

Courier Correo Courier

October 2020
Volume 35, Number 2



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

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

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**
Une Communauté
d'Églises Anabaptistes

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A word from the editor



Cover Photo:

“Most of my paintings these days are inspired by nature. During this quarantine time, I realized how much space nature actually took in my life. Also, in nature I can always see the wonder of God’s creation.”

Illustration: Mia Handoyo, Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) Semarang, Indonesia



Fragility and resilience

When the last *Courier* went out, the pandemic had just begun to shut down the world. Mennonite World Conference’s Executive Committee meetings were cancelled alongside the Renewal 2027 event to be celebrated in Canada.

Now, we have spent more than half a year in the uncertainty of pandemic living. Around the world, it has meant anything from the inconvenience of home confinement to the utter devastation of losing all sources of income and even losing loved ones. For almost all our members it meant – at least for a time – the suspension of in-person church services.

Our much-anticipated global Assembly has also been affected by the pandemic. The Executive Committee decided, with counsel from the National Advisory Committee in Indonesia, to postpone our gathering until 2022 (see page 17). The time of year and place of gathering remain the same. Adjust your calendars and keep planning to meet brothers and sisters worldwide at Assembly – in 2022. (Read more on page 11-12.)

In this issue of *Courier*, pastors from Africa and Latin America share about how their churches have been affected by the pandemic: what lessons are we learning and what new practices will we continue? (see page 3-6).

Nindy Sasongko, a pastor from Indonesia, shares a pandemic practice worth keeping: the vlog and podcast he started with friends has gained a large audience and become a spiritually nourishing place of faith development for producers and listeners – including people from other faiths (page 10).

The pandemic’s shutdowns resulted in some good news on the climate crisis. Smog in some major cities was reduced such that citizens were able to see blue skies and nearby geographic features for the first time in decades. On the other hand, disposal of single-use plastics is at an all-time high. MWC Creation Care Task Force member Sibonokuhle Ncube considers what she has learned about this urgent situation from her work in Zimbabwe and now as a theology student in the USA (page 8-9).

And two pastors from France reflect on holding funerals in a time of social distancing (page 7).

The pandemic is teaching people about interconnectedness, fragility and potential resilience of communities.

In May, MWC gathered a task force representing member mission and development organizations to guide our communal response to needs within our body. In another form of response, we began a bimonthly Online Prayer Hour: a time to hear each other’s struggles and gather together before our Lord.

The pandemic challenges us to question how we do everything from shopping to going to church. We use the term “the new normal” as we talk about how we are living now and in the future.

Yet, amid all that has changed, our convictions have not. God is creator even of the virus; the Holy Spirit walks with us in our pain and grief; and the body of Christ encourages us even from a distance. The pandemic has changed many things, but it has not changed who we follow: Jesus Christ, our hope.

Karla Braun is editor of *Courier* and writer for Mennonite World Conference. She lives in Winnipeg, Canada.

***Courier* is interested in your contributions. An upcoming issue will look at how we engage with religious traditions outside of Christianity. Do you have drawings, paintings, sculpture or photographs that depict interreligious dialogue? Submit your artwork/graphic art to photos@mwccmm.org for consideration for use in *Courier*. Please ensure images are full resolution. Include artist’s name and local church. Include a short description of the artwork.**

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Respondents



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Clement Ndlovu, pastor, Brethren In Christ Church, Krugersdorp branch, South Africa



Alba and David Irala, youth pastors, Iglesia Cristiana de la Paz, Mennonite Brethren church, Asuncion, Paraguay



Francis Kamoto, bishop, BIC Church, Zimbabwe



Siaka Traoré Traoré, pastor, Eglise Evangelique Mennonite du Burkina Faso



Sergio and Paula Mendoza, youth pastors, Sinai Mennonite Brethren Church, San Lorenzo, Paraguay



Nkunda John Bosco, pastor, Mennonite Church Uganda



Bishop Okoth Simon Onyango, Mennonite Church Uganda

COVID-19 in the Global South

We collected voices from around the world on the church in the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.

See sidebar for respondent bios.

How are we learning new ways to do church due to pandemic restrictions?

“Now more than ever, various forms of technology have taken on an active role. They have become key to keeping the church together and in fellowship,” say Sergio and Paula Mendoza.

However, ongoing disparities are highlighted. “The church community has been hit by possibilities of leaving others behind – especially those who have been slow to embrace technology,” says Clement Ndlovu.

Nevertheless, congregations have found means to reach their members.

“In some areas, people have been encouraged to seek God individually on mountain tops and in their homes. Other people have been encouraged by radio and TV programs to seek God more than before,” says Nkunda John Bosco.

“At the most, our Mennonite churches used WhatsApp to communicate with

members. A new way of doing things was to call Christians regularly by phone to show them that the leaders were thinking of them,” says Siaka Traoré.

“Throughout the entire lockdown we were able to use many forms of technology to keep the youth meetings going and connect with the youth’s different realities,” say Sergio and Paula Mendoza.

Even with the struggles, God is at work.

“Church work is more effective outside the four-walled structures as opposed to the modern way of conducting everything inside church buildings,” says Okoth Simon Onyango.

“Really, the changes that we have experienced during this time as a church have taken us beyond our comfort zone,” say Alba and David Irala. “However, technology enabled us to create new spaces with more sharing and participation than before. Through this we could see God using the difficulties and uncertainty to speak to us and affirm us in our faith. At the same time, we were able to strengthen our ties as a group.”



Sibonokuhle Ncube, theology student, BIC Church Zimbabwe



Like many churches, Mennonite young adults in Ecuador celebrated YABs Fellowship Week on Zoom during the pandemic.

Photo: courtesy of Consejo Juvenil Menonita Ecuador

“We are learning to truly be a church; one that is not defined by a physical space but one body present in various places as we pursue the same goals and follow the same Jesus,” say Alba and David Irala.

What are the theological challenges of reliance on technology?

“There are some still in our communities who have no access to modern technology. In our rural areas, electricity is not accessible and television sets cannot be used either. So reliance on technology made the church’s work harder in some areas during the pandemic,” says Okoth Simon Onyango who walks many miles to stay in touch with church members.

The variety of options is also a challenge.

“I think our theological foundations have been shaken due to a great exposure to many teachings made available,” says Clement Ndlovu.

“In a way, being able to meet via ‘just

one click’ converts the space for fellowship and living out our faith among fellow believers into just one more option on the menu of entertainment that the world offers us via digital platforms,” says Sergio and Paula Mendoza.

Yet, “with or without technology, Jesus Christ is our HOPE,” says Okoth Simon Onyango.

“The question at the beginning was how we could share the Lord’s Supper. Now we see that rather than be an insurmountable problem, sharing the communion symbolized in the Lord’s Supper breaks down barriers and makes us one. We have found peace as we have been faithful to this command despite the separation. In a sense, the distance has strengthened our theological and Biblical concepts,” say Alba and David Irala.

How has the church grown in this time?

Clement Ndlovu mourns the church’s lost spiritual influence on those without

technological connection. However, “virtual worship has opened the church beyond her catchment areas.”

“It’s tough to measure growth especially spiritually, however the time itself we find ourselves in has sensitised the masses of the importance and value of life. We see people seeking divine intervention more now, both believers and non-believers. In terms of reach, we have gone beyond the norm; able to reach more people numerically and globally,” says Bryn M Maphosa.

“For certain Christians, it was a period of slackening, because there were no longer regular and official activities at the church: a time of spiritual sleep. On the other hand, for a number of Christians this pandemic was a sign of the end times and so some put their lives in order,” says Siaka Traoré.

Yet the Holy Spirit is working, compelling even those who are not known evangelists to share about God with their neighbours. “As I walked a long stretch three days a week for two consecutive months, I met other people also walking, and the subject

“This period presents us with a number of lessons. The church has to learn to be intentional in her fellowship activities. The church’s teachings have to prepare the membership how to be the light and salt in difficult times. Learn the art of physical and virtual fellowship preparedness,” says Clement Ndlovu.

of discussion was ever the same – ‘May God help us and remove this virus that has brought this suffering,’” says Okoth Simon Onyango. “Evangelism is at its peak: each one was encouraging the other to believe in God the Almighty for a supernatural act.”

“The growth that we have seen has been in quality. The quality is reflected in our attitudes toward the needs that have arisen. Brothers and sisters in the faith have responded to this pandemic through acts of service, and a new opportunity to serve our community has arisen,” say Alba and David Irala.

What does it mean to be a group of believers “centred on community” when we cannot gather in person?

“It demands that we think out of the box to still further our mission. The group of believers still needs to be seen and heard one way or another as it is the heart of the community,” says Bryn M Maphosa.

“The practice of Christianity can only be done by reaching out to others. Our Christian life is real when we are in community; however, gathering in person is

not the only way. Our spiritual acts are not meant for public show,” says Okoth Simon Onyango.

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!’ (Psalm 133:1) ‘Let us not give up meeting together’” (Hebrews 10:25). We are used to this kind of worship, but the Bible is also encouraging us to have our prayers on our own because we are the temple of God and the Holy Spirit dwells in us,” Francis Kamoto.

“Adults and youth alike are eager to see one another soon. Even so, we know that it is necessary to respect the rules and we have found that our community is truly united,” say Alba and David Irala.

“It is possible to be in a shared space without a shared attitude. But now we are apart while we pay attention to one another’s needs and maintain constant contact through calls and online meetings,” say Alba and David Irala.

The distance forced by isolation or lockdown has reinforced what it means to be the church: “We encourage and exhort one another to be conscious of the situations that our own members are facing as well as the people around us. We see their need and look for ways to meet it. Through these actions we reflect the love of Christ and also demonstrate that we are believers who are committed to our community,” say Sergio and Paula Mendoza.

These changes: which do we hope are temporary? Which do we hope will remain after life goes “back to normal”?

“Without a doubt, we anxiously wait for the recommendation to keep our distance to be lifted. When that happens we will be able to hug again and show affection that is such a part of how we relate as believers. We especially desire the lifting of the restriction on meeting in churches so that once again we can worship together as the body of Christ,” say Sergio and Paula Mendoza.

But the hygiene practices are welcome to stay.

“They not only help with caring for ourselves, they also help us to care for others,” say Alba and David Irala.

“Hygiene practices protect us against many germs that we transmit from one to another. If we continue to wear masks in our context here, it protects us against dust and smoke pollution,” says Siaka Traoré.

He worries, however, about social distancing’s impact on “African socio-cultural values. African society expresses itself through relationships concretely, not virtually. In church, fraternal warmth is expressed through physical contact.”

“This period presents us with a number of lessons. The church has to learn to be intentional in her fellowship activities. The church’s teachings have to prepare the membership how to be the light and salt in difficult times. Learn the art of physical and virtual fellowship preparedness,” says Clement Ndlovu.

“Without a doubt, the pandemic has had positive effects too. It has challenged our definition of what it means to be church. Many thought of church as a physical space; now, however, our definition has deepened. We understand that being united and looking out for the needs of others through prayer and constant communication, then we are truly united and acting as a true church,” say Alba and David Irala.

“What I hope will be permanent: the requirement to be flexible when the need arises. The use of multimedia platforms is a great tool to be perfected to increase our global reach with the gospel,” says Bryn M Maphosa.

“I’ve been challenged to think more about the beauty of humanity, this idea of community cohesion. Look out for those who are low on resources. Go out to help,” says Sibonokuhle Ncube.

“The church continues in spite of the circumstances. We continue to practice ‘being church’ now more than ever. We

are discovering that it is not the place that defines us,” say Alba and David Irala.

How has this time challenged us to rethink how we used to live? What lessons does this period hold for us?

“I think this has helped me to be flexible in doing things. Sometime we take things for granted that we do things in this way. We can worship God at any place at any time,” says Francis Kamoto.

“The church must not lose its relevance and favour in such a time as this. The church needs to adhere to the laws of the land. The church needs to have plenty of resources to intervene in the lives of its congregants and community where needs are identified. Innovation and change management are critical strategic elements to incorporate in our running of God’s business,” says Bryn M Maphosa.

“This period has shown us the fragility of our medical, economic and even our governance systems. This pandemic has confirmed the idea that the world is a global family, because a disease that started at one place on earth was propagated throughout the entire planet,” says Siaka Traoré.

But it has demonstrated our capacity for solidarity amid fragility. “All sectors of society brought financial and in kind contributions to combat the coronavirus pandemic. We discovered an internal potential of local resources that allow for common actions,” says Siaka Traoré.

“It has been a good contribution from the pandemic to say ‘be aware of yourself and those around you and be safe for them,’” says Sibonokuhle Ncube. Physical distance is a reminder to “maintain distance from unhealthy things in interpersonal relationships too.”

“We have been obliged to comply with the norms established for the common well-being, and through our exemplary behaviour we reflect the teachings of Christ where we are in our society. As a church we have seen the hand of God guiding us through the difficulties. We must come to



Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) Anugerah, in Jakarta, Indonesia, installed handwashing stations outside their church building.

Photo: courtesy of GKMI Anugerah

depend entirely on the Lord. After all, this is our greatest wealth and hope in this world,” say Sergio and Paula Mendoza.

“We believe that this situation has helped us to think better about life as a whole; about relationships, service, the economy and health. The pandemic has shown us that we cannot go back to the way things were. Rather, we need a new normal where we take a more prudent and wise view of things; where we understand the importance of being church, of being a body that lives with wisdom and true unity regardless of where we are,” say Alba and David Irala.

Instead of being a great leveller, the COVID-19 pandemic is exposing pre-existing systemic inequalities that benefit some and disadvantage others. How is the Anabaptist family responding? Mennonite World Conference has invited Anabaptist mission and service agencies to coordinate their financial response to COVID-19 hardships experienced especially by under-resourced member churches around the world.

Learn more here



Pastor Tapas Dey and his wife Ratna of Grace Community Church, a Bharatiya Jukta Christa Prachar Mandli (Mennonite) church in Kolkata, India, were able to collect and distribute flooding aid in their neighbourhood despite the pandemic.

Photo: courtesy of Cynthia Peacock



Bishops and other church leaders in Zimbabwe prayed before distributing bags of rice, cooking oil, and sugar beans. “It was a great time of sharing the Word of God to the community people,” says Bishop Sindah Ngulube of Brethren in Christ Church Zimbabwe.

Photo: Sindah Ngulube

France

Grieving in the time of COVID-19

by Luc Nussbaumer, Philippe Figuière

A new solidarity, different ways

Our Mennonite community of Pfastatt, France, is located five minutes from a megachurch that was one of the most significant centers of the COVID-19 epidemic at the time of a week of fasting and prayer in their facilities. For a long time, they were unfairly accused of having provoked the largest propagation of the virus in France. The mistrust of government officials with regard to Protestant churches continues.

A totally new situation

Like everyone else, we were surprised and disconcerted by the shelter-in-place order of the government. It was an unknown situation for which we had no reference point.

The church immediately felt the need to preserve bonds within our community, especially for isolated persons who were not connected to the internet. It was necessary to find new ways to support and nourish community members spiritually.

As a pastor, I needed to learn to provide pastoral care and teach people individually by phone or the internet. The fact that I was following up with recently converted young people was all the more reason to do this, since I had to wait for the shelter-in-place orders to be lifted before we could meet in person.

In order to be available and effective at each moment, the elders and deacons met every week via video conference. We organized ourselves to gather everyone's news by sharing contacts, to offer biblical meditations each week via email or regular mail, and to encourage and nourish each person. During this time, some suffered from anxiety and depression, while others did not, but the feelings of unease were strange and previously unknown.

"We had never prayed so much before this"

A church member set up a prayer chain on WhatsApp, proving itself to be very effective. Church members said to me:

"We had never prayed so much and for so many people before this!"

Another group for parents and children was created on WhatsApp to assist families in schooling their children – with daily life in confinement – and to suggest ideas for biblical teaching and organized activities. Many took advantage of this.

In spite of the situation, a week of prayer and fasting was held via a daily guide sent out by email. Some communicated their lived experience through the prayer chain group. Together, we were able to closely follow the evolving health of one of the elderly members of our assembly who was seriously ill with the coronavirus. We were able to observe the events leading to that person regaining health and rejoining family.

Church members said to me: "We had never prayed so much and for so many people before this!"

The pain of grieving

I officiated at two burials of people who died from COVID-19 during this time. The number of people authorized to attend was limited to a maximum of 25 and the time was limited to 30 minutes outdoors at the cemetery. Certain family members were not able to come, making the sharing of emotions and expression of grief particularly difficult.

People learned a new kind of solidarity, different ways to support each other. Some were led, in their solitude, to rediscover a personal relationship with God. They were also led to renew family worship times that they had not held for a while, times that had been missed.

At the beginning, Sunday worship via Zoom or YouTube were like a breath of fresh air. Seeing the faces of brothers and sisters gathered together and hearing their voices was a source of joy.

Nothing, however, replaces a true in-person gathering. Even with all of the

orders to follow and the distancing rules to respect, being able to listen to each other sing and praise together and to greet each other has become a real luxury. Having said this, it is still not easy for everyone to return to worship.

This is a new challenge for leaders. Customs, format, teaching children – all of this requires new inventions.

Our assurance is that God is never taken by surprise and the coming of God's Kingdom has never been so relevant.

Philippe Figuière is pastor and member of the elders and deacons of the Mennonite Evangelical Church of Pfastatt, France.

Touched by testimony

Our church (Birkenhof) is located 30 kilometers from Mulhouse, France, and we experienced four deaths from COVID-19 before August. Three of them were between 75 and 80 years old and one was 86. The burials took place outside the church or in the cemetery with a limited number of people.

Accompanying grieving families in such circumstances is unusual. The absence of members of the extended family, the church, friends, and neighbors, as well as a ceremony with a reduced format is a painful experience for those who are stricken by this ordeal. It isn't possible for them to experience grief in normal conditions and as a consequence, the separation is even more difficult.

Gathering news, making phone calls, sending messages, expressing affection and supporting persons in mourning are very important.

On two occasions, the burial services were filmed and made available to those who were not able to attend. We were amazed by the number of views of one of these videos. Although we are an assembly of 130 members, the burial service of one member had registered 785 views before August. We venture to believe that a non-Christian public was also touched by the testimony of the deceased brother.

Luc Nussbaumer is pastor of the Mennonite Evangelical Church of Birkenhof, France.

Zimbabwe

Ambitious dreams for a more just world

by Sibonokuhle Ncube

“It started from small ambitions of a little heart,” says Sibonokuhle Ncubenokuhle Ncube. As a child of 10 in Zimbabwe, “hearing that my parents couldn’t ever send enough money to help [my relatives] because whole village was hungry, I got ambitious in my dreams. *When I grow up, I will be helpful.*”

In both rural and urban Zimbabwe, the majority of households grow some of their own food. Changes in climate patterns are apparent to everyone. The droughts used to come every 10 years, then every five. “Now the droughts are back to back, across seasons. We are keenly aware of that,” she says.

Add in a global pandemic, and the situation is even more critical.

Church leadership in community

As with issues surrounding the coronavirus, the reasons for climate change are not always understood, says Sibonokuhle Ncube, and are often politicized. Political divisions result in actions that cause real harm. Misgovernance and politicization of development can also affect how aid and resources flow from one region to another. “Apart from structural issues, [in Zimbabwe], we had civil unrest; structural, cultural and physical violence; displacement.”

Her studies and vocation have focused on development, peacemaking and climate finance governance in Zimbabwe where she has worked with government, NGO and faith-based agencies and INGOs.

Targeting rural poverty via agricultural and water supply interventions was my first port of call. We work together with communities [affected by food insecurity] to co-create pathways to adequate provisioning.

“The church needs leaders who understand their local dynamics and are able to share transformative information from the pulpit. The body of Christ is richer – not just in spiritual knowledge,

“There is good value in not speaking from a polarized perspective one that has an *us* and *them*. I tried to come from a space to talk about *us* and *we*. I also look at things generationally. Science shows us the climate has been changing from many years ago.”

but a broad sharing of life skills,” she adds. For example, the church can promote ecological regeneration of common lands (caring for local forests, shared paddocks) in their community.

Hope comes from action

High level action is needed for climate response. In every age, there are issues that “call upon people of faith to truly walk in radical acts of discipleship. Climate response is one of those for us today. We need a prophetic stance against the forces that reproduce marginality.

“A vibrant climate response is multilevel. On the policy side: speak to people in power. Make financial provisions for innovation, mitigation, adaptation,” says Sibonokuhle Ncube, “Communities of faith must pray for people in power who control resources. We need to pray for those who have no sense of ecological responsibility.”

People can also participate in civil action. “Individuals and communities can do something within their realms. It stops us from being gripped by despair.”

Sibonokuhle Ncube advised the government of Zimbabwe in the lead-up to

the Paris climate agreement in 2016. Some of the world powers’ commitments made there have not been upheld. Nevertheless, “I have chosen to stand on the side of hope and be acting from the bottom.”

“Our approach to working on climate response should be as concerted, coordinated, urgent and inter-generational as the attention we gave to HIV and AIDs,” she says.

An *us* perspective

For a deep and meaningful climate response, “we need to come to a round table as big as the earth’s circumference. We’re affected as humanity,” Sibonokuhle Ncube says.

“There is good value in not speaking from a polarized perspective one that has an *us* and *them*. I tried to come from a space to talk about *us* and *we*. I also look at things generationally. Science shows us the climate has been changing from many years ago.”

“I love to come from an embodied systems worldview where I ask all of us living now to view ourselves as beneficiaries of the carbon age. If we look at stages of development, we are existing as offspring of humans who lived in ages past. I invite communities to think about what we can do to change some of the ways we do development and economics. Corporate thinking unlocks resources, participation.”

Exercising global stewardship

She also calls people of faith to consider justice and stewardship in their climate response. The impact of our individual reductions may be minimal, yet we must consider how our excess carbon consumption “causes discomfort on the other side of the world.”

“The systems perspective brings Scripture to come alive. Communities that are disenfranchised by shifting climate due to our action are our neighbours (Matthew 25). “We need to think deeply

Indonesia

New ways of learning for a new time

by Nindyo Sasongko

Nindyo Sasongko believes theology should be publicly available to a wider audience. His experiment in online discussions began in November 2018; when the pandemic hit, “Theology” increased in frequency to meet the demand for online means of connecting.

“The initial purpose was to be for laypeople who don’t have background in theology in Indonesia. We started with 15-20 minute episodes on theology matters accessible to a general audience. Later on, we find out that our audience grew – not only from Indonesia but also my colleagues.”

The theology professor and PhD candidate invited fellow theology students – from Indonesia, but spread around the world from Australia to the USA – to join him in humble conversations online. Three of the six founders are Mennonites: Nindyo Sasongko and a second theology student Adi Widya Nugroho were raised in the GKMI church in Indonesia. Perdian Tumanan is studying at AMBS, Elkhart, Indiana. This meeting grew into “Theology,” a theology discussion channel online with almost 250,000 followers.

Concerned about accessibility for those with poor internet connections, Nindyo Sasongko converts the recordings to audio for podcasts. But he sees the barriers of access melting away. During the pandemic, sometimes those in rural Indonesia have a better connection than he does in New York City, USA.

“Theology” was launched into English – and to a wider audience – at Mennonite World Conference’s Global Anabaptist Peacebuilding Festival in the Netherlands in 2019 when they spoke with Mennonite historian Ben Goossen.

The audience comes from a variety of different traditions; “probably more progressive Christians, but also conservative.”



At Peace Sunday 2017 celebrations at Mtshabezi Brethren In Christ Church in Zimbabwe, Sibonokuhle Ncube stands by as the bishop commissions a borehole at the adjacent Ekuphileni Bible Institute of the Brethren In Christ Church. Traditionally, they mark Peace Sunday by commissioning institutional or community infrastructure with a peace-related name. This has contributed to strengthening awareness of the centrality of peace to development.

courtesy Sibonokuhle Ncube

about what just transition look like. Global North or Global South – we call need to do something. We need to hold those in authority to account in ways that are theologically sound. We are not only a people who work in ways that are hidden, but are also able to speak truth to power, as many a Bible character has had to do.”

“In face of natural disasters and the impact of shifting climate, continuing in our future, communities will need to be resilient, work with alternative energy, know how to communicate our ecological stewardship as part of our faith,” says Sibonokuhle Ncube.

Sharing gifts

For Mennonite World Conference, there is a lens of “sharing gifts.” “Life is a gift from God. Yet there is a high life we find in Jesus who gives us abundant life. He gives us gifts like the created order. We are

responsible for looking after those gifts, bequeathing generations to come with better ecological gifts to ensure we share a better quality of life for posterity.”

“It’s my prayer that this generational thinking can help us reorient our minds: ask the Holy Spirit to reconfigure our spirits. Look at the world redeemingly through God’s eyes. Look at brothers and sisters and creation worldwide through God’s eyes.”



Sibonokuhle Ncube, a member of Brethren in Christ Church Zimbabwe, is currently walking her peacebuilding journey through studies in theology and peace at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, USA. She is also a member of the MWC Creation Care Task Force.



Learn more about the MWC Creation Care Task Force here <https://mwc-cmm.org/creation-care-task-force>

Guests have included well known experts in their fields, but it started with inviting friends.

“We wanted to provide a non-elite form. We invited BA students with passion in theology, people writing a paper that got published.”

A new appetite for theological conversation

The pandemic was “a blessing in disguise” for “Theovlogy”, says Nindyo Sasongko. The organizers were busy with schoolwork; six months passed without a new episode. Then the closedown happened in mid-March and everyone had time at home. “I thought I would be insane if I just prepared for class.” So, “Theovlogy” revived. Soon Nindyo Sasongko learned about other podcasts in Indonesia following its example.

Teaching classes online left Nindyo Sasongko feeling stretched. “Before the pandemic, [to discuss theological matters], we would meet our audience and they would pose questions directly to us. Now we could only see their writing, short questions; we could not see their expressions.”

But over at “Theovlogy”, “Our conversations brought me health.”

“We found people can follow and interact as they watch our conversations,” says Nindyo Sasongko. “Before, regular church people’s retention is 20-25 minutes. During the pandemic, people sit and watch for about an hour – on hard theological topics. They stay with what we are discussing. They can re-watch or re-listen. I didn’t see this happen before the pandemic.”

“Through this podcast, we learned that we created community,” says Nindyo Sasongko. The hosts and guests interact with the audience during the live question and answer session and through feedback

“This is a safe space,” he says. Hosts & guests talk about faith & religion “without being judged by doctrine, dogma or rules.”

on the recorded sessions. The audience includes people none of the originators have ever met before. “Even across religious traditions.”

“This is a safe space,” he says. Hosts and guests talk about faith and religion “without being judged by doctrine, dogma or rules.”

“Our audience can have access to theological matters that they did not expect before. Many of our audience expected theology as a defense of faith, apologetics.” But the podcast showcases different views of theology. The audience experiences how theology can be approached not from an apologetical point of view, but from a more collegial, conversational and hospitable point of view.”

“Theovlogy” has hosted a Muslim scholar and an agnostic as guests. “We never knew Christianity in this kind of openness and hospitality,” both guests and listeners told them.

“In this sense, I can see this is a Mennonite way of providing reconciliation,” Nindyo says.

Lessons for the new normal?

“When we can, we sit together and let’s talk,” Nindyo says.

But, in the meantime, he has seen the potential for even a remote, screen-mediated experience to provide a

connection – the sense of community that Anabaptists believe is imperative to church.

“The church breaks down barriers,” he says. Online services have done that in a new way, making it possible for people around the world to participate in church together. “This might be what the apostle Paul says: in Christ all boundaries are broken down, there is no Jew nor Greek (Galatians 3:28),” he says.

Online discussions give opportunity for people from different religious traditions to dialogue and learn. “At Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, we invited a Sufi to talk to us. He had his disciples watching from Indonesia.” Another time, a Jewish rabbi invited his colleagues to watch.

“I see that this might be the future of the church.”

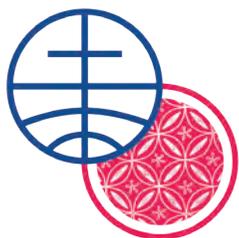
“There is an openness that isn’t there in person in four walls,” he says.

“I see a challenge to my own theology” in meeting online. “I am vulnerable; I must open myself to be moved, challenged, interrupted, changed and transformed by my encounters with others. I learn that I am still in the process of becoming, and this process is sometimes painful.

“When all humans are connected through the internet today, I ask myself what it means to be human. It is to be open to vulnerability, because only in this way, we learn to see new possibilities.”



Nindyo Sasongko is a founder of “Theovlogy”. An ordained minister in the Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) Conference in Indonesia, he is currently a PhD student in systematic theology and a teaching fellow at Fordham University, New York, USA. He is also theologian in residence at Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship, New York City, and a member of the MWC Creation Task Force.



Indonesia 2022

05-10
07 2022

bersama-sama mengikuti Yesus melintas batas
sesarengan ngetut wuri Gusti Yesus nratas wewates
following Jesus together across barriers
seguir a Jesús juntos, superando las barreras
suivre Jésus ensemble à travers les frontières

NEW DATE

Youth delegate becomes workshop organizer

“The memories are still in my mind,” says Estifanos Gedlu, workshop coordinator for Assembly 17 (a gathering of Anabaptist from around the globe).

A delegate at Global Youth Summit and Assembly 15 in Paraguay in 2009, Estifanos Gedlu left his home country of Ethiopia for the first time to attend.

“I was impressed by the culture of Paraguay: the way they worship; the way they welcomed us.”

Today, he is part of the team shaping this barrier-crossing experience for the Mennonite World Conference event in Semarang, Indonesia.

From 5 to 10 July 2022, there will be daily mass worship, service opportunities, fellowship activities – and two workshop time slots – on the theme “Following Jesus across barriers.”

“We are looking for topics and workshop leaders that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of our global communion and are interactive and dynamic,” says Estifanos Gedlu. “In addition to theological and historical workshops, we are particularly interested in including cultural or creative workshops and stories of lived experience.”

A recent engineering graduate before he went to GYS, Estifanos Gedlu was working in campus ministry at Meserete Kristos Church, which led to his opportunity to go to Paraguay.

“From that moment, I read about Anabaptists, I received Courier [MWC’s magazine], I got Info [MWC’s monthly e-newsletter]. I was looped in.”

In Assembly workshops, “I heard interesting stories from countries with similar challenges to those from my home,” he says.

“I learned about different cultures. It is good to see we have this international church.”

He never returned to engineering. Now Estifanos Gedlu is deputy director of leadership transformation at Leadership Transformation Ministries.

He works with rural pastors and is an elder in his local church, Dehub Meserete Kristos Church.

The friends he made from around the world at GYS remained close for years, as they started careers and their own families.

“Some of my old friends from GYS may be coming with their children.”

“I’ll do my best to make my part of Assembly interesting and relevant to various contexts,” he says.



Program Committee, from right to left: Estifanos Gedlu, Jessica Mondal, Benjamin Bergey, Natalie Frisk, Frieder Boller, Jardely Martínez.
Photo: Liesa Unger



Indonesia
2022



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

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

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**
Une Communauté
d’Églises Anabaptistes

New Date

On 18 August 2020, the Executive Committee has decided to move the Assembly by one year to 5–10 July 2022. Indonesia will still be the host country; the Holy Stadium church in Semarang, Central Java, the place for the meeting.

Assembly Scattered

Before and after Assembly Gathered various locations in Indonesia

1–4 July 2022 | **Global Youth Summit (GYS)**
Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia
Theme:
Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship.

5–10 July 2022 | **Assembly Gathered**
Holy Stadium, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia
Theme:
Following Jesus together across barriers.



Assembly Scattered.
Photo: Liesa Unger

Assembly Gathered Program

- July Daily Themes**
- 05 Tuesday (opening) – following Jesus together across barriers
 - 06 Wednesday – following Jesus – learning together
 - 07 Thursday – following Jesus – living together
 - 08 Friday – following Jesus – caring together
 - 09 Saturday – following Jesus – celebrating together
 - 10 Sunday (closing) – following Jesus together

Morning Program

Each morning will feature speakers chosen by the Young Anabaptist Committee and by one of the MWC Commissions. Youth will be actively involved in the program on stage. Singing together will be a major part of our celebration.



Youth Program.
Photo: Heike Martin

Afternoon activities

Afternoon activities will include workshops, service opportunities, local tours, sports, Global Church Village and Anabaptist World Cup.



Service Opportunities.
Photo: John Eby

Evening Worship

Each evening will have special music and speaker from one continent.



Evening Worship.
Photo: Jonathan Charles

Children's All-Day Program

Children will join the morning singing with their families. From there they will be welcomed into their own program in different age groups. The program will involve story telling around the biblical message. There will be games, crafts, singing and tons of fun. The program will include lunch and end before supper.



Children's Program.
Photo: Jonathan Charles

Teen and Youth Program

Youth will have a special focus during all parts of Assembly. This will include small groups for youth, Young Anabaptist speakers, inspiring music, service opportunities, youth-related themes in workshops, sports activities and hang out time at the Global Church Village. And at the end of each full day, there will be a bonus late-evening youth program.



GYS. Photo: Liesa Unger

Registration

Registration opens in December 2021

Registration fee for adults will be D \$550, C \$150, B \$75 or A \$35 US or Rp.500.000 depending on country of citizenship (see rate groups on website). Registration includes lunch and supper, Semarang airport pick-up and drop-off and Semarang hotel shuttles to and from Assembly site.

There will be special rates for children, youth, families, volunteers and GYS attendees. Please see website for more details.

Lodging, breakfast included

Hotel Rooms:
\$30 to \$50 US room per night at a 3- to 4-star hotel
Dormitory-style lodging at local school: \$10 US per person per night

Registration fee GYS:

including food and lodging
A \$15, B \$35, C \$75, D \$275 US, E Rp. 200 000.- depending on country of citizenship (see rate groups on website).

For more information

Indonesia2021@mwccmm.org



Print your own Assembly poster; share information about Assembly.
www.mwccmm.org



Indonesia
2022

Rely on God for everything

The story of Brethren In Christ Church Nepal

Nepal

MWC member:

*Nepal BIC Church/Brethren in
Community Welfare Society*

Baptized Members	1076
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Congregations	22
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President	Shemlal Hembron
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Source: Global Statistics – 2018 Directory



Mrs. Netra Neupane

courtesy of Hanna Soren



“I learn to share and care for others happily even in the time of difficulties such as the pandemic coronavirus and lockdown,” says Mrs. Netra Neupane.

Although the number of people infected by COVID-19 is increasing, the people of Nepal have suffered more due to the lockdown. People have lost jobs and are starved for food. However, in the midst of such a critical situation, Christian believers learn to rely on God for everything.

During the lockdown, most believers spent time in prayer seeking the will of God for their lives.

Many formed prayer groups for chain prayer weekly or monthly, and some spent time in fasting prayer.

They learned to be thankful to God even in the time of difficulties. They have collected whatever they have and shared with each other as per their needs.

Mrs. Netra Neupane, a member of a BIC Nepal church, runs a restaurant in a rented house. During the lockdown, she found very difficult to survive and also pay the house rent because the restaurant was completely closed. In spite of her own difficulties, when she saw some people without food lying in the bus station, she shared with them the rice she received for herself.

Even when the local BIC church wanted help her family, she directed assistance to those who are more needy and helpless than her family.

“I learn to share and care for others happily even in the time of difficulties such as the pandemic coronavirus and lockdown,” she says. “That gives me not only satisfaction but joy in serving the needy as Jesus taught his disciples.”



Brethren in Community Welfare Services helps farmers like these in Jahada Rural Municipality in eastern Nepal through food security projects, vocational training programs and rural education programs.

Photo: Henk Stenvers

First mission efforts

Brethren In Christ Church (BIC) Nepal was pioneered by missionaries from the Brethren In Christ church in Bihar, India. In turn, the BIC mission station in Bihar, India, was started in 1914 by the missionaries from USA and Canada who came under BIC World Mission.

For more than three decades or until around 1950, these missionaries from North America were not very successful in planting churches. In the meantime, they discovered mission work among Santals in south Bihar was fruitful to them. So, they appointed a native missionary from south Bihar to reach out the Santals in north Bihar. Encouragingly, people responded to Jesus Christ and very soon churches began to grow among the Santals.

Later the North American missionaries found another responsive tribal people known as Urawn where the BIC missionaries focused their outreach. As a result, many people accepted Jesus as their Saviour. Significantly, the churches among the Santal and Urawn began to grow in their neighbourhood as the local believers were so zealous to reach out other people from their own tribe wherever it was possible for them.

When an Australian missionary working in Nepal border informed the BIC missionaries in Bihar about the Santals in Nepal they became very happy to know it and planned to visit them. So, under the leadership of this Australian missionary, Indian native missionaries from BIC Bihar visited the Santals in Nepal for the first

time. When they saw the interest of people to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour, the missionaries began to visit them regularly.

The first and second events of baptism were recorded in 1959 and 1962 when Nepal was constitutionally a Hindu country. This meant preaching the gospel was illegal and conversion from any other religion to Christianity was punishable by three to five years imprisonment. Followers of Christ had to face persecution from government and the local community.

Formation of Brethren in Community Welfare Society

In the beginning, most early believers were excommunicated by their society. However, in spite of this situation, Nepali Christians continued to spread the gospel secretly and the number of believers in Christ continued to increase. Therefore, regular church worship began in the early 1980s and the churches of BIC Nepal were officially organized in 1994. They continued to work under the church board of BIC Bihar until 2004 when BIC Church Nepal became the national conference.

Since there was no provision to register as a church, BIC Church Nepal decided to organize a social wing to serve the community to share the love of God in action. In the name of Brethren in Community Welfare Society (BICWS) Nepal, a social trust was formed and registered with the local government. After two years of becoming a national conference, BIC Church Nepal became an associate member of MWC in 2006 in Pasadena,



Members of BIC Nepal churches have a vibrant faith despite the possibility of threats from extremist religious groups.

Photo: Henk Stenvers

USA. In 2009, BIC Nepal became a full member of MWC.

In the partnership of BICWM and coordination of BIC Church Bihar, BIC Church Nepal continues to grow in spite of some challenges and difficulties. Now there are 34 churches including 12 house fellowships with 912 total baptized believers.

BIC Church Nepal continues to have close fellowship with BIC Church Bihar and holds associate membership in Mennonite Christian Service Fellowship of India (MCSFI).

BIC Church Nepal is associated and coordinates with the local Christian society, provincial Christian society and Nepal Christian Society (NCS) and also with National Churches Fellowship of Nepal (NCFN).

Major ministry focus

Along with many other church activities, BIC Church Nepal has been focusing on five major areas: church planting, leadership development, community development, children's education and humanitarian relief service.

Church Planting

Evangelism and church planting is one of the main focuses of BIC Church Nepal and therefore the church has been reaching out to the unreached people for Christ. The BIC church in Nepal is small, and its numbers do not increase rapidly. However, in spite of persecution and other difficulties, new



The mud-house BIC church building in Itahari Sunsari District was affected by flooding.

Photo: Henk Stenvers



Brethren in Community Welfare Services helps farmers like through food security projects and vocational training programs.

Photo: Henk Stenvers



The central plain area of Nepal – where most of the BIC churches are congregated – experiences frequent flooding from excess rainfall.

Photo: Shemlal Hembron

believers are being added to the church and also new house fellowships are formed almost every year.

BIC missionaries from India pioneered churches mainly among the Santals and Urawn communities in southeast Nepal. Now, the BIC churches are planted among 11 different peoples including Santals and Urawn in seven districts of two different provinces of Nepal. The church includes people from Rajbanshi, Rishedev, Tharu, Rai, Limbu, Magar, Newar, Tamang (Lama), Madheshi people groups and high caste Hindus.

Leadership Development

The BIC church organizes short-term lay-leadership training at least twice a year. Since 1990, in coordination with Allahabad Bible Seminary, Uttar Pradesh, India, BIC Church Nepal has developed a Bachelor of Theology (BTh) course in Nepali medium. This course is carried on through extension program as it is aimed to provide an opportunity to those Nepali-speaking church leaders who cannot attend or do not have an opportunity to go for theological training in residential Bible school/colleges. This course is also open to other evangelical churches and denominational leaders who are interested.

Community Development

Serving the community who are helpless and oppressed has always been part of BIC Church Nepal's mission since it was registered with the local government as Brethren in Community Welfare Society

(BICWS). We serve those who need to be helped and be liberated as we find in Luke 4:18 and Romans 12:13.

First, for six years in partnership with United Mission to Nepal (UMN), BICWS empowered women of the target community through self-help group mobilization, vegetable farming and kitchen gardening.

For last 10 years in partnership with MCC Nepal and the local government, BICWS has been actively involved in the community development through food security projects, vocational training programs and rural education programs in the target community of Jahada Rural Municipality in eastern Nepal.

Humanitarian Service

In partnership with MCC Nepal and the local government, BICWS Nepal is also engages in response to natural disasters. Almost every year, the society has been responding to drought, fire, floods and thunderbolts. In 2015, BICWS responded to earthquake although it was in limited areas.

With the support of MWC through the Global Church Sharing Fund, we supported congregations to reconstruct the church buildings that were damaged by the flood. Whenever needed, BIC church also coordinates with the other local congregations and provincial Christian society for humanitarian relief support during critical situations.

Even this year at the time of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BIC Church Nepal coordinated with the provincial Christian society to provide relief

food and other needs for those who are in quarantine centres in the border of eastern Nepal.

Children's Education

Most of BIC churches in Nepal are established in the rural area among unreached people who are mostly uneducated and also financially poor. When these people come to the faith in Christ, we try to support them to grow in their spiritual life and also assist them for their children's education.

We have two different programs in order to ensure all children of BIC Church Nepal have an opportunity to get school education and are nurtured spiritually.

In partnership with BIC World Mission USA, we run Sponsorship Program for International Children's Education (SPICE) hostels where children from rural areas come to live together and join the nearby government schools for their education.

In partnership with BIC World Mission Canada, we run a Provide Essential Assistance for Children's Education (PEACE) project. This project is run nearby government's schools, so the BIC Church gathers children every day before and after school for tutoring and food.

Theological Issues

In Nepal, we do not have major theological conflicts since BIC Church is the only Anabaptist-related church, although the believers are from different cultural backgrounds. Charismatic Pentecostal, Presbyterian and Lutheran churches in

the region also mostly practice balanced evangelical faith and teaching. Most churches in Nepal recognize the differences and accept each other, living in communal harmony.

Challenges and opportunities

In the present context of Nepal, we have both challenges and opportunities.

Challenges

Persecution from the government and religious fundamentalists is one of the major challenges. Although Nepal is declared a secular country under the constitution of Nepal, which was promulgated 20 September 2015, and the constitution provides for freedom to practice one's religion, it still denies the right to convert another person. Christianity is a minor religion; therefore, followers of Jesus are often in the target of religious fundamentalists, who falsely accuse Christians of bribing others to Christianity. Several Christian leaders from other churches are in prison or facing court cases against them. BIC leaders are aware of the risk of accusations against them.

Other major challenge is natural disasters as Nepal is vulnerable to earthquakes, landslides, floods, thunderstorms, avalanche, fire, droughts and epidemics. Almost every year, hundreds of people die and thousands people are badly affected by these disasters.

In 2015, an earthquake took more than 10 000 lives and damaged 500 000 houses were damaged. People who were badly affected by such devastating disasters were slowly trying to recover. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected normal human life. At press time, 51 919 people are infected of which 322 have died and 36 672 have recovered. Comparatively more than the direct hit by the illness has been the lockdown which badly affected people especially the daily wage workers.

Poverty and increasing rate of unemployment of youth is another major problem because of which youth participants in the church decrease day by day. The young people are attracted to worldly pleasures and they try to compete with others to earn more instead of desiring to grow spiritually and be obedient to God.

After Nepal became a secular country it was a joy for Christians to worship and practice the faith in Christ more openly. Christian leaders are learning about the fundamental human rights and are raising their voice for religious freedom. But with this religious freedom, several cults came to Nepal who visit mostly Christian homes and try to impose the believers to accept their teaching that is contradicting our biblical and evangelical faith.

Opportunities

In the midst of difficulties and challenges, many good things are also happening.

Persecution brings unity among the Christians and binds them in one cord despite doctrinal and denominational differences. It opens the ways to connect with each other and share our common concerns and also support each other in whatever ways possible. Those who are strong in faith try to help other believers to be strong and encourage them to trust God, spend time in continuous prayer and live in closer fellowship with other believers in Christ. They are motivated to organize chain prayer with fasting and praying and also depend on God rather than any resources or human being. It gives them sense of togetherness and unity as it is seen in the book of Acts. During difficulties, the believers experience the grace of God and also learn to support each other in every way as possible. They learn only to depend on God and God's power rather than human power. As they live in unity, they learn to co-operate each other and try to resolve problems together.

In times of difficulty, like the pandemic, people are more open to the gospel. Especially when they are sick, lack supplies and also face political pressure, they are open to accept Jesus as Saviour.

Submitted by Hanna Soren on behalf of BIC Church Nepal.

MWC Financial update

You make a difference in our Global Anabaptist community when you contribute to the ministry of MWC. We thank you: national member churches, local congregations, and individuals.

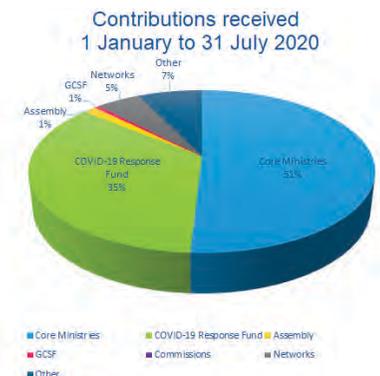
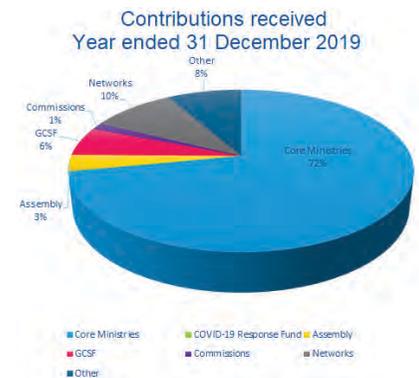
Designated funds are used to carry out specific ministries; this year, a new fund was added to support initiatives responding to needs arising from the COVID-19 global pandemic. And we're raising funds for Assembly in Indonesia in 2022.

The graph below shows how the gifts we receive were used in 2019 and 2020.

We are grateful for all contributions in support of Mennonite World Conference. We rely on your end-of-year contributions to meet our financial commitments. **Your gift impacts lives!**

See mwc-cmm.org/donate

Len Rempel, chief operating officer



Executive Committee meetings

MWC charts course for future operations

“Like the Israelites in the desert as referenced in the book of Numbers, we’re on a journey together, trusting in God’s daily provision and presence,” said J. Nelson Kraybill, MWC president, to open the second set of online meetings of the Executive Committee.

MWC’s Executive Committee met virtually twice in 2020 to replace the cancelled in-person meetings and postponed [Renewal 2027](#) event in British Columbia, Canada.

The global pandemic has caused unexpected turns in the journey of Mennonite World Conference. Considering the recommendation of the National Advisory Committee of the host country, the Executive Committee agreed during their 18-19 August 2020 meetings to postpone the global Assembly planned for Indonesia until 2022. Timing and venue will remain the same.

Delaying this event with attendant meetings requires a change to term endings for General Council and Executive Committee members and MWC Officers, including the MWC President. The Executive Committee agreed by consensus on a proposal to extend these terms by one year until the new Assembly date. The matter proceeds to General Council members via email for final approval.

Budget

At the 30 March to 2 April 2020 meetings, the Executive Committee approved the proposed 2020 budget while recognizing the financial uncertainty created by the global pandemic. Over the year, staff and officers will regularly apprise Executive Committee of the financial situation and implications for the budget, and will consult if major budget changes are required.

In August, giving is in line with previous years, reports Chief Financial Officers Len Rempel. Expenses are below budget due to reduced travel; however, Fair Share contributions from national churches have been coming in slower than anticipated.

“Some parts of the world have entered into recession due to the pandemic. This may impact giving from individuals as well as member churches’ ability to meet their

commitments later in the year,” says Len Rempel.

Administrative proposals

In April, the Executive Committee approved administrative proposals concerning financial statements, officers’ reports, a policy for workshop and seminars at [Assembly 17](#) and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS).

“The AMBS MOU builds on the idea of sharing gifts in our global church,” says MWC general secretary César García. “This opens the door for the possibility of AMBS working with other theological institutions in the Global South.” Also, the emerging Global Anabaptist Higher Education Network (GAHEN) can help Mennonite educational institutes around the world to work more closely with each other.

The Executive Committee also approved changes to the Global Church Sharing Fund accounts: the newly formed [Creation Care Task Force](#) will be entrusted with use of the carbon offset fund originally collected under auspices of the Global Church Sharing Fund. The usual management fee will not apply to the COVID-19 response fund so all donations can go directly to grants to meet needs for food, hygiene items and health education in countries of the Global South.

Study on baptism dialogues

Approved at the April meeting, Mennonite World Conference appointed a creation care task force to raise awareness and propose actions for our global church family. The task force works closely with the four MWC Commissions.

“This [discussion] comes at the right time,” says MWC vice president Rebecca Osiro. “The young people in my congregation observe that this issue begins with them. I hope this task force will find ways of reaching out to engage with even more people within our national churches who are interested in this subject.”

Also in April, the Executive Committee received the official report “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church.”

The report is the result of [five years of dialogue](#) between representatives of Mennonite World Conference, Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic church (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity).

The MWC Faith and Life Commission is developing Renewal 2027 webinars for churches to explore the implications of the report and act on its recommendations.

“We urge pastors and leaders to mine this resource,” says MWC president J. Nelson Kraybill. “We can learn from other traditions and appreciate their perspective even as we strengthen our own theological foundations.”

“What is different about this dialogue is that it gives specific recommendations that imply changes in relation to the reception of members raised in traditions that practice infant baptism,” says César García. “We want to be intentional about studying this document.”

Name change

A proposal to change the name of Mennonite World Conference to be more inclusive of all its Anabaptist members and its function as a global communion (not merely a periodic event), remains under discussion.

Future meetings

Recognizing the loss of extended conversation and relationship-building time at face-to-face meetings, the Executive Committee affirmed the financial and environmental stewardship benefits of online meeting.

“We might need to adapt a bit and learn to understand each other in an online fashion,” says Europe Executive Committee member Wieteke van der Molen.

Mennonite World Conference release



Read more about
Assembly postponement

Read more about
the trilateral
dialogue report





The YABs Committee in Kenya in 2018: Ebenezer Monde, Asia; Larissa Swartz, North America; Jantine Brouwer-Huisman, Europe; Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube, Africa; Oscar Suárez, Latin America

Photo: Karla Braun

Meet your YABs Committee

“As we walk with Jesus in relationship, his peace flows out of us into our relationships with others. It must be based in love,” says Young AnaBaptist Lilia Aranguren a member of Iglesia Menonita Venga tu Reino, Villas de Granada, Bogotá, Colombia.

She participated in the YABs Fellowship Week global gathering on Zoom 19 June 2020.

What are YABs?

Young AnaBaptists (YABs) refers to all members of MWC member churches from teens to young adults up to age 35.

Though we have different faces, cultures, languages and ways of practicing our Anabaptist faith, all young people in the global Anabaptist family form part of YABs. Together we have much to share!

Just like the commissions and other groups of MWC, YABs also has a committee, the YABs Committee. This committee represents all of us young people before the MWC General Council and works with the MWC Executive Committee.

Purpose

On the foundation of our Anabaptist identity, through global and local networking, we as young people walk together and empower and support each other in fellowship, decision-making and peace-making initiatives.

Focus

- Create some infrastructure for networking within young people, both through face-to-face and online interaction
- Encourage fellowship and closer relationship within young people, and with other groups in the church, locally and globally

- Build capacity for young people
- Provide space for young people to influence decision-making in the church
- Promote peace-making and the Anabaptist identity among the young people
- Create a system that allows for continuity for the next YABs Committee, by maintaining a connection with young people in our respective continents
- Raise awareness of the importance of connecting with the global church and understanding Anabaptist identity
- Carry out monthly check-ins with each representative through our social media platforms

YABs Committee

The YABs committee is made up of a representative from each continent and a mentor.

The current committee:

- Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube (Zimbabwe) for Africa
- Ebenezer Monde (Philippines) for Asia and the Pacific
- Jantine Brouwer-Huisman (Netherlands) for Europe
- Oscar Suárez (Colombia) for Latin America
- Larissa Swartz (USA) for North America
- Our mentor is Tigist Tesfaye (Ethiopia)

The continental representatives share the needs of young people in their regions with the YABs Committee, and jointly discuss projects and themes related to young Anabaptists. The mentor advises and monitors the work of the YABs Committee.

This committee changes every six years after the Global Youth Summit.

GYS

The next Global Youth Summit (18+) will be held 2–5 July 2021 in Salatiga, Indonesia. The theme of GYS 2021 is Life in the Spirit: Learn, Serve, Worship.

“GYS provides one with the opportunity to really open our eyes to the fact that behind all those countries that appear on the map there are brothers and sisters in faith living in diverse social, economic and political contexts. These contexts are the backdrop for specific challenges in each region to which God is responding in unique ways,” says Karina Bogarin, a member of Maranata de los Hermanos Menonitas, Paraguay. She was a delegate for the *Convencion Evangelica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos* in 2015.

Learn more here: mwc-cmm.org/yabs/gys

Online Event



Renewal 2027

In 2020, we were forced to cancel the Renewal 2027 event scheduled for Abbotsford, B.C., Canada, because of the global pandemic.

We are happy to announce that Renewal 2027 will take place as an **online event in 2021**, focused on the theme of baptism and the recently-published final report of the Trilateral Dialogue on baptism. (Read more: mwc-cmm.org/node/3716)

The event is projected to be held in July 2021 using a format that combines a webinar with interactive discussion.

Watch for more information: mwc-cmm.org/renewal-2027





Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday worship materials

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday is an opportunity to remind our communities of faith that we are all part of one body made up of many tribes, languages and nations (Revelation 7:9). Each year, we encourage Anabaptist-related churches across the globe to use a common theme in their service on the Sunday closest to 21 January. On this date in 1525, the first baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland.

We celebrate that, in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the cultural and national boundaries that separate us have been overcome by the cross.

Materials for 2021 were prepared by Asian church leaders on the Assembly theme **“Following Jesus across barriers”** from the texts Isaiah 55:1-6, Psalm 27, John 4:1-42, Philippians 2:1-11.

On Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, Anabaptist congregations can lament together about pain and suffering; reflect the glory of God together as we reach across religious, racial/ethnic and gender boundaries; and follow Jesus together in obedience.

Download this resource to celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday in your local congregation with the global Anabaptist family in January or at whatever time is convenient for your congregation in 2021.

Send pictures and stories from your congregation’s celebration to photos@mwccmm.org



[mwccmm/awfs](https://mwccmm.org/awfs)

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FellowshipSunday

President’s column

A fresh wind of the Spirit

A “great multitude...from all tribes and peoples and languages” worship around the throne of God (Revelation 7). That vision aptly describes Mennonite World Conference. But it stands against a backdrop of disaster that feels too familiar today. Unable to rescue the world, saints cry, “Salvation belongs to God...and to the Lamb!”

Parts of our world have seen disaster in recent years – Ebola, hurricanes, civil war, religious persecution. Now creation groans under COVID-19. We cancel meetings, wear masks, meet by Zoom – and pray. In Revelation 8, angels carry prayers of saints caught in chaos into God’s presence. Our prayers, too!

Will COVID-19 remind us of our need of God?

- Plagues of Egypt belatedly softened Pharaoh’s heart.
- Amos (chapter 4) laments that a series of plagues did not turn Israel to God.
- John of Revelation (9:20, 21) expected that global plagues would turn humanity to God, but they did not.

Coronavirus can highlight our need for each other and awaken hunger for justice. The poor disproportionately suffer in this pandemic because of fewer financial and medical resources. Now is a time for Anabaptists to share with sisters and brothers in need.

At ancient Corinth, more wealthy church members ate plenty at communion while poor members (arriving late?) went hungry. Some became “weak and ill” and died. Those with resources brought judgement



Catch the power of the wind of the Spirit.

Photo: Karla Braun

upon themselves because they acted “without discerning the body” (1 Corinthians 11).

An often-cited Old Testament prophecy tells of God’s Spirit breaking through a terrible locust plague to bring salvation. Joel says that plague would culminate in God pouring out the Spirit: “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. [The elderly] will dream, [the young] will have visions” (Joel 2).

Ever renewing the church, may God’s Spirit blow afresh through MWC as COVID-19 passes!



J. Nelson Kraybill is president of MWC (2015–2021). He lives in Indiana, USA.



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Photo: Rina Ristanami

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- grow a thriving global communion through MWC commissions, networks and gatherings
- uphold service and witness in our faith communities

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Photo: Karla Braun



Members of Gloria Patri GKMI congregation in Semarang, Indonesia, watch their church service online from home during COVID-19.

Photo: Agus Setianto

Where are we looking?

Times of uncertainty. In such times people look for guidance. Like in a storm, people need a lighthouse to help them navigate through dangerous waters. COVID-19 has been a time of enormous uncertainty, now deepened by a financial crisis, environmental challenges and political instability in many countries.

Even before the pandemic, I heard from many friends worldwide an increasing tendency to look at social media in search of guidelines about health, diet and even ethics. People decide on how to respond to the pandemic based on the opinion of popular influencers more than on what experts from credible sources say. While writing this article, I spoke with two friends from Colombia that look at social media for advice about politics and theology.

The Internet is like lightning in a storm. Its flickers and flashes are stunning to behold but not of much help to see what is truly in front of you. Worse, this “light” is not spontaneous, but controlled. It illuminates different directions based on forces with intentions to manipulate or even deceive. It is incredible to see how many lies I have received from members of our churches, forwarded in the format of a video and including Christian vocabulary to endorse them as biblical. When I respond to unmask the video’s falsehoods, I discover that they have also been forwarded to my friends by other Christians. This falsely reinforces the video’s supposed veracity.

We need to remember that algorithms that manage what appears on social media are driven by popularity, advertising revenue and our previous searches. Instead of supporting communal discernment, this kind of communication ends up reinforcing the presuppositions that people already have.

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14–16)

Social media is shaping politics in many countries. I would say that it is shaping ecclesiologies and Christian faith too. But this influence is flowing in the wrong direction. It is our faith that should shape our politics, and it is our faith that should guide what we support and share in our social media.

Jesus calls us to be light for the world. It is the church that should set the example for the world on leadership, ethics, politics, justice and finances, among other matters.

In this issue of *Courier*, we highlight what our global church has been doing in response to COVID-19. We share some of our challenges and questions about it. We speak about what we are learning and what we need to reinforce as a global church. Our societies need to be shaped by what we do in response to the pandemic – not the other way around. And this, of course, is a challenge. In many ways, we fall short in our call to be light. I hope that this issue of *Courier* will encourage you to pray for our global church and look for active ways of involvement in our global intention of allowing God to shine through and in us during these times of dangerous waters.



César García, MWC general secretary, originally from Colombia, lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.