christian groups. These included Anglican



With a Paraguayan harp orchestra providing music (opposite page, top), a procession of banners from congregations, conferences,



and other groups around the world (above) opened MWC's Assembly 15 on July 14. After the procession, the banners were hung on

Church, Baptist World Alliance, Catholic Church, Lutheran World Federation, Methodist Church, African Instituted Churches, Salvation Army, General

Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, World Evangelical Alliance, and the World Council of Churches.

Representatives from nine language groups stated the conference theme—"Come Together in the Way of Jesus Christ"—in their own languages. Spanish served as the "platform" language, with simultaneous interpretation available in English, French, Enlhet, Nivacle, German, and Portuguese.

Former Paraguayan president, Nicanor Duarte Frutos, and his wife, Gloria de Duarte, were at the opening celebration of MWC's Assembly 15 on Tuesday, July 14. Gloria is a member of the Raíces Mennonite Brethren Church in Asunción.

Music became an important part of the opening service—as it did for all services throughout the week.

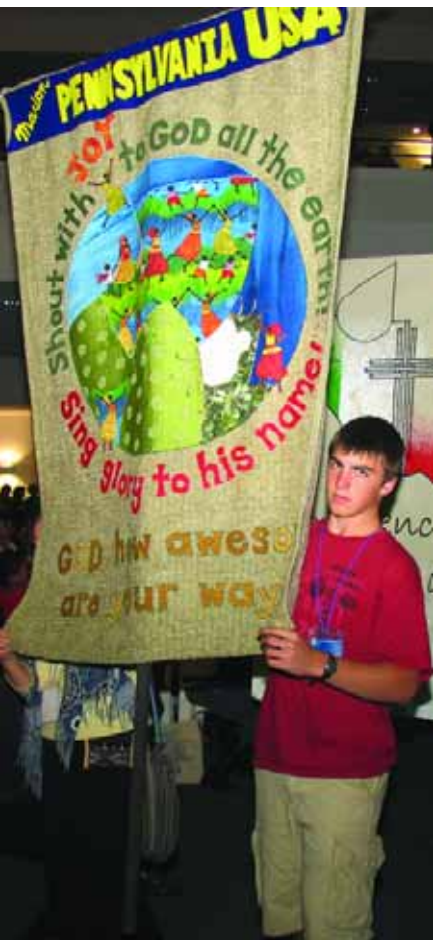
Paul Dueck, Canada, and an International Music-Worship Team of 13 led the gathering in singing throughout the assembly.

At the opening worship, the Choral Sounds from Zimbabwe, a group organized six years previously for Assembly 14 in their country, presented three songs.

In her keynote address, outgoing MWC president Nancy Heisey of the United States modeled the diversity of MWC by beginning her talk in Spanish, then telling a story in French before proceeding in English. She noted that humans are made

photo by Lowell Brown





the first balcony overhang (bottom right), where they remained through the week.

for community and celebration, and “this gathering is like one of the many celebrations we take part in.”

However, she said, noting the text of Philippians 2:1-11, having the mind of Jesus, who was killed, doesn’t sound like a typical celebration. “The way of Jesus Christ does not begin with us ... but with God.” In order to have the mind of Christ, she said, we must experience the love of God.

Paul contrasts the pride and “empty ambition” of the Philippians with the humility of Jesus Christ, who “emptied himself.” The mind of Christ involves “giving up what could be ours,” Nancy said.

Though we may be delighted by our diversity,

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photo by Lowell Brown

photo by Ray Dirks



Heisey said, experiencing people who are different can be hard. “We don’t experience Christ in the same way.” There is no resting place for expanding God’s love, short of God’s kingdom, she said.

But love turns sour when it clings to sameness. “Our love of church can be disruptive if it only seeks to protect our fences,” she said. “If our love fails to expand, it will perish.”

Our work as a church

must be grounded in God’s love, Heisey concluded. She called people to celebrate but not cling to the community of these days. “Let us spread to the wind the blessings of this assembly,” she said.

—Gordon Houser

Wednesday, July 15

## 'The way of Jesus Christ'

A gesture of reconciliation set the stage for the first full day of Assembly 15 on July 15.

Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), addressed the gathering with a "heavy heart," he said, because of the "painful history" Lutherans and Mennonites share, especially the persecution—and execution—of Anabaptists in the 16th century.

*Ishmael Noko (right), general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, listens as MWC president Danisa Ndlovu responds to Noko's acknowledgement of the "painful history" between Lutherans and Mennonites.*

photo by Merle Good



"This history of condoning persecution," he said, "is a spiritual wound we [Lutherans] carry around in us." He described the condemnations of Anabaptists, contained in the "anathemas" of the Augsburg Confession, as "the poison of a scorpion." But "the Anabaptists did not strike back," he said.

"We were wrong, regretfully wrong," he said. "Execution was not the only choice, even then."

In recent years, Mennonites and Lutherans have been in dialogue, and Lutherans are seeking to address "how we condemned you," Noko said. At their meeting in 2010, the LWF will be asked "to take action which will put us in a new position to the anathemas and express our deep repentance and regret."

MWC president Danisa Ndlovu responded: "What we have heard will change our lives and perspectives. We are witnessing the breaking of walls," he continued. "We are ready to receive the words we have heard."

If this exchange was an exhibit of "the way of Jesus Christ," the day's theme, the Bible study that morning was an inviting exposition of it. Elfriede Verón, instructor at Instituto Biblico Asunción, went through

Bracketed by an opening celebration on Tuesday, July 14, and a closing evangelistic service on Sunday, July 19, each day at Assembly Gathered focused on a subtheme of the conference theme, "Come together in the way of Jesus Christ."

Morning worships included a Bible study, evenings a sermon. Interspersed throughout each service were congregational singing, special music groups, reports from Anabaptists active throughout the world, and introductions to some of MWC's work.

In the next four pages (8-11) we give a summary of some of what was said and what took place during these days. *Courier-Correo-Courrier* will carry texts of some Bible studies and sermons in subsequent issues.—Editor

Democratic Republic of Congo, developed the theme further in a passionate sermon on Micah 6:1-8. "We follow Jesus Christ," he said, "through the practice of social justice."

Often using the phrase, "listen to me carefully," Mukawa rolled out a range of issues in which the church is called to "live justice": ordain women, accept minority group leadership, "rise up and defend" children, support women suffering from sexual violence, and act on behalf of poor countries—by eliminating their international debt, by granting more access to trade, and by rich countries paying damages for pollution.

—Dora Dueck

photo by Ray Dirks



Lars Akerson (above, left) and Jon Spicher, who spent six months travelling more than 12,400 kilometers (7,700 miles) by bicycle to Assembly 15 from the USA, reported on their experiences on Wednesday morning.

They discovered "incredible hospitality" and "good" everywhere they went, Akerson and Spicher said. But they would also get "much negative advice" about what lay ahead. Crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, for example, at "a highly volatile time," they found themselves suspicious of every movement.

The two reported how a white van followed them, slowly, in the Mexican desert. Coming up alongside, the driver handed them a piece of pizza! Pizza in the desert was delicious, they said. And, it seemed to be "a sign from God" to give up their prejudices and fears while they continued their trip.

Philippians 2:1-11, verse by verse, considering its exhortations to unity and Jesus' "way," seen in his relinquishment, humility, and obedience.

That evening, Nzuzi Mukawa, professor at the School of Missiology and pastor of a Mennonite Brethren church in Kinshasa,



Thursday, July 16

## 'Uniting in Christ'

“We affirm Anabaptist unity from a different perspective,” said Ofelia García Hernández, in a statement by three Latin American women theologians during the evening worship service on July 16.

“We have a goal of becoming a prophetic voice that denounces leadership abuse and lifestyle choices that perpetrate male dominance,” continued Ofelia, who is president of the Mennonite Church of Mexico.

At the same time, added Alix Lozano Forero, president of the Mennonite Church in Colombia, “We want to walk together with our male counterparts in a spirit of discernment.” She said women leaders will gather strength as they share their stories and promote women in leadership.

Joining the two on the assembly platform was Olga Piedrasanta, co-director of the Latin American Peace Network. All three women spoke out of a gathering of Latin American women theologians earlier in the week.

In his Bible study earlier in the day, Antonio González, director of research and publications at Fundación Xavier Zubiri in Madrid, Spain, called on his listeners to reject the Greek understanding of “glory” as “praise” that many of us interpret in reading John’s explanation in John 17.

Rather, he noted the Hebrew definition of “glory” as described in John 17 denotes receiving a significant gift from God. It is something the believer is



A choir from the Democratic Republic of Congo sings during the Thursday evening worship services. Choirs were a part of each

Assembly 15 service. In addition to Congo, they came from Paraguay, Zimbabwe, Indonesia, Switzerland, and Canada.

given, not something one earns.

“Glory has more to do with loyalty than with what we receive from each other,” Antonio said. Glory is what we give to others, as God gave it to Jesus. The purpose of this gift is to build up unity in the body of Christ.

In his evening sermon, Ditrich Pana, an Enlhet church leader from the Chaco active in radio evangelism, recalled how the first Christians gathered every day to break bread together. It was only in this way that they got to know each other, he said, and thus experience unity.

The apostles showed us a

*Melani Susanti of Indonesia joins other young adults in listening to a morning Bible study. Melani was MWC’s intern at MCC’s United Nations office in 2007-2008.*

model of unity, Ditrich said, when they shared their possessions because they didn’t think they owned anything.

“They belonged to God,” he said, urging this model for present-day Christians uniting on a global scale.

Thursday’s services also included a prayer of thanks presented by the Ojibway

and Cheyenne nations of North America and a report of PAX men building the Trans-Chaco road. The lights went off for several minutes during the latter, and the audience spent the time in the dark sanctuary singing from memory, simultaneously in several languages.—*Dick Benner*

photo by Lowell Brown



Friday, July 17

## 'Serving like Christ'

On Friday, MWC's Assembly 15 got off to a sobering start when worship leader, Werner Franz, announced that a bomb had exploded in Jakarta, Indonesia, earlier that day, killing nine and injuring 80, including a Mennonite.

Werner also noted that many from the assembly were sick, and he expressed caution about H1N1 flu.

With this background, Jenny Neme, director of the Center for Justice, Peace, and Nonviolent Action (JUSTAPAZ) in Bogotá, Colombia, led a Bible study on the day's theme of service.

Focusing on Isaiah 58:1-10, Jenny noted that God underlines the need to name injustices, to ask how these happen, and who is responsible.

God invites us to "act in spite of our fears," Jenny said. We often ignore the

photo by Paul Schrag



photo by Merle Good

*Amor y Fe (Love and Faith), a dance troupe of Indigenous young people from the Chaco, performed a choreography on the theme during the Friday evening worship session.*

violence around us until it touches us, she noted. But the Isaiah passage would have us note all acts of service must be oriented toward justice.

The evening worship on July 17 included an offering, an introduction of MWC's commissions (service, peace, mission, and faith and life), a choreography by "Amor y Fe" of Paraguay and music by a Paraguayan choir.

Elizabeth Soto, a member of Mennonite Church USA who grew up in Puerto Rico, continued the theme of service in her evening sermon. She said that Mennonites are noted for service; people talk about what Mennonites do. "But we haven't matched Jesus' beautiful service," she said, as illustrated in Mark 10:35-45.

After James and John ask to sit by Jesus, he tells them they must walk the walk he walked. "Jesus knows that

*Marcos Moreno of Paraguay and Charlotte Rosenberger of the United States take notes during the Friday morning Bible study by Jenny Neme.*

serving means being in solidarity with those who are rejected and fallen," Elizabeth said.

She described working in a women's shelter, where being in solidarity with the fallen took her "beyond her comfortable Mennonite world." She said she learned that it wasn't just women in the street who were suffering but women in the pews of our churches as well.

"The beginning point is not the task but our connection with God," Elizabeth said. We are to be an instrument in God's hands and walk with those who suffer.

Jesus gave dignity to others, she said, and so should we.

Friday's worship services also included choirs from Switzerland and Paraguay, the Menno Colony School Band, and reports from the Global Youth Summit.

—Gordon Houser

Saturday, July 18

## 'Go together in the way of Jesus Christ'

Worshippers celebrated communion and heard a call for unity, humility, and selflessness by MWC's new president at the Saturday evening service.

Danisa Ndlovu, bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe, who began his term as MWC president during the assembly, spoke on the conference's theme text, Philippians 2:1-11.

Danisa said the church must banish selfishness to attain unity in Christ.

It is easy to group ourselves by nationality, economic status, race, or denomination "without realizing this pursues selfish interests," he said. "Let us therefore be warned and stand our guard against the

enemy, the devil himself, the father of self-interests."

He called selfishness a killer disease and humility the key to harmony.

"Our conduct must reflect a change of thinking and attitude evidenced in how we relate to one another,"

Danisa said. "This is a clarification call for mutual respect, acceptance, and, above all, unity in the household of faith."

After Danisa's sermon, worshippers shared bread and juice in observance of the Lord's Supper.

In the morning worship service, an Anabaptist theologian from New Zealand said Christians who want to make peace need to start by putting their own house in order.

"We will never be credible as peacemakers in a violent world unless, within our own Christian congregations, communities, and families,

*Saturday evening's worship service included members of the global church celebrating the Lord's Supper together.*

photo by Lowell Brown



photo by Lowell Brown

we make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," said Chris Marshall, a professor at the University of Victoria in Wellington, New Zealand.

Unity is the starting point for all of the church's witness to the world, said Chris, who formerly was involved in leadership at London (UK) Mennonite Fellowship.

"The oneness of the church is every bit as essential to the Christian faith as the oneness of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ," he said.

Unfortunately, Marshall said, the church sometimes is just as crippled by conflict as the rest of the world. Nothing is more damaging to the cause of Christ than a divided church.

"The unity of the church is not something we manu-

*Most afternoons offered an opportunity to participate in service activities throughout Asunción. Here an inter-generational group scrapes and paints at Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas de Guarambare.*

facture by being unusually nice to one another," he said. "It is something that already exists. It is an objective reality, brought into being by the Spirit of God."

Marshall said four qualities—humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance—make it possible to overcome every conflict.

Also that morning, Nguyen Quang Trung, president of the 4,000-member Vietnam Mennonite Church, told of the church receiving legal recognition from the government.—*Paul Schrag*

Sunday, July 19

## *'Come together in the way of Jesus Christ'*

Swelling the numbers of those attending the Sunday morning worship at Assembly 15 were local Mennonites who came there rather than conduct their own services.

Estimates put the crowd in the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* at 8,500-9,000.

They witnessed a symbolic gesture of peace when Helmut Isaak read a statement of forgiveness for the death of his brother, Kornelius, to the man who killed him, Jonoine Picanerai

*Chief Jonoine Picanerai waits with the spear he had used to kill missionary Kornelius Isaak in 1958. During the Sunday morning service, he heard a statement of forgiveness and reconciliation from Isaak's brother Helmut.*

photo by Lowell Brown



chief of the Ayoreo tribe. Jonoine came to the stage carrying the spear that killed missionary Kornelius Isaak in 1958 when he was attempting to make friends with the Ayoreos.

Some 300 members of the Ayoreos are now Christians, according to reports, the result of efforts by New Tribes Mission.

**The Lord's cats.** Alfred Neufeld, dean of the theology faculty at the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay in Asunción, delivered the final message of the assembly on Sunday morning.

Jesus needs you to love, Alfred said, not only members of the church of Christ but the church itself.

He challenged his listeners to be the "Lord's cats, not



photo by Lowell Brown

pigs," explaining that cats are constantly cleaning themselves to keep their identity. By contrast, pigs seek mud puddles for their enjoyment!

He warned against trusting ideologies and politics rather than Jesus Christ. We have to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling," he said. This is not magical, Alfred emphasised, but an act of obedience, a labour of love that reaches out, like Jesus did, to the "most marginalized of our society."

Alfred challenged the audience to "work out one's personal salvation" in a congregation, a place of safety and from which the Christian can draw strength. "The world will know us by our helping one another inside this community of faith," he said.

—Dick Benner

*Above: Hilde Plett of Asunción reads a poem she wrote during the assembly at the Sunday morning service. Holding the microphone for her is Alfredho Altamirano, worship leader on Sunday. Below: Alfred Neufeld, chair of the National Coordinating Council, preached the Sunday morning sermon.*

photo by Lowell Brown



# Lessons in diversity from assembly hosts

Experiencing the variety of Paraguay's Mennonites proved instructive for visitors and valuable for Paraguayans, too.

In the eight conferences hosting the Mennonite World Conference assembly—three Germanic, three Indigenous and two Hispanic groups—MWC general secretary Larry Miller saw a reflection of the worldwide fellowship.

"In your history, your diversity and your vitality, you incarnate the past, present, and future of the global Anabaptist church," he said during the evening worship service July 18.

In interviews, conference goers from Paraguay said the assembly made an impact by bringing the country's Mennonites closer.

Jakob Warkentin saw benefits both for Indigenous and for German-speaking Mennonites.

"It is important for the Indigenous people to see that to be Mennonite is not to be white, but also black or brown," he said. "It is a matter of belief, not of culture and heritage."

And for German speakers, Jakob said, worshiping in Spanish at the conference meetings taught an important lesson.

"Here we are in step with the Indigenous people, because Spanish is not the mother tongue for either of us," he said. "So we adjust to that, we learn from that."

**Part of a larger body.** Walter Neufeld, speaking in Spanish, said the assembly "encourages the Mennonite churches to realize that we are part of a large body of people in the world, that the opportunities don't finish in Paraguay, that we can work together with others."

In a workshop, Indigenous Paraguayans told of being drawn to the Christian faith and later to a Mennonite identity.

Since the first baptisms of seven Enlhet men in 1947, the Indigenous churches have grown to include 8,300 members in three conferences:



photo by Ray Dirks

*Convención de las Iglesias Evangélicas Unidas—Enlhet Paraguay, Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet, Convención Iglesias Evangélicas Hermanos Menonitas Nivacle.*

"We're very grateful for the work of the missionaries and the courage they showed," said Cornelio Goossen, a Nivacle whose parents worked for a Goossen family and adopted their name.

He said his people learned to put their confidence in God rather than witch doctors.

"There were many things we had to leave behind because of our faith in Christ," Cornelio said.

When the Enlhet first came in contact with the Mennonites in the 1930s, the nomadic hunter-gatherers were "very much afraid," said César Cabañas. "But the Mennonites said we could live together."

The Indigenous people began to learn the German language, and "the word of God, like a seed, entered into

The diversity that is the Paraguayan Mennonite church is reflected in its children, some of whom gather here to start their day's activities during Assembly 15.

hearts," César said. "After the seed was growing, it gave new life. And the Indigenous people decided to follow Jesus."

Among the results of their new faith was an end to the practice of infanticide, which had been common when families felt they could not care for more children.

**Third-generation.** Today, many Indigenous churches are third-generation congregations. Still, for some, a Mennonite identity is relatively new.

"No one told us we had to be Mennonites, so it's only in the last generation that we realized we are part of the Mennonite faith," said Victor Pérez. "Mennonite has less to do with the color of your skin than your faith."

—Paul Schrag

# Interpretation 'a high calling' and a huge task

by Doreen Martens



photo by Lowell Brown

Above, foreground: Walter Ortíz and Asciano Fautz (left to right) interpreting from Spanish to Enlhet during a worship service. In the background, Juan Ramírez and Marcos Moreno interpret from Spanish to Nivacle. Below: a view from the interpreters booth during the General Council sessions. Interpreters also worked at other venues, such as the Global Youth Summit and workshops.

photo by Ray Dirks



The dimly lit booth tucked into a balcony at the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* doesn't hold much: a table and chairs, a pair of microphones, a bottle of water, a few sticky notes stuck to the window, a bilingual Bible—and Carmen Epp, listening intently through headphones to the sermon being delivered in Spanish on the stage down below. Few are aware she's there, but hundreds of English-speakers are depending on her ability to listen, interpret, and talk at the same time to make this a meaningful evening.

Carmen was one of 125 persons who interpreted between Spanish and six other languages—French, German, English, Portuguese, Nivacle, and Enlhet—on stage, in the booths, and at workshops and meetings during Assembly 15.

"It's a high calling, but also a very humble ministry," Rebecca Yoder Neufeld says of the vocally and mentally demanding job. "Especially in a booth: The better you do, the less you're noticed. If you're doing the job

really well, you fade into the background."

Yet without it, "all the careful preparation done for this assembly would pretty much come to nothing," she said.

Rebecca, a Canadian resident who is familiar with all three MWC official languages plus German, coordinated the interpreters for Asunción—as well as for the last assembly in Bulawayo—and for smaller gatherings in between.

Asunción was the first MWC assembly at which English was not an official platform language, which meant that many North Americans and English-speaking Africans and Asians were learning what it's like to depend on headsets.

Assembly planners obtained equipment through a company in neighboring Argentina, and close to 2,500 headsets were dispensed before each session by young volunteers. They also had to collect them after the session.

**Screening and training.** But for Rebecca, the job began a year and a half earlier, determining interpretation needs and recruiting and screening interpreters. She was assisted by Paul Amstutz, Paraguay interpretation coordinator, and Carmen Epp of the MWC Asunción staff. As Indigenous languages coordinator, Jakob Lepp trained volunteers who had never interpreted simultaneously before.

Then came the big task of scheduling equipment and volunteers to cover not only the two daily mass meetings but also 77 daily workshops, six pre-assembly meetings, and other gatherings where interpretation, sometimes in several languages, would be required.

"It involves a lot of careful thinking and matching about who fits what kinds of venues best, because of their experience, practice, the kind of vocabulary they're familiar with," Rebecca said. Some feel quite comfortable interpreting sentence-by-sentence; others



photo by Lowell Brown

find doing so on stage in front of 6,000 people too nerve-wracking.

“I haven’t done it often enough not to get nervous, but it’s exciting,” Carmen said of translating English to Spanish, sentence-by-sentence, on stage. “When it’s something written that people read, it’s dense. That’s harder to do; you’re almost translating from the paper because you don’t want to miss out. When it’s more conversational style it’s easier—you can speak freely and listen to what they say.”

Coordinating her army of talkers kept Rebecca on the run all week, and brought some tense moments when

interpreters took ill or otherwise missed their assigned times.

One might wonder: Why not just hire professionals? On a previous occasion when that was necessary, Rebecca said, the pros didn’t do so well because they didn’t know “church language.” Two German professional interpreters who attended the assembly, however, were welcomed as volunteers.

**Written texts.** Wherever possible, written texts were collected in advance so volunteers could prepare. Speakers were counselled on how to make their addresses interpret easily, for example

*Connie Byler of Spain (center) and Carmen Epp of Paraguay at work interpreting from Spanish into English. In the background is Miguel Lopez from Brazil interpreting from Spanish to Portuguese.*

by avoiding expressions that are too culture-specific. Interpreters, in turn, were cautioned to keep their voices neutral, avoid the temptation to soften speech that seems politically incorrect, and as effectively as possible to convey the speaker’s tone.

All went through an orientation first. “Part of the point of that, in addition to practical suggestions, the ethics of interpreting, and things like that, is trying to help people think about the meaning behind this task,” said Rebecca.

Hanging in the interpreters’ office was a colorful banner that reflects the Pentecost story and Revelation, which picture a multitude of tribes and nations and languages praising God.

“Language isn’t erased there, in that final picture of how God wants things to be,” Rebecca said. “What we’re aiming towards—these gatherings are a little glimpse.”—*Doreen Martens, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.*

**T**his must be the first MWC assembly where English speakers need to use interpretation headsets to understand. The platform language is Spanish. So if someone speaks a language other than Spanish, there is consecutive interpretation on the platform to put it into Spanish. But if Spanish is spoken, there is no interpretation on stage. It’s simultaneous from a booth. So English speakers must

wait in lines for headsets before each service, and they only get a speaker’s joke after it has been laughed at by the majority here, who do understand Spanish. I have heard a few comment about this, people wishing they spoke Spanish. For many, it is uncomfortable, humbling, but profoundly enriching not to be the dominant majority this time.—*Janet Plenert, Canada, Assembly 15 blog*





# *Singing each other's songs*

For many, singing together was one of their Assembly 15 highlights.

For the man who led that singing, it was the highlight of his life.

"It's a dream come true," said Paul Dueck. Beyond the thrill of music making, he said, was "the thrill of seeing our brothers and sisters from around the globe singing each other's songs."

Paul Dueck is music minister at the United Mennonite Church and music teacher at United Mennonite Educational Institute, both in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. He is also a harpist, with three recordings to his credit.

Though Canadian, Paul was born in Asunción to Mennonite missionary parents and lived in that country 12 years. He returned to Paraguay as an adult, with his wife Linda and their family, for two separate stints of teaching at CEMTA, a Mennonite seminary in Asunción.

The energetic Paul moved easily at Assembly 15 between the three languages he speaks fluently—Spanish, English, and German. He also moved easily from leading at the front of the stage to leading behind the piano or harp.

As in several previous assemblies, the music committee had debated creating a songbook for the event, since many people do not read notes.

They once again decided in favour, because a book collection can be enjoyed further at home. This assem-

bly's songbook was smaller than the previous one, however, with about half as many songs.

As editor, Paul made sure that, in addition to international representation and MWC favorites, a good portion of its 44 songs would be in Spanish.

Paul's other main task was to put together the team of international singers, instrumentalists, and composers that helped him lead the twice-daily worship sessions.

He kept pushing for more time for singing, he said, because "that's where people get involved in the conference."

One such time was given him unexpectedly when the power went out in the windowless sanctuary during the Thursday morning service.

Paul and his team scrambled to the stage. The congregation joined them as they moved from one familiar song to the next, in several languages, until the house lights were restored.

Applause and cheers concluded the spontaneous singing in the dark. "It was amazing," said Paul.—*Dora Dueck*

*Members of the International Music-Worship Team, which led in congregational singing at each service (from left below): Gerlinde Funk, Luci Driedger, Orlando August. Other members included: Saptajo Adi, Carlos Correa, Stefan Goertzen, Brigido Loewen, Florent Malu-Malu, Micheli Peralta, Andrea Weber Steckly, Bryan Moyer Suderman, Wilma Toews, Maximino Vera.*



*Opposite page, top: Paul Dueck directs the International Music-Worship Team and the audience from behind the piano.*

*Opposite page, bottom, left: Doris Toews, a member of the Menno Colony School Band from the Chaco, plays flute during the prelude on Friday evening.*

*Opposite page, bottom, right: Members of Grupo Ebenezer, musicians from the Chaco, play zampona flutes and guitars during Wednesday morning's service.*

All photos by Lowell Brown

Paraguayan mass choir:

# *‘Now I can imagine how it might sound on resurrection day’*

by Ed Toews

photo by Mark Smucker



*Those who attended Assembly 15 won't soon forget hearing a Paraguayan mass choir sing "Kyrie Eleison" in eight languages at the conclusion of the Saturday evening communion service. The choir also sang at the Sunday morning worship.*

*Ed Toews, music teacher at the Indigenous Bible School at Yalve Sanga in the Chaco, brought together and directed this choir. Here he tells how that happened and what the experience meant to him and the singers.—Editor*

**E**leven Paraguayan ethnic groups “Came together in the way of Jesus Christ” to form a 160-voice choir to serve God in unity with songs of praise.

When the program planning committee first suggested the idea of an inter-ethnic Paraguayan mass choir for MWC's Assembly 15, the idea hardly seemed feasible to me. Yet I also saw a tremendous challenge, a symbolic gesture of service and unity. Alfred Neufeld of the National Coordinating Council suggested I consider a repertoire of traditional Spanish and German songs as well as two movements from a Catholic mass, *Misa Criolla* by Ariel Ramirez.

The greatest task was recruiting singers scattered all over Paraguay. However, long connections to the German Mennonite churches in west

*Backed by the Paraguayan mass choir, Ed Toews leads the congregation in singing "Kyrie Eleison" at the Saturday evening service after the choir had sung the same song in eight languages.*



and east Paraguay, through numerous song festivals and frequent music workshops over many years at different Indigenous reserves, made balanced recruitment easier. Distances between settlements made rehearsals difficult, but many prayers and the help of local consultants made the project possible.

As the music teacher at the Indigenous Bible School (IBI) at Yalve Sanga, I was able to rehearse weekly with at least one group of Indigenous singers. These came from eight different groups: Nivacle, Enlhet, Guarani, Sanapana, Toba, Angaite, Lengua Sur, and Ayoreo. Indigenous people as a rule don't read music, so they had to learn the repertoire by rote.

**I** had limited connections to the Spanish churches in East Paraguay, but I was fortunate to receive support from song leader Micheli Peralta. Local conductors helped prepare the repertoire with two joint rehearsals in the Chaco and three in East Paraguay.

After our first joint rehearsal in the Chaco, one Indigenous woman, overwhelmed by the sound of the choir, said, “Now I can imagine how it might sound on resurrection day, when all ethnic groups will sing the same repertoire and the same language in unity.”

In a relatively short time, the 160



photo by Mark Smucker

The 160-voice mass choir, a small part of which is shown above, came from all over Paraguay and from all the groups that served as hosts of the assembly.

singers from German, Spanish, and Indigenous Mennonite, Mennonite Brethren, and Evangelical Mennonite churches were set to go. A final joint rehearsal was possible only on the day of the actual performance, Saturday, July 18 during the noon hour.

For my wife Wilma, the pianist, and me, this was a unique opportunity and challenge. The symbolism was powerful: inter-ethnic unity in this choir joining in a Catholic mass, traditional Spanish songs, a German chorus, “Das Kreuz von Golgatha”—which has deep roots with many 1930s German immigrants to Paraguay—and, finally, singing the “Kyrie Eleison” in eight languages. This was immense, powerful, and awesome.

Traditional instruments like Paraguayan harps, accordion, charango, tumbadoras (Conga drums), triangle, and other percussion instruments added a typical Latin American carnival flavor to the music.

For us all—singers, instrumentalists, directors—sharing music at the two concluding Assembly 15 worship services was a delight and a privilege.

*Soli Deo Gloria.*

## Exhibits detail suffering in Russia

Suffering and faith go hand in hand in the story of the Russian Germans in the 20th century. This was evident in an exhibition from the *Museum für Russland-deutsche Kulturgeschichte* (Museum for German-Russian Cultural History) from Detmold, Germany, on the fourth floor of the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* during the week of Assembly 15.

Documents, artifacts, and works of art showed how German-speaking peoples—including Mennonites—of the Soviet Union were treated as enemies of the people because of language and religion.

Their experiences include flight, deportation, forced labour, forced collectivization of farms and industries, arrests, detentions, resettlement, pressures to give up their faith, and liquidations.

Sketches by Kurt Hein and Ernst Dyck as well as works by sculptor Jakob Wedel portrayed aspects of life under the Communist dictatorship that reached its most severe form under Joseph Stalin.

Wedel’s work about the forced deportation of women to labour camps in 1942, for instance, shows

photo by Lowell Brown



the agony of mothers leaving their terrified children behind as they are taken away.

Ernst Dyck sketched a prisoner in a labour camp, falling exhausted into the snow at the end of a long workday, being offered a last piece of bread by a fellow prisoner.

Humanity in the midst of suffering was also seen, for example, in the photo album that opened the exhibition, *Dank an Deutschland* (Thanks to Germany). Mennonite refugee women in the camp in Mölln, Germany, provided images of the good life in Ukraine and relationships formed in the camps.

Tables of dates and a map of Mennonite dispersion showed how the communities, sometimes expressing a common faith in a written confession, were dispersed by the policies of governments. And yet, the German-speaking Christians continued to nourish their faith by carrying miniature testaments (easily hidden), spiritual songs written into notebooks, Bibles disguised as wallets, cards with biblical messages, and invitations to church weddings.

Some German Mennonites fled to escape persecution in Russia and some of them eventually found their way to Paraguay and settled there.

After 1955 the situation changed for the Russian Germans. They received citizenship and acquired more freedom of movement. Nevertheless, many thousands left for Germany in the 1970s and onward.

Museum director Katharina Neufeld coordinated the display and told stories about it.—*Lydia Penner, Netherlands*

*An Assembly participant views art depicting the experiences of German Mennonites in Russia.*



# Global Church Village

photo by Klaus Hübert

photo by Wilhelm Unger



It's become part of an MWC assembly tradition: the Global Church Village. Here participants can come to relax, meet friends old and new, view exhibits from around the world, and sample some of the local cuisine.

For a time, it appeared that the Global Church Village at Asunción might not make it. Unseasonable rain in July had turned the lot that was to be the site of the village behind the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* into mud.

The rain stopped just in time, and local planners got busy with sand and gravel and even grass to make the village operational (above).

Unseasonably warm weather for a Paraguay winter in July allowed assembly participants to enjoy the outdoor venue (left). It also made the ice cream stand from a Mennonite-owned dairy franchise, one of the more popular spots at the village (opposite page, bottom).

Equally popular was a stand offering coffee and mate as well as cocido and tereré, typical Paraguayan drinks.

*Empanadas* also proved to draw lines of people for a between-meal snack.

Central to the Global Church Village was a stage offering a variety of performances throughout the afternoon,



photo by Lowell Brown



photo by Wilhelm Unger

such as a dance troupe from Paraguay (above, left) and the Choral Sounds from Zimbabwe (above, right).

The village also offered participants a chance to learn about Anabaptist churches throughout the world. Each continent was responsible to provide a display highlighting church activities from its region. These displays were in tents scattered around the village especially constructed for this purpose.

Because of the compact nature of the venue, Christian music concerts were also held in a 1,000-seat chapel in the CFA. The dining area in the underground garage also included an internet cafe, currency exchange, book store, opportunity to purchase souvenirs from local artisans.



photo by Lowell Brown



*The MWC booth (left) contained an exhibit of the participant bags used for the past five assemblies.*

photo by Ray Dirks

## Workshops on a variety of subjects draw large crowds

*Workshops were popular during four afternoons at Assembly 15. Participants faced daunting challenges: selecting which of 77 different workshops to attend; climbing several flights of stairs to upper level classrooms since elevators were not yet installed; and finding the right room in the maze of hallways.*

*If you didn't arrive early, it was often standing room only or waiting for a second chance. Thirty workshops were repeated once, and eight others ran three or four times. A few were held at a different site within walking distance.*

*What follows are reports from four of the numerous workshops that became part of the assembly experience.*

**A new church in Cuba.** What is probably the world's newest national Mennonite church is part of a revival of Christian faith in Cuba.

"We want you to know we are there, and we are part of the bigger church, and we want your prayers for the Mennonite Church in Cuba," Alexander Reyna Tamayo, the group's president, said. Reyna, whose passion

*The creation care workshop culminated with the planting of a tree at La Roca Mennonite Church as a symbol of the Christian's responsibility to the earth.*

photo by Ray Dirks



photo by Lowell Brown

*Assembly 15 workshop attendance was unprecedented. Participants had up to 77 from which to choose each afternoon and often packed out the scheduled venues.*

for Anabaptism is the driving force behind the Cuban Mennonite movement, spoke during a Thursday afternoon workshop at Assembly 15.

The Mennonite Church in Cuba was founded last August. It now has about 150 attending some 12 cell groups.

**Care of creation.** Interest was high in three care-of-creation workshops held throughout the assembly week. More than 120 people attended the first, in spite of the fact that the location was several blocks from the main venue. The creation care table at the Global Church Village was also swamped.

Workshop participants heard from Indigenous and Native Americans about how lack of care of the creation is affecting their people: lakes on the Arctic circle disappearing, migratory birds vanishing, caribou herds aborting their young; fishing lakes and forests disappearing in Paraguay, with more signs saying "private property—no hunting," changing an entire way of life.

**So that the world may believe.** Because of their contentious history, both Anabaptists and Catholics are sometimes stuck in the 1500s, Father Gregory Fairbanks told a workshop on Wednesday, July 15. The Vatican's representative for the Pontifical Council Promoting Christian Unity, Fairbanks said both communions "sinned" over the intervening years by keeping their division alive. Rather, both should heed the words of Jesus: "May they be one so that the world will believe."

Fairbanks was one of eight represen-

tatives from other Christian organizations introduced by Larry Miller, MWC general secretary. Others included: Daniel Okoh of the African Instituted Churches; Eugene Hsu, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists; Geoff Tunnicliffe, World Evangelical Alliance; Katherine Johnson, Lutheran World Federation; Raquel Contreras, Baptist World Alliance; Federico Pagura and Hansulrich Gerber, World Council of Churches.

**Rich and poor in the family of faith.** Unequal distribution of wealth became very personal at a Wednesday workshop led by Barbara Kärcher and Miriam Krauss. Barbara reported that an AMIGOS colleague from Zimbabwe was unable to attend the Global Youth Summit (GYS) and Paraguay 2009 because he needed to stay home to work and care for his family.

That led workshop participants to discuss the power of money and wealth at a very personal level. How much do we keep? How much do we give away? they asked each other

This workshop was intended "to create a space" where participants could openly talk about how MWC can continue to be a family of faith, given the unequal amount of money within the global community. But there wasn't enough space for people interested, including a sizable number of young adults. Many were turned away from the small meeting room.

*From reports by Paul Schrag, Stuart Clark, Dick Benner, and Leroy Shantz*

Assembly children's program:

*'We understood each other. How interesting!'*

Activities for children were again part of the MWC assembly. In Asunción, 274 children were registered to participate every day in their own program.

Of the 274, 191 were in the 5 to 12 age group and 83 in the group up to age 4. Most came from Paraguay and North America, with a few children from other Latin American countries, Europe, and Africa.

Leo and Sandra Wölk of the Raices Mennonite Brethren Church in Asunción were in charge of the children's program, along with many volunteers. The program ran from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. each day.

Their work got high praise from the kids. "If you were not at the MWC [assembly], you sure missed a lot. We had looooots of fun!" said Michelle and Joel Fast, two of the children.

Another was overheard to ask, "When is the next world conference? I want to come again," as the week was ending.

"On some days, our children didn't want to go home!" said Gudrun Janz, who had five children, ages 3 to 11 registered in the program. While they were there, she helped with the interpretation during assembly gatherings.

Heinz and Marie-Luise Fast, parents

photo by Jon Hines



*Doris Areco of Paraguay heads up a line of girls and their leader outside the CFA preparing for a day of learning and fun; 274 children were part of Assembly 15.*

of Michele and Joel, reported that getting to meet children from other parts of the world excited their children. They—and Gudrun's children, Rocio, Joel, Timo, Moses, and Eliane—all of whom speak Spanish and German, prepared for the event by connecting with "email pen pals" from outside Paraguay months earlier, and some of them took English lessons.

"It really overwhelmed me that all those kids, with different colours, languages, and cultures believed in the

same God that I do," said Michelle. "And we all could worship God with singing, dancing, jumping, clapping, and moving to songs together."

Michelle developed a good relationship with her pen pal and hopes to stay in touch through the Internet.

Throughout the week, leaders picked a variety of colours to help the children think about God: red, for Jesus giving his life for our sins; yellow, for God's ever present light; and green, for all the living things on earth.

"I made a wrist band with all the colours, which I am still wearing," said Joel. "It was amazing to see all these different kids and think that God created them all and made each one special."

The children had plenty of activity, such as music, soccer, and other games as well as practising English. Joel said he loved the singing, but added, "The best parts were the competition games and outdoor activities. ... We just screamed and cheered, everybody in their own language, and we understood each other. How interesting!"

—Ferne Burkhardt

*Story-tellers and music groups—as well as games and recreation—kept children's attention for 10 hours each day.*





photo by Barbara Kärcher

GYS met at Gutenberg Primary and Secondary School in Asunción, where the stage was used by a variety of music

groups, dramas, and dance troupes. Delegates from different continents were responsible for much of the programming.

Global Youth Summit:

## *Dreaming of the ideal church in service*

**G**lobal Youth Summit (GYS) brought together 48 delegates from 34 countries to work on issues of importance to youth and young adults. Service was the theme of our three-day event.

These delegates were joined by other youth from around the world for worship and discussions to make a total gathering of more than 700 in

photo by Wilhelm Unger



Asunción July 10-12, immediately prior to Assembly 15.

This was the second GYS; the first was held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003 in connection with Assembly 14.

In a report to the MWC General Council following their meeting, GYS delegates said:

“Our eyes were opened to see how God is working in the whole world in

so many ways. ... We concluded that service is initiated by God; it is important to do service in a relationship with God and with others, understanding the needs around us.”

GYS participants and delegates dreamed of what an ideal church would be. Our list has:

- young people willing to serve God;
- strong sense of community and opportunities for intergenerational dialogue;
- caring and working on behalf of the needs of others;
- peacemaking with congruency between word and deed.

We challenged [MWC] to give young people space to explore their gifts, involve them in decision making, and create a space for intergenerational dialogue and envisioning. —*Sarah Thompson, USA, outgoing representative from North America on AMIGOS, MWC's young adult leadership group*

*Through small group discussions about service and the ideal church GYS participants said they learned their dreams and goals are similar wherever they live.*



*GYS organizers asked several continental delegates to reflect on their experience in Asunción. Excerpts from their reflections follow; more extensive reports will appear in the next issue of Courier-Correo-Courrier.*

**G**YS helped me to get a better perspective on how God is working around the world. I came to realize young people's vision about service is similar.

The GYS activities were great. They allowed us to get to know more of the Word of God and new people. Each continent was creative with the worship services, having different rhythms and customs.

This whole experience was a taste of heaven where one day we'll be all together worshipping the same God!  
—*Rut Paulina Bergen Dyck, Mexico*

**A** school gym filled with hundreds of young people covered in layers of jackets and sweaters, speaking numerous languages, is not common for me. But even more amazing was what brought us together: to worship God, and to learn from each other how God is working in our lives.

Building relationships was the biggest blessing I received from GYS and Assembly 15. Not only have I been

*During Assembly Gathered week, young people up to age 17 had their own Teen Zone near the CFA for music, sports, biblical messages and other activities.*

able to see how God is working in powerful ways around the world, but I have also been able to see God through the people I got to know.

We are all made in the image of God, and my sisters and brothers reflected God's beautiful creativity.  
—*Kristina Toews, Canada*

**T**he GYS sessions taught me what service means and how we ought to serve like Jesus served—selflessly.

The discussions also helped me to identify the problems of our society and our church and challenged me to do whatever I can to bring solutions.

I liked the statement of one worship leader: "Youth are not the future of the church; they are the present church." This encouraged me a lot, since I had only heard about youth being the future of the church. I want to get out of my comfort zone and be more active in my church and in society.—*Sumana Basumata, India*

**W**hen I was going through a time of physical growth, I had pain from my bones growing longer. This time my growing pains are related to my heart, my mind, and my soul.

I learned a lot from the people I met. Discussions with diverse people have helped me to understand better the Word of God. How they act and how they serve has helped me to see that these are people who try to live like Jesus. This could be why my mind has grown.—*Marc Pasqués Villalba, Spain*



photo by Ray Dirks

*It wasn't all listening and discussing at the Global Youth Summit July 10-12. Recreation also played a major role, particularly football or soccer games.*

**T**eam work at GYS 2009 provided a wonderful forum for sharing ideas and skills at a global level, particularly the diverse ways of worshipping. Different races worked together, and the mixed groups promoted team spirit.

What I learned at GYS 2009 that can bless my church and community is identifying resources in the church and how to utilize them. I also learned that youth should become more responsible and be charged with duties in the church, interacting and consulting with church leaders, sharing holistic ideas, and fellowshiping with different tribes from my country.—*Ayub Omondi Awich, Kenya*

photo by Ray Dirks





Right: 60-plus volunteers worked at 12 serving stations to feed 6,204 people in an hour.

Far right: dining was on the first level of a two-level parking garage under the CFA.



Feeding the 6,204:

## *Volunteers, and a giant cooker, made it possible*

When Adelheid Thiessen agreed to head the mammoth task of preparing 10 meals for 6,200-plus assembly participants, she knew the menu would have to be simple. She'd also need an awfully big cooking pot.

Originally from Menno Colony but living the last 25 years in Asunción, Adelheid

found her mind turning to the big iron kettles her foremothers used in the Chaco. She envisioned a huge, propane-fueled cooking vat that would be custom built at the assembly site. But there would be no time to test it with anything but water before the event began. It had to work.

Worried about the design,

photo by Merle Good

she gave a testimony at her congregation, Concordia Mennonite Church, expressing her concerns. After the service a man came forward with a new idea: to divide the oval-shaped vat into four chambers, with two half-moons on each end and two rectangular sections in the middle. Rice and pasta could be cooked in the outer ends, while sauces would go in the middle.

The vat became the centerpiece of the cooking area outside the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* (CFA). Additional food preparation, baking and meat roasting—more than 2,000 kg. / 4,000 lb. of meat at a time—was done offsite.

“We had hoped to contract out the baking, but that didn't work out at the last

minute,” Thiessen said. “So we said, well, if Jesus closes one door, he will open another.”

She called another local bakery, which offered its space for free.

In addition to her husband, Edwin, who organized the dining area on the first parking level inside the CFA, Adelheid was assisted by co-leaders Hans and Nancy Teichgräf plus a host of volunteers.

With 12 serving stations staffed by 60-plus volunteers, the entire assembly crowd could get their food in less than an hour. Seating was only available for some 2,000, so everyone was asked to spend no more than 20 minutes eating and then move elsewhere for extended conversation.

Most meals featured a sauce of chicken or ground beef served over rice or noodles with crusty rolls, locally-sourced oranges or bananas

*The giant cooker, made especially for the assembly, required extensive washing after each mass meal.*





MWC Assembly 15:

## *What difference does it make?*

by Nancy Heisey

If you've taken the time to view the pictures in this issue, checked out the reports and photos on the MWC web ([mwc-cmm.org](http://mwc-cmm.org)), or followed any of the Assembly 15 sessions via live streaming, you've gotten some of the flavor of the amazing event that we celebrated together in Asunción this past July.

If you were there, you remember the amazement and delight of running into a friend from some other part of the world whom you haven't seen for years, or the undefeated friendliness and energy of the *servidores de paz* (peace servants) who helped us find our buses home each night, or waved us efficiently through the lunch lines each day.

You'll remember the shared prayer of the crowd as we followed our music leaders in singing: "Have the mind of Christ," or the stirring words of our preachers and Bible study leaders.

During the past thirty years, I have received many gifts as I have been able to attend each MWC assembly since 1978. During my years as MWC president, I also became somewhat of a "student" of assemblies, gleaning from the historical records to learn more about the importance to the Mennonite-Brethren in Christ story of the places where each assembly has been held.

I've delved into some of the questions and controversies that have accompanied our efforts to come together as a worldwide family of faith. I've also learned a great deal more about the costs of holding such a worldwide event, whether in time, money, environmental impact, delays to other on-going ministries, and great personal stress.

Now, as I settle back into life as part of an MWC member church in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, I ask: What difference does it all make?

For many of us who found Assembly 15 a "mountaintop" experience, it's important to recall the experiences of the disciples after the transfigured Jesus

was revealed to them (Mark 9). Jesus didn't even answer Peter's comment about building three dwellings on the mountain, only ordered them not to tell about what they'd seen and then led them down into the midst of a human crisis that called for Jesus' healing power. This is not to say we shouldn't talk about the wonderful experiences in Asunción. But it is a way of helping us understand what Antonio González noted in his Bible study: Jesus' glory is not an event; it is a way of life.

Gatherings of the church, local and regional as well as global, are very important for us to encourage each other, to learn more about the amazing diversity and giftedness of Christ's worldwide body, and to seek the mind of Christ together. But to be what they are intended to be, they must bear fruit in our day-to-day lives and witness now, next week, and into the years ahead.

The Paraguay 2009 daily news sheet recommended a number of things that can help in this process: we can (1) ask for time in our home congregations to share "mind of Christ" experiences from Assembly 15; (2) remain in sustained contact with at least one person outside of our home countries; (3) pray daily, for 30 days following the assembly, for the church around the world; (4) promote World Fellowship Sunday [see insert this issue].

I'm grateful that, long before I got involved in MWC, I learned from my parents that we belong to a worldwide communion of faithful sisters and brothers. May we all, whether we were in Paraguay or not, commit ourselves to the ongoing joyful task of living as Jesus' people within the Anabaptist tradition, knowing more deeply now than ever that we have good news to share where we are, and that we are not alone in this work.

*Nancy Heisey completed her term as MWC president during Assembly 15.*

photo by Merle Good



Head cook Adelheid Thiessen

and bottled water, sometimes with a salad of shredded cabbage with cucumbers or carrots.

Paraguayan Mennonites are famed for their beef and dairy production, and roast beef and yogurt also appeared during the week, as did the local staple root vegetable, *mandioca* (also known as *manioc* or yucca). Snacks included meat *empanadas* (turnovers), tea sandwiches, and pastries.

Business people but not food services professionals, the Thiessens previously had never cooked for a group larger than their 500-member church.

—Cathleen Hockman-Wert, Corvallis, Oregon, USA

## General Council approves new initiatives for MWC's structure, work, and personnel

**W**hat's new with Mennonite World Conference? A great deal:

- a new president and vice-president;
- a new General Council and Executive Committee, with a woman representing Africans for the first time;
- new member churches, including the Mennonite Church in Vietnam;
- growing involvement of youth;
- a new treasurer from Paraguay;
- a revised constitution;
- four new commissions.

And there will be a new general secretary in fewer than three years.

All this and more was part of the business of the MWC Executive Committee and General Council at meetings held in Asunción, Paraguay, in conjunction with Assembly 15.

Danisa Ndlovu, Zimbabwe, who had been vice-president for six years and

*Though never used in Executive Committee or General Council meetings, the gavel has become the symbol of leadership change for MWC.*

*Outgoing president Nancy Heisey, USA, handed it to the new MWC president, Danisa Ndlovu, Zimbabwe, during ceremonies at the General Council meeting.*

photo by Merle Good



president-elect for three, was installed as president of MWC for the next six years. He succeeds Nancy Heisey, USA, who served in various MWC roles since 1995 and as president since 2003.

Janet Plenert, Canada, was elected vice-president for six years. Janet chaired the Global Mission Fellowship for three years and worked with GMF and MWC in establishing what has become MWC's Mission Commission.

**New Executive.** The General Council elected a new Executive Committee from its members, with two people nominated by each continental caucus. For the first time, the Africa Caucus chose a woman, Mawangu Biavula Ibanda from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as one of its representatives. The second African is Thuma Hamukang'andu from Zambia.

Other members elected to the new Executive Committee are: Prem Prakash Bagh, India, and Adi Walujo, Indonesia—Asia; Edgardo Sanchez, Argentina, and Felix Rafael Curbelo Valle, Cuba—Latin America and the Caribbean; Rainer Burkart, Germany, and Markus Rediger, Switzerland—Europe; Iris de Leon-Hartshorn, USA,



and Ron Penner, Canada—North America.

The first action of the new Executive Committee, which met on July 19, was to accept a report from AMIGOS, the young adult team, and its nominations for a Youth Task Force to operate for one year. AMIGOS, with one representative from each of the five continental regions, organized a Global Youth Summit (GYS) in Zimbabwe in 2003 and in Asunción in 2009.

The new task force will have a member from each continental region and one member from the out-going AMIGOS team. Its mandate is to propose MWC youth programs and structures by 2010.

**New members.** Four national churches were accepted as full members of MWC. In addition to the Vietnam Mennonite Church, new members are the Brethren in Christ Church in Mozambique, the Gilgal Mission Trust (Mennonite Church) in India and the Bible Missionary Church in Myanmar.

For churches to be eligible for MWC membership, they must be known and recommended by the general secretary and the regional caucus. They must be an organized church for at least five years, have 500 or more baptized members and at least two congregations, and affirm MWC's vision, mission, and shared convictions.

Spain has several small Anabaptist



*Consensus has become the method of decision-making for both the MWC Executive Committee and the General*

*churches which have formed an association, but together they have fewer than 500 members. Those churches were granted decision-making rights on the General Council until the question of their full membership as a special case is determined.*

**New treasurer.** For the first time, management of MWC's finances has moved to the global South with the appointment of Ernst Bergen from Paraguay as treasurer. Paul Quiring from California concluded 11 years as treasurer at the Asunción meeting.

During the past decade, MWC's income, investments, and expenses have increased dramatically to approximately \$1.2 million (U.S.) at the end of 2008 with positive fund balances. Assembly 15 finances are not yet final.

The General Council has 116 members named by member and associate member churches. Approximately half of the new General Council (GC16), which will operate from 2009-2015, were also members of GC15, which was responsible for MWC from 2003-2009.

Work completed by GC15 included adopting a revised constitution. Among changes to the constitution are defining length of terms for specific positions and enlarging the functions of continental caucuses. A new section on commissions was added.

The four commissions, which have been developing over several years, and appointments to them were approved by the General Council. The commissions met for the first time in Asunción.

*Council, with orange cards (above) designating agreement and blue cards disagreement or hesitation. At the*

Discussion between MWC and the Global Mission Fellowship concluded with the formation of the MWC Mission Commission. Richard Showalter, USA, was elected chair of this commission in Asunción.

Other commission chairs, named earlier, are: Deacons—Cynthia Peacock, India; Faith and Life—Alfred Neufeld, Paraguay; Peace—Mulugeta Zewdie, Ethiopia. While each commission has goals and plans for specific areas of work, they will also discern how to operate in unity.

The General Council also approved the merger of MWC's Asia Caucus and the Asia Mennonite Conference, which the AMC had already ratified. Within MWC, this body will be known as the Asia Caucus; for programs and communication within Asia, it will be known as Asia Mennonite Conference.

**New offices.** MWC is also looking into the future. Under consideration is reconfiguring its offices and staffing, intending to shift some administration to the global South. The goal is to have an MWC office in each continent.

There is strong support for continuing global assemblies, not losing current momentum. A study is underway to determine the time and place for the next global gathering. Already a major celebration is anticipated in Europe in 2025, the 500th anniversary year of the beginning of the Anabaptist movement and MWC's 100th anniversary.

The next General Council meeting will take place in May 2012 in

*Asunción meeting, "I love consensus" buttons (opposite page) were distributed in three languages to Council members.*

Switzerland in conjunction with the Mennonite European Regional Conference (MERK).

In May, 2012, Larry Miller will conclude 22 years as general secretary of MWC. An international search committee, chaired by President Danisa Ndlovu, Africa, has already begun work.

Other committee members are Markus Rediger, Europe; Mesach Krisetya, Asia; Karen Klassen Harder, North America; and Elizabeth Vado, Latin America. Bert Lobe of the MWC Kitchener office serves as facilitator.

—Ferne Burkhardt, news editor

*Mawangu Biavula Ibanda, a General Council delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the first woman to be elected by the Africa Caucus to the MWC Executive Committee.*

photo by Ray Dirks





Magali Moreno



Ryan Toews



Ernst Weichselberger



Ray Brubacher

## Credit where it's due for a good experience

Organizing and facilitating an event that brings more than 6,200 Anabaptists from around the world to one place is no small task. It requires the coordination and cooperation of hundreds of personnel, both staff and volunteers.

For Assembly 15, the volunteers numbered close to 500, including 81 “peace servants,” high schoolers from Paraguay especially trained to assist participants in various ways. In the months preceding the assembly, MWC also

photo by Ray Dirks



maintained an Asunción office, which hired more than a dozen to work at registrations, venues, supplies, name tags, bags—the list goes on and on.

Overseeing the entire operation were four persons (see above):

- *Magali Moreno*, office manager, responsible to keep the operation flowing smoothly.

- *Ryan Toews*, chief operating officer, working with local committees, coordinating their efforts and solving their problems.

- *Ernst Weichselberger*, national coordinator. Ernst hired the Asunción staff and was responsible for raising much of the funding in Paraguay for the assembly.

- *Ray Brubacher*, international coordinator, responsible for programming and related activities. Ray will be retiring from the MWC staff in October.

In introducing the Asunción staff to the assembly audience on Saturday evening, general secretary Larry Miller noted that, if you removed Ernst's years from the equation, the average age of the rest of the staff was 24.

“I was constantly amazed by the energy, vision,

*For the first time at an assembly, MWC's web site was updated daily with photos and video clips. It also carried live streaming of worship services. Credit for this work goes to Liesa Unger of Germany (left) and Jon Hines of Canada. Hundreds of photos and video clips of the assembly continue to be available at [www.mwc-cmm.org](http://www.mwc-cmm.org).*

patience, joy, crazy humour, hard work, and long hours of these young people,” Ray says. “Whenever I have doubts about the future leadership of the church, I think of this group, and my confidence is restored.”



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Perspective:

# *From the mountaintop to the valley*

by Danisa Ndlovu

Several days after returning from Asunción, I received a query from Markus Rediger, an MWC Executive Committee member, about my impressions of Assembly 15.

One of Markus' questions was: "Now that we are 'back from the mountain,' back home, did Asunción change our lives, our families, and our churches?"

I remembered Markus' question the next Sunday when I went to worship in one of our Bulawayo congregations. After reports from those who attended Assembly 15, the pastor, in his sermon, referred to the story of the transfiguration of Christ: the joy and beauty of the mountaintop experience. But his text was Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd ... though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for the Lord is with me."

photo by Lowell Brown



His point? After the mountain, we do not need to be afraid to go down to the valley, where real life challenges abound. After the glorious experiences of the mountaintop, we must not be afraid of the valleys of life that demand commitment, service, and sacrifice.

Some of the valleys can be scary and life threatening, but we walk carefully and with confidence, knowing the Lord is with us.

Assembly 15 was a mountaintop experience. These are some of my reasons for saying so:

- Prayer permeated every aspect of our gathering, both in the General Council and in Assembly Gathered.
- The adoption of the new MWC constitution serves as a launch pad into our future programs and structure. For me it was exciting to see new commissions being estab-

lished, particularly the Global Mission Fellowship taking up the challenge of being MWC's Mission Commission. These commissions, I believe, will become the eyes, ears, feet, and hands of MWC to carry out its mission in the world.

- There is a strong call for MWC to invest in its youth if it is to be relevant today and in the future. It was in that spirit that the first consensus decision of the new Executive Committee was to establish a Youth Task Force to help shape the future role of our youth within the MWC global family.

- The presentations by Lutherans Ishmael Noko and Katherine Johnson—in both the General Council and during an Assembly Gathered worship service—left many with a tear in their eye. Both Noko and Johnson demonstrated the honesty with which they wrestle with Lutheran persecution and execution of Anabaptists in the sixteenth century.

It became clear to many of us that the Lutheran-Mennonite dialogues are important. They are a way of cleaning up the dirt that has been under the carpet for a long time, leaving the house clean!

At the same time, the many powerful messages at Assembly 15 had a soul-searching effect. They challenged us to leave the mountaintop experience and go

*Danisa Ndlovu, MWC's new president, also serves as bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe.*

into the valley to live a life with a difference.

We can start living that life with a difference by being in prayer:

- for the work of the MWC commissions, that they may be able to be on their feet, walking and running.
- for the new MWC officers and the new Executive Committee as they give leadership to MWC, an organization in transition in both structure and staffing.
- for those of us involved in ensuring that a smooth transition takes place, that we will seek to glorify God in all stages of the process.
- for those who support the life and ministry of MWC, both prayerfully and financially.
- that many will be excited about MWC and joyfully and sacrificially give to enhance its work in the global family of faith.

We offer these prayers and engage in all these activities, not because we are on the mountaintop, but because we are down in the valley of life, which sometimes is full of uncertainties. We do so confident that the Lord our good shepherd is always with us.

Yes, I believe Asunción changed our lives. It might be difficult to measure at this point, because that change can only be seen in how we conduct our lives. I am waiting with great anticipation for stories that testify to that change as a result of Assembly 15.



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