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**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

3

Inspiration and reflection

Conflict in the church: Lessons from Acts 15

6

Perspectives

- From division to unification
- Dealing with difference
- Prayer for unity
- A jar of clay in God's hands
- Desire for renewal leads to split

14

Country Profile

Malawi

17

Resources

- Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday
- Online Prayer Hour
- The Officers' Column
- From Our Leaders
- News



Cover Photo:

This statue towers above Cusco, Peru. It was a gift from Palestinians in 1945 who found refuge in the city. The open arms remind us that we are one in the body of Christ.

Photo: Henk Stenvers

Word from the editor



Making space and time for conflict

We don't like to talk about it.

The unity of Christ seems to be easier to maintain separately. Our tradition as Mennonite peacemakers results from a split from the wider church, and our plurality today – with its strengths and weaknesses – was the result in many cases of a disagreement that was not resolved. Our personal histories may also contain memories of ill-managed conflict: relationships broken; leaders ostracized; churches divided.

This issue of *Courier* attempts to talk about it.

In our feature article, Daniel Schipani enters into the story of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. It's a multicultural context for a disagreement on matters of spiritual importance. This was more than a question of whether to sing old songs or new!

But they sat down to talk.

Early in the formation of the church, in the face of a crucially important matter, the leaders – and the factions – faced their fears and discerned together. The unity of the church could persist despite diversity because it is a gift of God.

“The unity in Christ that God is creating reaches to the edges of space and time and beyond – and includes us all even when we don't include each other!” says Larry Miller, former general secretary of MWC.

In his address to MWC's General Council, Larry Miller offered three practices that could help us approach conflict in the church and come out with unity on the other side, without necessarily being uniform.

- Recognize Christ in one another.* Even when the other seems wrong on points of theology and practice, can we acknowledge each other's love for Christ and desire to follow him?
- Learning receptively from each other.* Just as I think I have something to teach you about what Jesus really meant, so you may have something to teach me about faithfulness.
- Coming together as local congregation.* In some cases, this is where the conflict lies! But can we remember even in conflict that no one has everything; but everyone has something? Swiss Mennonite theologian Hanspeter Jecker says “This recognition requires that the gifts of the individual contribute to the wellbeing of the whole.... Mutual encouragement and admonition are the foundations for...becoming a forgiving – as well as a forgiven – community.”

It won't be comfortable, it won't be quick and it will take courage. But instead of walking away from conflict, could we use these principles to walk toward conflict carrying the gift of unity, so that righteousness and peace may kiss?

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

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Leadership and Communion

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Colonnaded street in Laodicea (in present-day Denizli), Turkey. This is one of the seven churches in the letters of Revelation (3:14-22).

Photo: Irma Sulistyorini

Conflict in the church: Lessons from Acts 15

I grew up in a Mennonite congregation in Argentina. I remember the preaching and teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation both within the church family and also in relating with those outside the faith community.

I also remember situations involving tension and even the threat of division. Some of the concerns: diverging views on women’s use of head coverings in worship; participation in politics; and how to deal with divorced persons wishing to join or remain in the church.

More recently, the most difficult challenges faced both congregationally and on the conference level include who can become pastoral ministers and how widely inclusive we ought to be in welcoming new members and in occupying leadership roles.

Two related factors are always present in conflict situations like those mentioned above: on the one hand, what is right or true, that reflects and fosters faithfulness; and, on the other hand, love and grace that seek peace and foster reconciliation and community building.

The summons to “speak truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15) nicely integrates the two factors involved.

Another constant element of conflict in the church is the place of the Scriptures. The function of biblical interpretation in the search for resolution, conflict transformation and healing is indispensable. In the Scriptures we can find insight, inspiration and guidance.

The remainder of this article consists of a biblical case study. It is offered as a model to consider while pondering the challenges and opportunities presented by conflict situations in our churches today.

The Jerusalem council as prototype (Acts 15:1-35)

Since the beginning, the church has needed to practice moral and spiritual discernment. It is a process of interpretation in which human experience is viewed and evaluated within its social-cultural context and in light of the Scriptures.

An early and clear testimony of such practice is found in the account of the Jerusalem council in the book of Acts. Let’s review it, keeping in mind our concern with conflict in the church.

Gentiles are becoming followers of Christ. A mission success! Before long, however, church leaders have “no small dissension and debate” (2) on this very matter. New questions emerge about requirements for belonging to the church as people of God, and thus for salvation itself.

Conflict often results in separation, even schism and alienation. However, those involved here choose to take the gift of conflict as an opportunity to challenge and enrich their theological and spiritual imaginations.

The leadership call a meeting. Paul, Barnabas and others have the opportunity to tell their story, while some Pharisees insist on the need for converted male Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses (5).

We are told that this is the concern and business of the whole church (4, 12, 22).

The leaders have a special role to play: Peter and James speak persuasively, and the apostles and the elders make significant choices with the consent of the whole church (6, 22).

Those who speak up connect personal testimony with the perceived work of the Holy Spirit and the words of the Prophets (15-18).

The discernment process is somehow experienced as Spirit-led and culminates in a unanimous decision. (25) The gathered council will send two leaders – Judas and Silas – as special representatives “to the brothers and sisters of Gentile origin in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia” (23) with a letter of accord.

The letter clarifies the scope of key expectations concerning Gentiles in keeping with Mosaic law (20, 29) and reaffirms the work of Paul and Barnabas. Luke’s narrative also tells us that the Antioch believers rejoiced at the exhortation and were encouraged and strengthened by Judas and Silas (31-32).

In sum, this text offers a rich illustration of the early church doing practical theology while facing a challenging situation. It can be considered as a multiway hermeneutical process for the sake of relevant and truthful discernment and faithful action. Some of the lessons that can be drawn are underscored below.

At the time of the argument, Paul could never have imagined that the seemingly weak young man would one day write one of the four Gospels.

Some guidelines to highlight

Discernment is like a multiway conversation: factors ranging from people’s stories and social-cultural context, to Scripture and the Holy Spirit to the church’s traditions and practices are all interacting, both bringing and receiving insight. Carried out as a necessary, ongoing spiritual practice, it is a never-ending process!

Faithful discernment in the face of conflict always takes much time and energy. Furthermore, not all resolutions after careful discernment are final; some can be revisited and even reversed (e.g. the issue of eating certain meat alluded to in the letter).

Those who lead the process need to develop “Spirit fruit” such as humility, patience, generosity, hopefulness, wisdom and grace. They must demonstrate the necessary knowledge of the culture, the church teachings and Scripture. And they must also have the necessary skills to care well for those involved and for the process itself.

Conflict between leaders (Acts 15:36-41)

Following the account of the successful resolution concerning how to welcome Gentiles into the church, we are told of another conflict. Paul and Barnabas part ways because of John Mark¹. Let’s review the background of this situation in order to gain clarity on the nature of the conflict.

The predominantly Gentile church in Antioch sends Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by John Mark, on what would become known as Paul’s first missionary journey (c. AD 46-48).

When they arrive in Cyprus, the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus becomes the first recorded high official of the Roman government to become a Christian (Acts 13:4-12). Between the details provided,



Ruin of the church of St John, Philadelphia, in present-day Alaşehir, Turkey.

Photo: Irma Sulistyorini

there is much opportunity to speculate on motivations and feelings. As we explore the story below, we will take such liberties as we seek to draw insight from the story.

From Cyprus they sail to Perga in Pamphylia (southern Turkey) where John (Mark) “left them and returned to Jerusalem.” This reference in Acts 13:13 probably became a significant marker in the lives of Paul, Barnabas and John Mark.

Apparently, John Mark was Barnabas’ young cousin, the son of his aunt Mary who was the head of a home church in Jerusalem. (Acts 12:12).

We are not told directly, but maybe it can be inferred that Mary had suggested Mark accompany his older cousin Barnabas and Paul on the missionary journey. Barnabas (“son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36), or the encourager of others) perhaps persuaded Paul to allow the young man to come with them in order to strengthen John Mark’s faith and to give him experience as a witness and missionary.

We are not told why Mark decides to go home. Perhaps he was homesick or found the rigorous ministry too demanding. But we are told of the heated argument between Paul and Barnabas precipitated by Mark’s exit at the port city of Perga, capital of Pamphylia:

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Come, let us return and visit the brothers and sisters in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord [on the first missionary journey] and see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and set out, the brothers and sisters commending him to the grace of the Lord. [On this second missionary journey c. AD 50-52] he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (Acts 15:36-41)

Lessons in leadership development

The hope Barnabas had in young Mark’s potential and the encouragement he gave his cousin show a discerning spirit.

At the time of the argument, Paul could never have imagined that the seemingly

weak young man would one day write one of the four Gospels. Additionally, according to Coptic tradition, Mark eventually journeyed across the Mediterranean and founded the Coptic Church in Egypt – the oldest Christian body of believers in the world.

It is interesting to connect the story of the conflict with Barnabas with the account of Paul and Silas having come to Lystra, in Turkey: "...where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was a Jewess and a believer....Paul wanted to take (the young Timothy) along on the journey, so he circumcised him." (Acts 16:1-3).

Could it be that Paul had come to realize the importance of fostering faith in young people and giving them the experience of communicating the gospel? The young Timothy, mentored by Paul, like the young Mark, mentored by Barnabas, would turn out to be one of Paul's most beloved and faithful disciples.

In c. 60 AD when Paul was in prison in Caesarea, he ended his letter to the church in Colossae near Ephesus: "Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas." (Colossians 4:10). It seems that sometime in the previous years Paul had reconciled with Mark. (One wonders whether at the prompting of Barnabas?).

It would appear that more than 10 years after Paul and Barnabas had a serious

conflict involving Mark, now Paul can write to his own disciple Timothy: "Only Luke is here with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me in ministry." (2 Timothy 4:11)

Mark is helpful to me in my ministry. Can we surmise that Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement," lived to see the fruit of his ministry with his young cousin Mark? Regardless, Barnabas' belief in and encouragement of both his cousin Mark and the Apostle Paul might have altered the course of history.

Perhaps those three followers of Jesus represent the realized promised of second chances, redemption, forgiveness and reconciliation. That being the case, the story of parting ways invites us to highlight some implications.

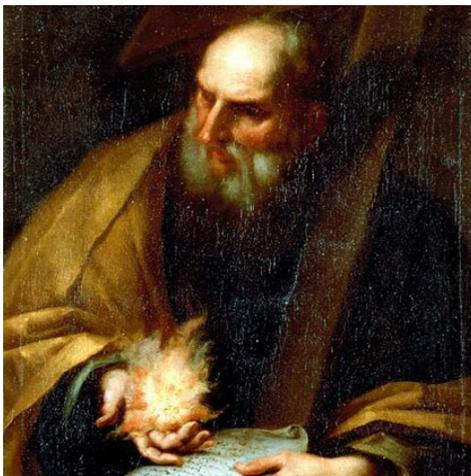
- Sometimes separation is unavoidable, or even advisable in order to prevent further conflict. Nevertheless, the choice of parting ways from one another, although acrimonious at present, can be transformed in the future.
- Separation and division don't need to be permanent. The hope for further understanding and reunion in the future can remain.
- It's possible that Barnabas became a mentor to John Mark. In any case, we are reminded that it's necessary to

care for younger, future church leaders in that way. And that always requires commitment, patience, willingness to take risks and generous investment of time and energy.

- The story also suggests that there is a special place for mediating ministry. And, of course, such ministry depends on the trust and good will of the parties involved. Barnabas might have played a mediating role between Paul and John/Mark. (Interestingly, Paul's letter to Philemon can also be read as documenting the former's mediating work between the latter and Onesimus!).
- Finally, in our imaginative reading, is it fair to project that the "reunification" of Paul and John Mark was possible not because one prevailed as having been right but both continued to grow and to learn better ways from past experiences?

Highlighted at the beginning of this article is the claim that two related factors are always present in conflict situations like those discussed in our case study of Acts 15: what is right or true, that reflects and fosters faithfulness; and love and grace that seeks peace and fosters reconciliation and community building. Psalm 85:10-11 alludes to that inseparable connection and beautifully sums up a vision of shalom for conflict transformation and healing: *Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.* May that be so!

Two related factors are always present in conflict situations like those discussed in our case study of Acts 15: what is right or true, that reflects and fosters faithfulness; and love and grace that seeks peace and fosters reconciliation and community building.



"San Barnaba", a depiction of Barnabas, "Son of Encouragement" (anonymous Lombard painter).

Public domain



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India

From division to unification

by Prem Kishor Bagh

A brief description of the journey of the Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church from the darkness of the 7-year period of division to the light of unification.

The division and reunification of the Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church were marked by a series of events and challenges.

The initial division was caused by a dispute over the rights of the chairman and the secretary of the church.

In 1994, a seemingly minor issue of choosing the date and venue for the annual convention became the catalyst for division. Some members wanted the convention to be held in

Jagdishpur instead of Janjgir, leading to differences among the office bearers.

This led to two separate meetings, one in Janjgir and one in Jagdishpur, resulting in divided congregations.

Elections were a significant concern during this time. To resolve the issue, the decision was made to hold elections separately in Janjgir and Jagdishpur, creating two executive committees. This division escalated when the chairman tried to impose restrictions on bank operations, leading to legal disputes and FIRs (police reports).

Efforts for reconciliation were made, including interventions by pastors, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of India conference. However, these attempts did not yield positive

results, and animosity continued to grow between the two factions.

The situation took a legal turn with hearings in the High Court, with both parties and registrar firms and institutions involved. The High Court ruled in favour of the chairman, but the dispute continued.

In 1997 and 1998, elections were held again, further solidifying the division. It seemed that reconciliation was becoming increasingly unlikely. Neither side was willing to cooperate.

However, a turning point came when a chance meeting occurred between me and the late Mr. N.S. Badhai in Gass Memorial, Raipur. This unexpected encounter led to a conversation about reconciliation.

Both of us recognized our roles in leadership and the responsibility to bring about unity in the church. We decided to seek mediation from Rev. C.S.R. Geer, with the goal of convening a joint conference (AGM).

With the support of a leader from the Evangelical Fellowship of India (EFI), a joint conference was organized in Jagdishpur in November 2002. Despite initial competition, I called back my name for the position of chairman and Mr. N. S. Badhai was elected as chairman. A powerful message from the EFI leader on the prodigal son story (Luke 15:11-32) touched hearts.

Members of both factions forgave each other and resolved to reunite and live together in the future.

Since then, the Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church has maintained its unity under the leadership of the conference's president. The grace of God has continued to guide the church toward a harmonious path.



A regional church conference in India.

Photo: Cynthia Peacock



Mr. Prem Kishor Bagh is church secretary at the head office of Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church in Jagdishpur, India.

Indonesia

Dealing with difference

The churches of GITJ (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa – Evangelical Church in the Land of Java), Indonesia, had been in conflict for some 22 years. This was largely because one group (with 24 member churches) was recognized by the Indonesian government while the other (with about 50 member churches) was not.

All during the time of disagreement and conflict, many in the churches were longing to reconcile.

The churches invited Pastor Lawrence Yoder (USA) to come to work on the issue, and through his personal approach he was able to motivate both sides to agree to talk with each other. They did so in a pastors' retreat and at a general church council meeting.

Then in 1999 each group had opportunity to send a representative – Pudjo Kartiko and Hendro Soeradi – to the Summer Peacebuilding Institute (SPI) at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA. The two returned from SPI and began to work hard with both groups toward reconciliation.

With the help of the peace center at Duta Wacana Christian University in Yogyakarta, churches in both groups agreed to come to a meeting to deal with their differences and the conflict that resulted.

At that meeting, the two groups decided to hold an extraordinary conference meeting in order to become one body. The conference was to be the reconciliation of the GITJ synod board.

So in the extraordinary conference meeting in 2000, we were able to choose a daily board for one GITJ conference. In the next two years it worked toward a unified Synod Board. Now all our churches are in one body, and we are working hard to maintain the spirit of unification.

—from Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ – Evangelical Church in the Land of Java).

This article is reprinted from *Courier / Correo / Courier* 2004, volume 19, issue 3

All during the time of disagreement and conflict, many in the churches were longing to reconcile.



The GITJ congregation in Margokerto, one of the first Mennonite churches in the Muria area, hosted MWC guests for Assembly 17 in Indonesia.

Photo: Tatiana Morales



GITJ Kelet Jepara is decorated with a Javanese altar cloth.

Photo: Windhi Arsari

Switzerland Prayer for unity

by Michel Sommer

In recent years, the Mennonite theological school Bienenberg Training Centre in Switzerland has offered a “Hot Topics” course, which gives voice to opposing perspectives on current hot topics in the churches. As they hear points they agree or disagree with, the attendees are invited to engage with their own sensibilities and convictions: to listen deeply and be willing to question their own responses. The sessions end with this prayer for unity.

Forgive us... for the scuffles with others, caused by the hot topics between us. Lord, have mercy.



A worship gathering of the Mennonite church in Bussum-Naarden, Netherlands.

Photo: Henk Stenvers

Our God,
Thank you... for the Word you have spoken to others before us and continue to speak to us today. We praise you, Lord!

Thank you... for the shimmer of your Word on our lives, on the Church, on the world – and for its power of transformation. We praise you, Lord!

Thank you... for the incarnate and ultimate Word that has taken on the face of Jesus, who opens the way to the kingdom of *shalom*. We praise you, Lord!

Forgive us... for our deafness to hear what you want to tell us through your Word, when it disturbs us... Lord, have mercy.

Forgive us... for the scuffles with others, caused by the hot topics between us. Lord, have mercy.

Forgive us... for the ferocity with which we seek to be right all the time, as well as for the cowardice that leads us to make everything relative. Lord, have mercy.

Please... teach us to know how to reconcile the search for the truth of your Word with love for those who understand it differently. Help us, Lord!

Please... gather your church with its many branches so that it may be a sign of unity, as you want it to be, by the means you want. Help us, Lord!

Please... lead your people, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to seriously practice love, as your Son has shown us, for the day when you will be all in all. Help us, Lord!

We pray together through Jesus, our Lord, Saviour and brother. Amen.



Michel Sommer is a teacher at Bienenberg, the Mennonite Bible training institute in Switzerland. This prayer was previously published in *Christ Seul*, the magazine of the Mennonites in France.

Brazil

A jar of clay in God's hands

by Reginaldo Valim

Conflicts arise, but we can build something new instead of shattering the old.

In 2011, the Mennonite Brethren church in Brazil (COBIM) faced difficult conversations. God had brought leaders from other denominations into COBIM. Now we had to learn how to handle these differences. The traditional MB leaders had not planned to bring in these pastors from different backgrounds; they had certainly not planned to become MBs.

I was one of the latter. As an Assemblies of God pastor, I preached once at a Mennonite Brethren church and vowed never again.

But after moving to a suburb of Curitiba in 2006, a series of Holy Spirit promptings led me into an MB church again and again. After several months of involvement and becoming a member, in October 2007, the pastor invited me and my wife to be pastors.

God was doing some very big things in that congregation. What God was doing locally started moving in direction of the national church.

When we got together in conferences, we would see the differences in way of worship, in way of praying, in way of preaching. We had differences of culture between German and Portuguese; between an individualist culture and a collectivist culture. These were apparent.

Who was right? Those who were more traditional or those who were more Pentecostal?

God who sees everything said: "I will mix these two. We want to build something new where no one is right and wrong, but both are right and both are wrong and we bind both together."

We decided to create a wider path where traditional and more charismatic could live together. Where both can respect and teach one another where we complement each other.

The Pentecostal folk who had gotten inserted in Anabaptist culture have to learn

from this Anabaptist movement. But we also have to share what we have received.

It takes a lot of talking.

We pointed out one side. We showed the other side. We defined our limits so we could cooperate.

We wanted our strengths to converge, not to fight or bring power tensions.

There were many moments that were difficult.

Several times, I received tap on shoulder to ask: "How long will you stay here yet?" They implied that I should take my difference and go elsewhere.

Another time at a conference of pastors, some were making light about the work of the Holy Spirit, and how people react with emotion. My heart was heavy that they should take something so serious and made jokes about it.

But I felt the Lord calling me to be patient. God was going to do a something new. If people were not willing to change, God would deal with it.

Over the next period, the leaders who had been most resistant to change each left the MB church, for a variety of reasons.

These leaders were not bad leaders nor sinful, they just couldn't see what God wanted to do. Their convictions based on their background and what they had learned were stronger than what the Lord wanted to do.

"We have all our backgrounds, [...] but when we are open, God shows us things through Scripture and through experience."

I think of when the Spirit came upon the Gentiles. The leaders didn't understand why God would go to the Gentiles. But they were open to understand the Lord was doing a new thing, building a "jug" of blessing from the mixed "clay" of Jews and Gentiles with the water of the Holy Spirit.

In COBIM, God provided a "Barnabas"

for me – named Paul. He is a "traditional" Mennonite Brethren, with a father from Russia and a mother who studied in Goshen College, USA.

After a career in international business – which opened his eyes to different ways of doing – he became involved in church leadership. His background allows him in a sense to "interpret" the charismatic movement into the culture of Anabaptists. People need a bridge; new ways are not just downloaded.

As we learn to live with difference, we pray for each other. It shows an attitude of your heart.

I have learned much from studying Anabaptist history. Through the traditional MBs, God led me to his Word. When I share a prophetic word, it is grounded in Scripture and joint discernment.

Step by step, two very different groups within COBIM are taking our differences and going in a smooth way. We could try to make it white or black – or we can create a path where we understand that if this one can go this far, the other can go this far, and we can go together.

"We all have our backgrounds," says Paul, "but when we are open, God shows us things through Scripture and through experience."

In the past, the clash of cultures hindered. Now, when we have problems, we don't each go to our own side, but instead we sit together. We must be open to understand God works in different ways. (See Larry Miller's three practices for building communion, page 3).

What did God do with the conflict in COBIM? God gave some charismatic leaders open hearts to hear and learn. God gave traditional MBs open hearts to hear and to love. God brought us together so the kingdom of God is multiplied, in Brazil and the world.



Reginaldo Valim is pastor of Igreja Evangélica Irmãos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren) de Campo Grande MS, in Brazil.

Canada

Desire for renewal leads to split

by John J. Friesen

The Mennonite Brethren church began in the midst of significant change among Mennonites in what was then South Russia.

It was in 1860 that some members in the Gnadenfeld Mennonite congregation in the Molotschna settlement petitioned their leaders to meet separately for communion. These members did not want to celebrate communion with those who had not experienced personal Pietist renewal and conversion. When the leadership refused to grant their wish, these members met separately, celebrated their own communion and founded the Mennonite Brethren (MB) church.

The reason for forming the MB church was the desire by those renewed through the influence of both Lutheran and Baptist Pietism to form a church that would include only like-minded people. In contrast, the other Mennonite churches accepted the new Pietist influences as well as the historic Mennonite practices and pieties. The MB's separatist stance and its active proselytizing among Mennonite churches created tensions with those churches.

After a while, some MBs became unhappy with the gulf that had developed between their church and the Mennonite church, and they spearheaded the formation of the Allianz Mennonite Church. This church tried to be a bridge between the two, allowing for more diverse religious pieties.

Inter-church tensions

The Mennonite migration to North America in the 1870s had far-reaching significance. Many of the other Mennonite immigrants who came from various churches in Russia joined the General Conference. The tensions that had existed between the Mennonite Brethren and the other Mennonite churches in Russia were now transferred to the relationship between the MB and the General Conference churches.

In the U.S., with evangelism as its primary focus, and because of easy access in the German language, the MB church continued to target other Mennonite churches. This created tensions. When the MB conference, centred in Kansas, sent "missioners" to the Winkler area of southern Manitoba in the 1880s, who formed the first MB church in Canada, this set up further tensions with Mennonite churches in the area.

Immigrant groups separate again

The immigration of 20,000 Mennonites to Canada in the 1920s, about a third of which were Mennonite Brethren, initially promised to change the dynamic between the MB and other Mennonite churches.

The immigration itself required cooperation between Mennonite groups in both Canada and Russia. In Russia, the emigration movement was led by B. B. Janz and C.F. Klassen, two MBs. In Canada, it was led by David Toews, chair of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and moderator of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, now part of MC Canada.

Upon immigration, members of the Mennonite and MB groups worshipped together in many locations. For a short while it looked like the trauma and difficulties of immigration would result in healing the divide within the Mennonite community.

Then, however, institutional and denominational loyalties rose to the fore. Each of the joint worship centres separated, and in each community two denominational churches formed.

Cooperation on MCC, CO service

There were, however, also areas of cooperation.

During World War II, the Mennonite Brethren, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, and the Swiss Mennonite conferences in Ontario together proposed to the federal government alternative service as their form of conscientious

objector service.

Subsequently, MBs were involved in the founding of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada in the 1960s, and in the establishment of Columbia Bible College in B.C. in the early 1970s. This spirit of cooperation continued in the formation of Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) in Winnipeg in the 1990s.

The change of worship language from German to English in the 1950s and 1960s allowed MBs to accept many of the emphases of the Canadian evangelical movement. MB Pietism was transformed into Evangelicalism. For some MBs, the influence of Evangelicalism meant stronger ties to evangelical groups, and a decrease in the emphasis on peace, service and other historic Mennonite emphases.

Other MBs were influenced by the renewal impulses of the "Anabaptist Vision," associated with the name of Harold S. Bender. Many within this orientation became strong promoters of peace and justice issues and supported inter-Mennonite organizations like MCC.

MBs also played significant roles in founding and supporting various inter-Mennonite service organizations like the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the Canadian branch of Mennonite Economic Development Associates.

This church tried to be a bridge between the two, allowing for more diverse religious pieties.

The present situation

From the early years, the two sides have moved to a relationship where, even though they are somewhat different, they can accept and learn from each other.



John J. Friesen is professor emeritus of Canadian Mennonite University. This article is adapted from Canadian Mennonite.



Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday Worship Resources

Prepared by the
MWC Regional
Representatives in
Latin America for
21 January 2024,
or at any time
convenient for your
congregation.

1 Theme and texts

a. Theme:
**Mosaic:
Becoming
a part
of God's
bigger
picture**

**b. Why this theme
was chosen:**
Mennonite World
Conference has many
members, each one
different from the
others, and yet together
the members create a
beautiful picture of the
body of Christ.

**c. Biblical text
options:**
Old Testament:
Job 42:1-6
Psalm:
Psalm 8
Gospel:
John 10:14-16
New Testament:
Ephesians 4:1-16

**d. Relationship between
the theme and biblical texts:**

- God's plan (picture) is bigger than our understanding
- God's creation (picture) is immense, reflecting God's glory
- God's flock of sheep is loved, and bigger than expected
- There are different gifts distributed in the church, but one Holy Spirit in one body, all a part of God's bigger picture

2 Prayer requests

Prayer requests from Latin America

- Pray for those who are fleeing violence in their countries, seeking to live in peace. Pray for conversion of the people and structures that perpetuate violence in its various manifestations.
- Pray that with the wisdom of the Spirit: congregations will respond to their missional and pastoral tasks in the context of current realities, including corruption, gang violence, economic inequality and migration.
- Pray that the churches will be passionate about bringing the message of salvation in Christ to those who are hungry to hear about hope in Jesus.

Prayer requests from MWC

- Pray for God's Spirit to be at work throughout MWC and the mosaic of churches throughout the world.
- Pray for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, so that the mosaic described in Revelation 7:9 will come true.
- Pray for the current needs in the MWC family as expressed on the MWC prayers page: mwc-cmm.org/en/prayers

3 Song suggestions

Songs from MWC 2022 International Songbook

- #12 In Jesus Christ We Are One Family / *Dalam Yesus kita bersaudara*
- #31 *Alabaré*
- #36 True Evangelical Faith / *La fe de Cristo*
- #39 You're not alone / *Tu n'es pas seul*
Somos uno en Jesucristo

Please check your congregation's copyright protocols before using these songs in public gatherings.

4 Multimedia resources

See mwc-cmm.org/awfs

- Video greetings from Latin American congregations
- Scripture texts read in MWC's official languages
- Song videos
- Photos
- Celebration map
- Speakers' bureau





5

Offering

- MWC invites congregations to take a special offering for our global Anabaptist communion on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday. One way to do this is to invite every member to contribute the cost of at least one lunch in their own community to support the core ministries and Commissions of MWC. This is a manageable amount in every MWC member church around the world.
- Go to [page 15](#) for more ideas to celebrate a special offering time for Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday.



6

Additional Resources

In this package (pages 3-16)

- Ideas for gathering and benediction
- Sermon content from biblical texts
- Testimonies from Latin America
- Anabaptist historical context
- Children's activity
- Tithes and offering ideas from Latin America
- Cultural suggestions from Latin America
- Artwork (see [page 16](#))



Iglesia Del Dios Viviente Rama, part of Convención Menonita de Nicaragua, celebrated the 498th anniversary of the Anabaptism movement with the Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday worship materials.

Abel Mendoza

The biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions, sermon ideas and other resources in this package have been prepared by members of MWC out of their experience in their local context. The teaching does not necessary represent an official MWC position.

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📷 Please send your photos and testimonies regarding your celebration to photos@mw-cmm.org

Malawi

The gospel with two hands: physical and spiritual development

Worshipping God during a leadership training session.

Photo courtesy Lyson Makawa



Malawi

MWC member church*

*Mpingo Wa Abale Mwa Kristu (Brethren in Christ Church)**

Total baptized members	4 953
Total congregations	75**

*Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi**

Total baptized members	9 114
Total congregations	62**

Church of God in Christ, Mennonite

Total baptized members	166
Total congregations	4

Source: MWC 2022
**updated per article

“I am Yao,” says Madalistso Blessings Kaputa. That people group is regarded to be Muslim in Malawi. “Someone has reached me.”

Chewa, Yao, Lome (major people groups in Malawi): they can all be part and parcel of this family of God, he says.

As a Yao, he is able to represent the church in Muslim areas. “There is a connection, a relationship, between the Muslims and the church. We try to have a sense that we let the Yao Muslim community understand themselves. We are part of the family of God. We do not impose. The church is working together,” he says.

“I am the living testimony of the church and how Anabaptists live with other people. If I were not able to grow in this way, it would be hard to live in Muslim community. I pursue peace. I share the gospel with peace.”

Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in Malawi boldly proclaim the gospel as they offer aid and succor to members and community alike.

There are two MWC member churches in Malawi: Mpingo Wa Abale Mwa Kristu (Brethren in Christ) and Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi. Both were nurtured in their early days by African evangelists.

Mpingo Wa Abale Mwa Kristu (BIC): Like the Macedonian call (Acts 16)

A small group began to meet for prayer in Blantyre in 1983. They became aware of the BIC church in Zimbabwe and desired to link with them. As they prayed, they were led to write a letter, inviting leaders from Zimbabwe to come.

BIC Zimbabwe received the call. In 1984, they sent pastors Philemon M Khumalo, Bekithemba Dube and their families.

A fellowship began meeting in Ndirande, a suburb of Blantyre, the country's industrial and urban centre. A second church was soon started in Zombe. The church was officially registered in 1986.

Early leaders were Sani Selamani Chibwana who called the first friends together; Melawrie Fred Mbamera who became the chairperson; Ephraim Disi, the secretary.

Today the church has grown to 75 congregations in both the southern and central regions of the country. It comprises members from several ethnic groups.

The church has ministries for youth and for women. There are evangelism projects, ministries to people affected by HIV/AIDS and other compassion ministries.

The church is living out its Anabaptist identity by pursuing peace and loving one another. They seek to live as Christ gave to us in Matthew 5. "We need Jesus since God is love. This shows our real identity," says Madalitso Blessing Kaputa.

As church members reach out with the gospel and find there is a physical need, they help: praying, walking alongside, supporting in seeking healing or resources.

They also offer teaching from the Bible and sound understanding about the need to put faith in Christ Jesus, not false doctrines.

"We can reach the person not only one-sided but both sides: spiritual aspects and even physical aspects," says Madalitso Blessings Kaputa.

"We are there. We are salt and light, meeting their needs as a whole person with a holistic gospel," he says.

Challenges

The pandemic was only one of the major challenges affecting the BIC church in Malawi. HIV/AIDS continues to break apart families. A cholera epidemic has only recently subsided. Climate change causes droughts and severe weather. Recently,

Cyclone Freddy swept through the country, destroying homes, church buildings and wiping out both gardens and crops, resulting in the loss of pastors, church members and neighbours. Food shortages will mean higher prices. The church is praying about how they can help when the harvests do not come.

But the BIC church does not just look at challenges. There is hope.

"We are the agent that God has entrusted with to give love those that are not being loved," says Madalitso Blessings Kaputa.

"Even though today we have health challenges, the church is there to give hope.

"Even with challenge like climate change: we have hope with Jesus," he says.

Baptism: a time of joy

"If it would have been like a cup of tea, so much sugar is added showing that there is a joy," says Madalitso Blessing Kaputa, about a recent baptism event.

Baptism in Malawi, a largely rural country, is mostly performed at the rivers or the lake.

Most of the time there is a large bunch of people, standing and looking, celebrating together.

It is time to fellowship, so there is often food.

Nothing can happen without singing. Singing is part of our joy.

Sometimes baptism is undertaken after months or year of study. But others wake up and say 'let's go!' then go on to understand their baptism. After all, it's not baptism that brings salvation but what is happening in their heart.



Madalitso Blessing Kaputa is an evangelist with BIC Malawi.

Mennonite Brethren Church in Malawi: multiplying churches

In 2009, a man from DR Congo in Dzaleka Refugee Camp in the Dowa district of Malawi saw a need to start a church. Safari Mutabesha Bahati (DRC), Onesime Kabula (Rwanda), Charles Isaiah, Chiza Sedata, Gems Mariamungu, Gemeya and their families started a church and it started to grow. People from DRC, Burundi, Ethiopia,

Rwanda joined, speaking French, English, Swahili and more were drawn in.

Their evangelistic fervour took them beyond the bounds of the camp to plant churches among local Malawians.

Today there are two congregations in the camp and 60 outside scattered through the rural areas of the densely populated country.

The strategy is that one congregation should plant another. These form into hubs of 7-12 congregations around a mission centre led by a senior pastor who reports to the executive. With this rapid growth, not all congregations have a formally trained pastor, but three times a year, pastors gather for one or two weeks of training through ICOMB's Missional Leadership Training workshops.

Regional and cultural solidarity is strong in Malawian society. The MB church seeks to cross those barriers. "In church, we have all these groups together: our language is that Jesus Christ is our leader. What unites us is the gospel," says Lyson Makawa.

The MBs strive to plant holistic churches. Evangelism and discipleship are priorities.

"We believe in nurturing the people who have just come to Jesus Christ so they can and grow in maturity," says Lyson Makawa. New believers are encouraged to attend classes for at least a month to learn the basics prior to baptism.

"We also believe in planting churches where you are empowered spiritually and also physically."

One example is the sewing project that was started in the refugee camp. Women are taught how to sew items for sale so they can have a source of income.

Another is promoting a pail kit system of farming. In one pail, the farmer receive an irrigation tool and seeds to plant vegetables.

The church has also started an incubator to hatch chicks for pastors to raise chickens for food and income.

Challenges

Pastors face many struggles, from lack of education to travelling between villages to supporting their families with little income. Their congregations look to them for spiritual support while their families seek financial support.

Although most pastors are men there is one woman who serves as a pastor. Up to



Leaders at the MBCM annual general conference.

Photo courtesy Lyson Makawa



Choir members at a BIC annual general conference.

Photo courtesy Madalitso Blessing Kaputa



BIC bishop Ephraim Disi baptizes a new member.

Photo courtesy Madalitso Blessing Kaputa

70 percent of church members are women. Although differences in faith practices between husbands and wives can cause marital problems, sometimes marital problems drive women to seek relief at church.

The MB church was not spared the affects of Cyclone Freddy. They are focusing relief efforts on elderly people, people with disabilities and those who are otherwise not able to support themselves.

Worship gatherings

A Sunday morning gathering starts with prayer, followed by about 30 minutes of teaching. Singing follows in several moments: vigorous praise with dancing, more contemplative worship, and choir performances. Over the next hour there is preaching from the Word of God by the pastor or an elder, or even a pastor from another church. After that, offering is taken, followed by the benediction.

Congregations may also hold midweek services for about an hour.

Gatherings focused on teaching from the Word of God take place on Wednesday, starting around 3 pm.

On Thursdays, the women often gather. These are times for work like decorating the church or encouraging one another.

On Saturdays there are meetings for intercessory prayers. "We have a God who answers our prayers," says Lyson Makawa.



Lyson Makawa is leadership and capacity building coordinator with the Mennonite Brethren church of Malawi.

Relationships with other churches

"We believe we belong to the larger family of Anabaptists," says Lyson Makawa. "Belonging to same roots brings us together."

The Anabaptist-Mennonite churches in Malawi are connected to the larger body of Christ around the world as well as with each other. Both BIC and MB relate to Mennonite Central Committee and work with each other.

The MBs have also collaborated with a conservative Anabaptist-Mennonite group in the country on publication of evangelistic materials.

Relationship continues between BIC churches in Malawi and Zimbabwe: There are frequently Zimbabwean guests at Malawian church conferences, sometimes bringing teaching. A delegation of women from Malawi visited Zimbabwe on a learning project.

Following the example of their mother church, Malawi BIC is also evangelizing in new areas. Strategic planning is underway to reach the northern part of the country and also to reach into neighbouring Mozambique. "Mission is on our hearts," says Madalitso Blessing Kaputa.

And the relationship with other church bodies reminds Malawian brothers and sisters they are not alone. "Whatever is happening with MWC, it is involving even the church in Malawi. We do not take this for granted: we are family," says Madalitso Blessings Kaputa.

Share the impact

“Thank you for sending!”
“News from *Courier* will add faith and knowledge to us.”

These are responses we’ve received after *Courier* brings you testimonies, teaching and news from the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family around the world.

How have you been moved by the sharing you read in *Courier*? How have you shared that with your wider church community?

Tell us what you learned – and what you want to learn more about!

We welcome your feedback.

By email: info@mw-cmm.org



On our website: mw-cmm.org/sharetheimpact

Facebook: @
[MennoniteWorldConference](https://www.facebook.com/MennoniteWorldConference)

Via Instagram: @[mw-cmm](https://www.instagram.com/mw-cmm)



Online Prayer Hour

“Prayer is the backbone of the church. We need to practice it as a body of Christ regularly,” says Tigist Tesfaye, secretary of the Deacons Commission.

“Praying together is a spiritual discipline for us to grow together. As we gather on Zoom for Online Prayer hour, it’s a way we see each other, shoulder each other’s burdens, cry and celebrate our joys together.

“This boosts up our fellowship as a family of faith.”

Visit mw-cmm.org/online-prayer-hour-registration to register for the next online prayer meeting.



Next events: 14:00 UTC

- Friday, 17 November 2023
- Friday, 19 January 2024

From our Leaders

“We need one another”

Meet Vikal Rao, Rajnandgaon, India



Vikal Pravin Rao, Deacons Commission member.

Photo: Christian Argha Aditya

How do you serve MWC?

I am serving officially as a member of the Deacons Commission (2018-2025).

My journey with MWC started in 1997: I was a youth steward in the Global Church Village (GCV) during the Assembly in India.

Then, I was the first GYS representative for Asia (then called Youth Summit Committee) in Zimbabwe in 2003.

From 2008 to 2012, I wasn’t much involved, but then in 2013, I was given this responsibility to be member of Programme Oversight Committee and to coordinate GCV for Assembly 2015.

I am also involved in other activities: travelling to conferences with regional representative Cynthia Peacock; sharing all the news from MWC with the churches; participating in online prayer hour (group leader and Hindi interpreter); translating worship materials (Peace Sunday and AWFS).

How do you serve your local church?

At present, I am serving my local church as pastor (Rajnandgaon Mennonite Church). Also, I am executive secretary of Mennonite Church in India. I live 115 km from my MCI office in Dhamtari, so 2-3 days a week I travel to the office; the rest of the time, I stay in Rajnandgaon to do visitation, take part in meetings, conduct Bible studies, prepare Sunday worship and preach, meet with young people and facilitate Friday evenings meetings.

What does it mean for the body of Christ to be unified?

We all have unique gifts, we have different cultures, different church practices, but when we are unified in body of Christ, we are interdependent. We need one another in spite of all our differences.

All the church members must connect with the global family, it’s not only for the leaders. As I learn that each one of us are part of MWC, I like to share that with people.

My father came to know Jesus through Mennonite missionaries who came to India. He was saved. When he shared his stories with me, I as well connected with Mennonites. People came from so far and helped people here; we can also do the same. This encourages me to connect with the global church and their needs.

What book or podcast have been reading/listening to lately whose insights you would recommend?

I listen to *Turning Point* by David Jeremiah and *Daily Hope* by Rick Warren for my personal growth. I like to watch videos about Anabaptism/History of Anabaptist/Anabaptist Faith on YouTube to learn and to share with the young generation. I am still learning.

What MWC resource do you recommend and why?

I read *From Anabaptist Seed* and I am studying the Sermon on the Mount.

Whenever we receive news from MWC (Prayer Network, Pastoral Letters), we pray. It helps us to pray for each other. We don’t know those people, but we feel that we are one body and that they are our brothers and sisters. It’s all because of Christ and his love.

I love it to be part of Online Prayer Hour. It helps me to grow in my faith. People all around the world are praying to the same God. It gives me the idea of the greatness of our God.

Fair Share Story

“We start with what we have”

“The way to address inequality is treating people differently – not the same,” says Arli Klassen, MWC regional representatives coordinator.

Mennonite World Conference is an organization made of members. However, financial resources vary widely within its global membership. Fair Share is MWC’s way to for all national member churches to contribute based on their ability and needs.

“When you become part of MWC, you become part of giving, not only receiving,” says Cynthia Peacock, MWC regional representative for Southern Asia.

“Even when you have little, out of that little, you share,” she says. “When we are in need, others are giving to us.”

In 1984, the executive secretary suggested a shift from the standard per-member figure to a negotiated amount. National economic indicators would be part of the new funding formula. The General Council approved the Fair Share Funding Formula in 2000.

Every three years, the regional representatives approach the General Council delegates to discuss their membership contribution and to sign the Mutual Expectations Covenant.

“MWC’s Fair Share acknowledges relative wealth (through assessment). Through negotiation, it acknowledges there is more diversity than hard numbers reflect. It makes space for conversation based on the principle that every member church can contribute something to the global body of Christ,” says Arli Klassen.

Negotiation

“Because I am one of them [a church leader from Southern Africa], I am not ignorant of the needs,” says Danisa Ndlovu, MWC regional representative for Southern Africa. “But all of us have something to contribute to the body of Christ. In the end, it is the body that benefits.”

Cynthia Peacock points out that churches can receive grants from the Global Church Sharing Fund. “Leadership understand that conferences are benefiting – not only financially but also in other ways.”

A basket for giving and receiving

In Southern Africa, “the impression we have been given is that we can always carry a basket to receive,” says Danisa Ndlovu. He encourages leaders to see that “everyone is in need, and everyone needs help.

“In the midst of the challenges we have, we must also appreciate that God is blessing us in some way. It is important for us to also be a blessing to the rest of the body – and ourselves as part of the body,” says Danisa Ndlovu.

The regional representative want the message to permeate even to the congregations where many languages are spoken. Cynthia Peacock translates MWC articles, worship resources, videos and Mutual Expectations into Hindi, Bengali, Odiya and Tamil to make them widely accessible.

“Once leaders are convinced about what I share, they invite me to visit them again to learn and to be connected with the global church and be strengthened,” says Cynthia Peacock.

One Lunch

The worship events (Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, Peace Sunday) provide an opportunity for [One Lunch](#) giving. If each baptized congregation member would give the equivalent cost of one lunch a year, the assessed Fair Share amount would be met.

“Sometimes members spend Rs.100 (Indian Rupees) or more a month for recharging mobiles; therefore, giving Rs.20 per year toward Fair Share is not impossible.”, says Cynthia Peacock.

Make a gift to MWC today! Following Jesus, living out unity, building peace: we all have something to contribute to the worldwide Anabaptist-Mennonite family of faith.

One Lunch is a more challenging concept in rural Africa, says Danisa Ndlovu, where some people may only eat one meal a day.

Yet, “God is not calling us to give out of what we don’t have but out of the little that we have,” he says. “God calls us to be joyous in doing that (2 Corinthians 9:7).”

Challenges

“National member churches on every continent say they can’t give the full assessed amount, so we start conversations,” says Arli Klassen. “The cultural differences come out clearly” as Fair Share is negotiated around the world.

“The responsibility to contribute to the common good is well understood in Africa,” says Arli Klassen. “In most of the Global South, leaders readily enter into conversation about amounts, saying ‘we need help.’”

There is a strong commitment to paying taxes to help the whole community in Europe. There, assessed amount is taken very seriously. In North America, there is a reticence to negotiate.

“We want our member churches to come up with a proposal of what is fair for them. My personal goal is that relationships are strengthened. The financial commitment reflects commitment to the global Anabaptist communion,” says Arli Klassen. “Every church can contribute something. That’s part of what it means to be a member.”

“To the new generation, a reminder and a challenge is that through the efforts of many missionaries we received much. Leaders have strived to maintain the vision with which the churches were established,” says Cynthia Peacock.

“Now we have much in terms of houses, cars, good jobs and therefore, with a thankful heart, it is time to give more to the local and global church to make our churches holistically strong,” she says. “For this, we need to build healthy relationships to listen to each other and live out unity as disciples of Christ.”



Support the work of MWC in following Jesus, living out unity, and building peace globally





Save the date!

Renewal 2024

Saturday, 6 April 2024

7:00 pm

1ª Igreja Evangélica Irmãos Menonitas do Boqueirão – Cruz Verde

Curitiba, Brazil

Please find information on MWC's website closer to the date in case of event venue or time changes



Renewal 2025

Courage to love

Celebrating 500 years of Anabaptism

Saturday, 29 May 2025

Zurich, Switzerland

Workshops, musical performances, theatrical performances and panel discussions culminating in an ecumenical worship service.

Anabaptists on the streets of Zurich

Commemoration of 500 years includes worship, speeches, discussions and art

In the shadow of the Grossmünster cathedral, the main Catholic church in Zurich, a group of young people gathered in a house to commit an act of subversion: adult baptism.

Their study of the Bible had led them to different understandings than the state church. As they understood it, baptism was a symbol of their conscious decision to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and follow his example in life—a commitment only an adult could make. That decision challenged the millennial-old practice in the Catholic church of baptizing infants.

This radical act on 21 January 1525 marked the symbolic beginning of what would become known as the Anabaptist (“re-baptizer”) movement. Today, the movement has grown to include some **2.13 million believers in more than 80 countries around the world.**

On 29 May 2025, Mennonite World Conference invites guests from around the world to gather in Zurich to commemorate this beginning. “The courage to love,” the theme for the event, will mark this history and celebrate what the movement has become today. Local government officials and church leaders of related traditions will also be invited.

“On this day, Anabaptists will become visible in the streets of Zurich,” says Liesa Unger, MWC Chief International Events Officer.

A walking tour within the city will feature stations that commemorate historical events and reflect on the contemporary church. Workshops, musical concerts, theatrical performances, panel discussions and more will be scattered throughout the downtown.

The day will culminate in an ecumenical worship service that recognizes the many steps toward reconciliation that have occurred in recent decades and an act of public witness. The final worship service will be livestreamed.

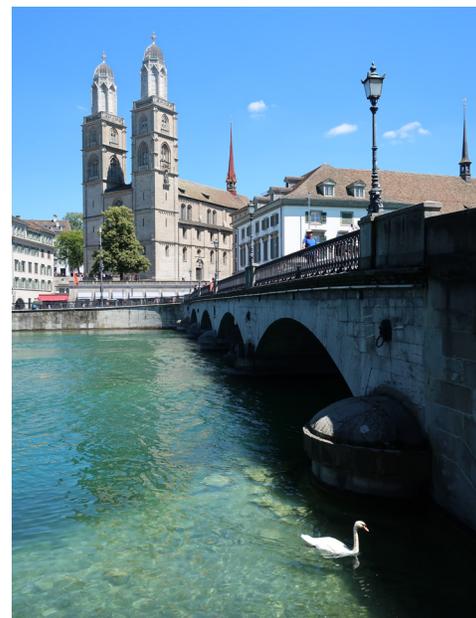
Rashard Allen (USA) of the international ensemble in Indonesia is coordinating

ensembles to participate in the event; one from each of the five regions. Deborah Prabu (Indonesia), worship leader from Assembly 17, is coordinating an international ensemble to lead congregational singing during the worship service.

“We want to have a strong historical component that makes it clear why we are gathering in Zurich. But an even stronger emphasis will focus on the future,” says historian and Renewal 2025 coordinator John D. Roth. “The Anabaptist movement continues to be dynamic, diverse, and creative in sharing the gospel in many different cultural settings.”

General Council delegates will be encouraged to craft local events to teach about the historical roots of Anabaptism and collect stories on the expressions of Anabaptist faith in their own contexts.

Check the MWC website for new information being released about the quinquennial commemoration.



The Grossmünster in Zurich, Switzerland.

Photo: J. Nelson Kraybill



Photo:
Christian Argha Aditya



Invest in the global Anabaptist family!

Join the MWC movement! Stand in solidarity with Anabaptist sisters-and-brothers from Argentina to Zimbabwe.

You can make a difference: **invest your financial gifts** in the worldwide mission of Mennonite World Conference. When we **work** together, we **learn** from each other while **blessing** the world.

When you contribute, you touch the world:

- Resource and strengthen Anabaptist leaders
- Encourage congregations to live out Anabaptist faith
- Nurture koinonia through MWC gatherings in person and online
- Equip MWC's commissions, networks, YABs (young adults) to serve

Like all families, we need each other to thrive.

Visit mwc-cmm.org/donate to give now or send your contribution to

- Mennonite World Conference
50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1
Canada
- Mennonite World Conference
PO Box 5364
Lancaster, PA 17606-5364 USA

Together we build up the global family of faith. Thank you for sharing your gifts with MWC!

New tagline reinforces MWC Vision and Mission Statements

If you were to sum up Mennonite World Conference in three phrases, what would you say? MWC leadership has selected a new tag line to do just that: “following Jesus, living out unity, building peace”.

“After almost one year of consultative process with Anabaptist theologians and MWC staff, under the facilitation of change management consultant Betty Pries, we agreed upon this tagline. It reinforces the three most important things about being an Anabaptist and summarizes the MWC Vision and Mission Statements in a way that is inspiring, compelling and calls people to action,” says César García, MWC general secretary.

These phrases are intended to help Anabaptists around the world answer some simple questions:

“What do you believe?”

“What do you stand for?”

“What are your priorities?”

“How are you different from / similar to other denominations?”

During the multiple rounds of dialogue, themes emerged again and again: following Jesus, making the world a better place, unity / unifying, transformation, peace, love, witnessing, community, *shalom* and supporting one another.

“There was consensus on that we want the tagline to call people to action, while focusing on the transformational love of Jesus, as well as continuing our commitment to build peace and unity. The new tagline achieved all these,” César García says.

Look for the tagline in the footer of MWC digital communications from letters, website stories, MWC Info e-newsletter, *Courier* magazine to social media posts.

More resources on what it means to be #followingJesus, #livingoutunity and #buildingpeace will be rolled out between

Following *Jesus*,
living out *unity*,
building *peace*

now and 2025, when we celebrate 500 years of Anabaptism.

MWC Vision: Mennonite World Conference is called to be a communion (Koinonia) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness.

MWC Mission: MWC exists to (1) be a global community of faith in the Anabaptist tradition, (2) facilitate relationships between Anabaptist-related churches worldwide, and (3) relate to other Christian world communions and organizations.

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Photo: Irma Sulistyorini



Praying for each other.

Photo: Ebenezer Mondez

How I envy you!

Some years ago, in my local congregation in Colombia, a friend said to me: “Oh! César, how I envy you!” *Why?* I asked her. “I work in a multinational company. I deal with a lot of stress because of ongoing conflicts and broken relationships with my colleagues and bosses. But you, César, you work with pastors and leaders of churches. What kind of conflicts could you have?”

We know conflicts among leaders, polarization and divisions are part of all churches – local, regional, national or global. Broken relationships because of disagreements seem to be the only option when differences are irreconcilable. However, I wonder if it *has to be* that way.

How the church handles conflicts ought to be a mark of an alternative community. The church is the community that can show the world that handling conflict without division or broken relationships is possible.

But as Anabaptists, we know that that has not been our case historically.

Some months ago, I was reading an article in a Mennonite magazine. Its author said: “I am proud of leaving this church because that is the faithful thing to do. You know, when you have to sacrifice doctrine or ethics, you must leave.”

Of course, that is a dilemma if you have to decide between *unity* on one hand or *doctrine* or *ethics* on the other. Is it necessary to sacrifice unity to keep a healthy doctrine or good ethics? That is how we have dealt with doctrinal and ethical conflicts in our Anabaptist history. Our experience of ongoing fragmentation has taken us to spiritualize unity or to leave it for the afterlife.

However, the New Testament speaks about the unity of Jesus’ followers as a gift of the Holy Spirit to be received, enjoyed and kept here and now (see, for example, the book of Ephesians).

Speaking of unity implies the existence of differences and disagreements.

I do believe unity and disagreements are not opposites. In my own life, I experience contradictions. Today, I can’t entirely agree with everything I have taught before during my 30 years of ministry. Thanks to God, I can say that I have been growing in my spiritual life and walking following Jesus.

“Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect,” says the apostle Paul (Romans 12:2). Renewing implies change, transformation and some internal contradiction with what I believed, did or was before.

If disagreements and contradictions are part of Christ’s body, conflicts are, too. That may be one reason why disagreements, teachings about forgiveness and conflict resolution among disciples are common topics throughout the New Testament.

The problem, then, does not have to do with the existence of conflicts but how we deal with them.

Broken relationships and divisions do not have to be the result of a conflict. If there is a robust and irreconcilable disagreement among Jesus’ disciples, condemning or excommunicating each other is not the only option. Why would we think our brother or sister in Christ is not an honest Christian because they do not coincide with our current way of thinking or with our group?

Strong disagreements may push us to distance – for some time – from each other. Ireconciled positions may make it too difficult to work together. But that does not mean we must question the commitment to Jesus of those who disagree with us. Can we say: “I strongly disagree with you *but* still respect your commitment to Christ”? Can we create distance with other believers without condemning them and breaking the relationship?

Those are some of the questions we want to address in this issue of *Courier*. May God guide us to find biblical answers that help us show the world what is different when we address conflict as members of an alternative community and in the power of the Holy Spirit. May God help us renew our minds about responding to church conflicts.

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