



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

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

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

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Cover Photo:

Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) is the largest MWC national member church. They continue to expand as they implement a 10-point growth strategy.

Photo: Lisa Carr-Pries

Word from the editor



Sharing the food of life

“Anyone who tasted Jesus is good should tell others what he/she tasted.”

Evangelism is a scary word for many of us, but this simple advice offered by pastors in Ethiopia helps to simplify the task. Although we each bear responsibility to share the gospel, it is the Holy Spirit that changes hearts. Our job is merely to speak up about how we have experienced the goodness of God.

In this issue of *Courier*, we share stories of churches growing in different ways. Bursting at the seams with growing congregations, the leadership team of Meserete Kristos Church shares their 10 step strategy for church growth.

The local congregation of Anolaima in Colombia is growing trees and grass and birds as they plant seeds of the gospel in the hearts of visitors to their “IgleParque.”

And in secular Netherlands, a Mennonite retreat centre and associated camping network live out transforming lives in community, running toward the questions and letting God fill in the spaces.

You will also find testimonies of the church community fostering the growth of faith from the 2024 Renewal event in Curitiba, Brazil: *Transformed, together we live Jesus*.

In our resource section, there is news to pique your interest in the upcoming 500th anniversary of Anabaptism.

Finally, we need to hear from you!

How have you been moved by the sharing you read in *Courier*? How have you shared that with your wider church community? We are seeking your opinion about what you find most valuable in *Courier*. Please scan the QR code here or visit [here](#) to fill out the survey.

This survey will only take five minutes of your time, but your response will help MWC keep *Courier* relevant for you and your church. Thank you for your help.

Karla Braun is editor, writer and website coordinator for MWC. She lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Survey

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Click here to fill out the full *Courier* survey.

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Henk Stenvers



Telling others what you have tasted

Why is the Meserete Kristos Church the fastest-growing Mennonite church?

Ethiopia is a multiethnic, multireligious and multilingual nation with more than 120 million people, the second most populated country in Africa. Located in northeast Africa, Ethiopia is a landlocked country.

European powers did not colonize Ethiopia. However, internal conflicts tore the country apart and broke it up along ethnic, religious and geographical lines. The civil war crushed the economy of the country. Ethnic and religious conflicts damaged the social ties among diverse people groups and increased fear; intolerance and revenge are part of the life of the people. Some people think of poverty, war and family as the symbols of Ethiopia.

Yet people who lost hope get a sense of meaning and direction for their lives when they turn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth. When people believe in Jesus Christ, they not only receive the hope of eternal life but also a new lens of looking at their difficult circumstances to devise better coping mechanisms.

Our understanding of church growth

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) understands church growth in two dimensions.

First, church growth is a numerical increase of church members. Congregations are expected to add new believers every year as was practiced in the early church (Acts 2:47).

The second aspect is that the church's growth is seen in the maturity of the spiritual life of believers. Believers who bear the fruit of the Spirit in their lives and follow the footsteps of Christ bring about positive influence in society. When people share the gospel with others through their practices in life, the possibility of people responding positively to the message increases.

The spiritual growth of individual believers and the growth of the church correlate.

Strategies for church growth

In the following pages, we will describe the 10 strategies/principles that helped MKC to grow fast in the post-Communist era (1991-2024).

Anyone who tasted Jesus is good should tell others what he/she tasted.

Pastor Desalegn Abebe is the president of Meserete Kristos Church, Ethiopia. He is also a PhD student.

Kebede Bekere is an ordained church minister, teacher at MK Seminary and editor-volunteer of the MKC Newsletter.

“We aligned our evangelistic activities with the strategic plan of the church to contribute our shares to achieve the common goals.”



Liesla Unger

1. Fervent prayers

MKC has used prayer as a spiritual weapon to overcome the power of the devil and free people from the bondage of sins. In prayers, we speak to God and listen as God speaks to us.

In all MKC congregations, prayer teams are praying for the church’s ministry, according to the topics they are given. The teams pray for the church to overcome the power of evil that holds people from hearing and believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are night-long prayer meetings of all members at the local church level. Full-time ministers spend significant time in prayers. Church leaders pray before business meetings. Believers pray believing that God is listening to them and responding to their prayers according to his will.

At MKC Head Office, a national prayer team meets every month for a day to pray for God to help the church reach out to the unreached people with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Many congregations pray for the salvation of people through the gospel of Jesus Christ using different approaches.

Some local congregations pray for unreached people groups during Sunday services. For instance, Tabour MKC in

Hawassa city in the southern part of Ethiopia prepared posters of several ethnic groups, and each week, the poster of one of the ethnic groups is posted on the front stage of the church. The whole congregation prays for that ethnic group for 5-10 minutes.

2. Calling new people to believe in Jesus

“Dear preacher, when you finish your sermon, don’t forget to invite new people to accept the Lord.”

In every local MKC congregation, following the sermon of the Sunday service, the preacher calls new people to accept Christ as their Saviour and Lord. MKC believes that the Holy Spirit touches the hearts of people and convicts of their sins to repent and believe in Jesus. Therefore, preachers are vessels for the Holy Spirit to work.

Many new people believe in Jesus every Sunday. The congregation takes these new believers to the prayer room to pray for them. The evangelists take their physical address and telephone number to follow up. Then, they join the new believers’ class to learn basic Christian doctrines. When baptized, the evangelism department hands them to the pastoral department to provide appropriate pastoral ministry services.

It should be noted that calling people from the pulpit without having non-believers in the church is meaningless. Congregations remind members to invite and bring their friends, family members or colleagues to the Sunday service.

Pastor Deneke Hussein, General Secretary of Southern Ethiopia MKC Region, cites a recent encounter: after Sunday service, he went outside and saw a sad woman. He sensed the guidance of the Holy Spirit to talk to the woman. He greeted her and asked, “You look unhappy, what happened?” The woman replied, “I was desperate about life and came to the church to hear God’s Word. I heard the message and was encouraged. However, no one talked to me.”

Pastor Deneke realized that the preacher did not invite people to come forward to accept Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord. He took her to the prayer room and formally asked her to accept Christ. The woman accepted Christ, was prayed for and connected to the evangelist of the congregation for further follow up.

One pastor from western Ethiopia says: “After a preacher has preached the gospel in a place where many people have gathered, not calling people who want to believe in the Lord Jesus is like planting a seed and refusing to harvest the fruit after it has ripened.”

3. Remaining small and growing

MKC’s policy states that a congregation with more than 1 000 members should be divided into two small congregations.¹ From a practical point of view, small churches (with members below 1 000) can provide effective services to their members. Church members also know each other and can have a meaningful fellowship.

A mother church nurtures the new offspring church to become a full-fledged congregation. Then both the mother church and the offspring church continue to grow to bear other new congregations.

Pastor Sebrella Kedir, the MKC’s pastoral ministry department director says that when congregations have large membership, they cannot provide appropriate pastoral services to the members and mobilize all members towards a shared goal. “A pastor can feed and protect the flock well when the number is reasonable. If the church’s size is big, some members are astrayed.

“By keeping the size reasonable, MKC grows in quality and quantity. Disciples of Christ share the gospel with others faithfully,” he says.

4. The responsibility to share the gospel

Anyone who tasted Jesus is good should tell others what he/she tasted.

MKC states clearly that the church exists to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people and make them Christ’s disciples. MKC’s Constitution mentions the participation of church members in the holistic ministry of the church by serving the church in the spiritual gifts given to him/her, prayers, professional advice/consulting, labour, wisdom and financial contributions.²

Before they become church members through water baptism, new believers are given lessons on what the church expects from them once they become full members.

One of the topics discussed is the concept of bringing other people to believe in Christ. The new believers are expected to lead others to Christ as someone led them to Christ. The church

encourages them to share the goodness of Jesus they experienced in their lives with other people. Telling what Jesus has done for them to other people does not require having theological training.

5. Implementing a contextually relevant strategic plan

Across all MKC, now people speak the same language: *Agenda 2819 is our priority.*

In the strategic plan MKC prepared and implemented in 2022, the church laid out the roadmap to sustain the growth of the church. The mission of the church was revised to indicate MKC as a missional/evangelistic church. It says, “MKC exists to preach the gospel to all people and make them disciples of Jesus Christ.”³

To inculcate this in the hearts of church members, the church prepared presentations on Matthew 28:19 – Agenda 2819, and awareness creation sessions were conducted in all MKC regions. This reignited the church leaders and members to focus on preaching the gospel and bringing people to believe in Jesus Christ. MKC’s president devoted substantial time to getting this message to all MKC congregations to achieve the goals.

The strategic plan also set specific indicators to track the progress of the church toward achieving 10% annual growth of members. The strategic plan has made the church mobilize resources to achieve the set goals. Above all, the church’s leaders realized they exist to preach the gospel and make those who believe the disciples of Christ.

Pastor Dessu Abebe, the General Secretary of Nekemte MKC Region, said the direction set by the strategic plan is very relevant. He read the strategic plan repeatedly to internalize it because if it is not implemented, the region will fail.

“I called the lead pastors and the elders’ council chairperson of all local churches in my region for three days of training on the strategic plan. I tried my best to help them understand.” He stressed the training alone was not enough to understand fully.

When he meets with the lead pastors during quarterly review sessions, he refreshes the strategic plan and listens to understand their challenges, concerns and successes. Pastor Dessu admitted that the strategic plan is tough and demands a lot of work. Two of the lead pastors in his

region resigned because they recognized that they did not have the competence to implement the strategic plan.

The Nekemte MKC Region was able to identify districts where there were no MKC congregations. “We planted churches in three of those districts. We have not thought that way before. The strategic plan guided us where we should focus.”

“The strategic plan helped us to see the bigger picture of where MKC is heading and our specific role as a local church,” said Pastor Shambel Genene, the lead pastor of Asella MKC. The church was engaged in Muslim evangelism even before the strategic plan was introduced. Now, “We aligned our evangelistic activities with the strategic plan of the church to contribute our shares to achieve the common goals.”

**God is doing his work.
We, the children of
God, must take the
gospel to people.**



Liesla Unger

6. Ordaining evangelists in congregations

Every MKC local church must have at least one evangelist devoted to preaching God’s Word and leading people to faith in Jesus Christ.

Two decades ago, evangelists engaged in the work of a pastor. MKC revised the ministry guideline to release the pastoral work from the evangelist and focus on evangelism.

An evangelist in a congregation shares the good news of Jesus Christ with people to be a model. He/she is also responsible for motivating and equipping

church members to participate actively in evangelism and planting new churches. He/she reports his/her evangelistic ministry accomplishments to the lead pastor and the elders’ council quarterly.

Ayalew Balcha is a graduate of Meserete Kristos Seminary and an ordained evangelist at Akaki MKC. He stated that congregations need evangelists to proclaim the gospel to non-believers. He coordinates the evangelistic ministry of the local church and mobilizes the congregation for evangelism.

He has an evangelistic team – an action group – that goes every month on the streets and goes village to village and shares the good news of Jesus Christ with anyone they meet.

Last year, 19 new believers who came to the faith in this manner were baptized and became church members. “We are praying and working hard to win more souls for Christ this year,” he said.

7. Mobilizing resources locally

“Our resources are the people we have in the church.”

Most of the MKC members are not rich people. We have several congregations in rural areas where they engage in subsistence farming. Due to climate change, conflicts, traditional farming style, inadequate access to improved seeds and fertilizers, and other factors, they cannot improve their income.

Most of them are hardworking peasants who contribute to the services of the church through tithes, offerings, special gifts and love gifts. They are poor but generous enough to support the ministry of the church.

Employees and business people who have regular income pay their tithes monthly.

Local churches also collect offerings for evangelism and the mission of the church. In some congregations, Bible study groups organized by the church contribute money to the Mission Funds of MKC.

Birru Robele, one of the prominent leaders of MKC, collects monthly contributions of his Bible study group members and gives them to Misrak Addis Ababa congregation. It supports more than 130 church planters in different parts of the country on a monthly salary of about US\$50.00.

Some people cannot continue their jobs after believing in Jesus Christ because those jobs are incompatible with the teachings of the Bible. These people include women who engage in prostitution and engage in the production and sale of local alcoholic drinks. Rehabilitating and changing their income-generating means demands money.

Pastor Bekele Bajira, the lead pastor of Bordi Nekemte MKC, said that three commercial sex workers came to the Lord through the evangelistic campaign. They completed the basic Christian teaching and were baptized. Later, the women told him that they did not have food because they stopped their former work. When Pastor Bekele shared their stories with the congregation, members contributed money that was enough to help them start other small businesses.

If we present genuinely the needs to be addressed to advance the cause of the gospel, believers are willing to give what they have," said Pastor Bekele.

8. Using the language of the people

MKC's policy states that the gospel should be preached and taught in the people's language. Since the purpose of the church is to help people hear the gospel, believe in Christ, and become his disciples, it preaches and teaches the word of God in the language people prefer. People usually open their hearts when they hear the gospel in their language.

In a society where the issue of language is sensitive, letting people learn the gospel in their language helps them not associate church ministries with politics.

MKC prepares and avails evangelistic and discipleship materials in various languages. We encourages believers who have a sense of call for ministry to be multilingual. Knowing several languages opens the door for ministry and church planting in various cultures.

Pastor Firew Lemma, education and training department of MKC Head Office, recently travelled to Tigray, northern Ethiopia, to teach church leaders. Having learned the language from his family, he greeted the participants in Tigriegna and observed their warm, welcoming facial expressions. They were surprised that he spoke their language.

Speaking the language of the people we serve is essential to communicate the gospel clearly and to develop good relationships, said Pasor Firew.

9. Placing church planters in unchurched communities

"Till the land with the oxen from that area."

MKC recruits, trains and places church planters within their own culture. Since the church planters recognize the culture and have already established connections, they can easily share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people.

MKC assigns church planters in several contexts: strongly Orthodox, Muslim and traditional beliefs. Wendimu W/Mariam, the mission coordinator at MKC Head Office, said that the church planters in the context where traditional beliefs and practices are predominant plant more churches than those in other contexts. In communities practicing traditional beliefs, if the prominent leader comes to Christ, many of the community members follow and believe in Christ.

In that context, "Our church planters pray and work to lead the community gatekeepers to Christ. Once they come to Jesus, leading others to Christ is easy," said Wendimu.

10. Following the lead of the Holy Spirit

MKC teaches about the Holy Spirit and that believers should be empowered to live a victorious Christian life and witness for Christ. The church encourages believers to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern God's will in their lives. The full-time ministers and church leaders pray for believers to be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

In the mission field, the dependence of the church planters on following the guidance of the Holy Spirit makes a difference in their efforts.

Church planters who pray for the sick and share God's Word as per the guidance of the Spirit lead more people to Christ than those who do not practice these things. When the gospel is preached/shared with power (demonstrated by the healing of the sick, recovery of mental health, release from the fear of the evil spirits, and the feeling of God's presence), people tend to believe in the gospel.

This is different from some TV miracle workers. MKC does not organize healing conferences but events to preach the word of God. There, the Holy Spirit does things according to God's will.

Church planters do not focus on the miracles, but on helping people understand the gospel. The miracles occur when they pray for the needs of the people. God confirms the power of the gospel by liberating people from whatever bondage hinders them from experiencing what God plans for their lives.

In conclusion, God is uniquely drawing people into God's kingdom amid intense political, social and economic upheaval in the nation.

The growth of the Meserete Kristos Church is a good indication that the conditions on earth do not prevent the expansion of God's kingdom. The scale and depth of the problem in our context could have destroyed the church. The evil forces trying to create obstacles to the gospel on earth have not succeeded. The wise God used the multifaced sufferings to lead multitudes to his kingdom.

God is doing his work. We, the children of God, must take the gospel to people. We can participate in the Great Commission of Jesus Christ by contributing our money, labour, knowledge, time, talents and whatever we have as our number one agenda.

The main reason for the growth of MKC is that we made the Great Commission our top priority and give what we have for the cause.

Footnotes

1. MKC Constitution Part II, Article 11(2), 2022
2. MKC Constitution Part II, Article 10(1), 2022, page 8.
3. MKC Strategic Plan 2022-2026.

Zimbabwe

The power of God at a funeral wake



Preshit Rao

Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe shares a testimony at Renewal 2025 in Curitiba, Brazil.

by Danisa Ndlovu

One of the events that bring people together among our people are funeral wakes and funerals.

Sometime last year, we had one of our church leaders have his wife taken to be with the Lord. It was a challenging time not only to the man, his family and the church, but the community as well. The community gathered every evening for four days before the actual funeral.

The man who lost his wife was a pastor and a respected leader. The death of this dear woman brought together church leaders and people who would otherwise not ordinarily meet and worship together!

The speakers and preachers on each of the days came from different churches and denominations. The unity of the body of Christ became a reality to many. Christ was lifted high, and the funeral wake literally became a revival of some kind. The presence of Christ was felt as the Spirit of God touched many who participated in these services.

Funerals are generally accompanied by mourning and grieving. In this instance there were signs of loss, but for the greater part it was indeed celebrating the life of one who had exemplarily walked with Jesus.

An exemplary walk

Testimony after testimony came from people who were not part of the church expressing how this departed sister and brother (the husband) had significantly touched their lives.

At the funeral service, one of her workmates (the deceased was a teacher) gave a touching testimony. When other teachers went on strike demanding what they believed to be their rights, the deceased never participated, believing that for her teaching was a calling. The welfare of children was her priority.

Parents' representatives also testified of the same and that over the years the children she taught almost always produced the best results.

At her funeral, many people who had absolutely nothing to do with the church attended her funeral and

Funerals are generally accompanied by mourning and grieving. In this instance there were signs of loss, but for the greater part it was indeed celebrating the life of one who had exemplarily walked with Jesus.

testified of God's love and goodness and the worth of following Jesus.

Let me point out that funeral wake gatherings are more or less cultural and expected. However, it is the Spirit's demonstration of unity of the church and the reality of the transformative power of Jesus that was experienced during that time.

People still testify about that funeral wake to this day. The transformative power of Jesus made this funeral different from among many.

For us Christians and indeed many others, the funeral wake, and the funeral itself made the words of Paul in Romans 14:7-9 come alive. These words continue to encourage us:

"For we do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

Amen.



Danisa Ndlovu is the MWC regional representative for Southern Africa. He served as bishop in the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe from 2000-2014.

This article is adapted from the speech he presented at Renewal 2024, "Transformed, together we live Jesus" 6 April 2024 in Brazil.

Indonesia

Discipleship in the family

by Agus W. Mayanto

My wife and I have pastored together for 25 years at a church in downtown Jakarta with a congregation of around 250 people. We really enjoy our ministry's call to grow together with the congregation we pastor.

We have one daughter who is now in her sixth semester of medical school preparing to become a doctor.

Since our time in the seminary, my wife and I have been mentors to more than 120 teenagers. We disciplined them so that many of the active members in the church today are the teenagers we mentored.

If I were asked what position or role is the most meaningful, it would be being a father to the many foster children we have brought into our home as part of our family. I treasure this more than all the other roles I have held in our synod or national church or even globally.

A home with open doors

This story began when my wife and I were still dating at a seminary in Salatiga.

We had the same passion for loving children and young people, guiding them to know the Lord Jesus and to grow in all aspects of their lives. We both realized that our existence is only due to God's grace; and we wanted other people to also experience God's grace.

After we got married and our daughter was 10 months old, God sent a young man to us. He had no parents and was rejected by his family. His body was emaciated and he had a burst eardrum due to violence from his uncle.

A member of the congregation took him to our place and that night we agreed to take care of him. He stayed with us for many years. We were able to guide him to meet the Lord Jesus.

That young person went on to complete theology and mission studies and has been serving for 10 years as a missionary in the interior.

Since then, God has sent many children from various regions and ethnic backgrounds to our home.

Some 43 children have become part of our family. Generally, they are from poor families in villages and remote areas who don't have a father or mother. Several of them have special needs or have conditions like epilepsy that need to be controlled by a doctor.

Bringing so many children into our home is not an easy thing. From the beginning we were committed to using our own money, which was very limited at first, even for daily meals. As pastors our income is not large. It became difficult when our foster children increased from 4 to 10 then 13 and then 17. Yet we see it as our calling to bear all their living expenses: food, clothing, school fees.

For two years we ate salted fish almost every day (which made my wife suffer from high blood pressure). But we never regret doing it because God gives us joy.

In the way of God

The hardest thing is not how to provide food, but how to educate our children in the way of God in light of their different family and cultural backgrounds.

We are not creating an orphanage, or even a dormitory for children. Instead, we are making them part of our family. We often tell our children that *this is their home* and *this is a family*, so that they rediscover the warmth and security of a family they never had.

Our goal is not only to allow them to pursue their dreams, but to educate them to become transformed by Christ and find their callings as his disciples.

When our daughter was in elementary school, she once asked: *"Mom and Dad, why do you bring so many children into our house? Our house is so full. It would be nice if it was just the three of us living alone, and everything was mine."*

However, when she was a senior in high school, she wrote an essay for a writing competition hosted by the biggest newspaper in our country.

"I was born as an only child who should be able to enjoy that blessing without needing to share with others. But my father and mother brought many children to be raised in our house, which meant that I had to share everything, including my father and my mother. At first, I was sad and found it difficult to accept. But my parents were very loving people who longed for other children to feel God's love and have a future. They allowed their lives to be disrupted so that they could become trees that sheltered many vulnerable people. Today, my house is filled relatives from all across Indonesia. I now understand that life must be shared. Where is the beauty of life if it is only lived for yourself?"

We shed tears as we read her reflection, grateful that she has also discovered that the true meaning of life is found only when we share.

As it turned out, she won the contest.

Currently, many of our children have graduated and are pursuing their vocations as pastors, missionaries, teachers, nurses and working in the marketplaces. If they ask, *"How can we repay you for all the kindness you have shown as our father, mother and sister?"* we always answer, *"Repay it by sharing God's love with others so that doesn't just stop with you. We look forward to visiting you seeing many children in your families."*

Of course, there are many dynamics in this whole process – many joys and sorrows. But God has allowed our dream to be fulfilled.

Pray that our children will continue to become believers and faithful disciples, serving God according to their gifts and callings. Blessed be the name of the Lord!



Agus W. Mayanto is the Mennonite World Conference Regional Representative for Southeast Asia. He and his wife Rosmaida are co-pastors of GKMI Cempaka Putih Jakarta in Indonesia since 1999.

This article is adapted from the speech he presented at Renewal 2024, "Transformed, together we live Jesus" 6 April 2024 in Brazil.



Mennonite World Conference

A Community of Anabaptist related Churches

Mennonite World Conference

Annual report: 2023

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.”

Ephesians 2:13-14

Thank you! ¡Gracias! Merci !

In Jesus Christ, we are one family. Thanks be to God! Through your investments in the global church in 2023, we worked together as part of God’s diverse and beloved family.

You enabled MWC to reach out to member churches facing significant challenges. Together we broke down dividing walls.

You participated in our common call to *follow Jesus, live out unity, and build peace* as part of a global Anabaptist family of faith. Your support helped to bring life to our witness. In a divided world, our fellowship together across barriers shows God’s power.

Building bridges in God’s kingdom – Ethiopia to India

“My journey with MWC keeps bringing out the best in me,” says Tigist Tesfaye of Ethiopia. The secretary of the Deacons Commission was invited to India in 2023 to be the featured speaker at the Triennial All India Mennonite Women’s Conference. She brought words of solidarity from Africa to Asia in sharing about her life of committed Christian service.

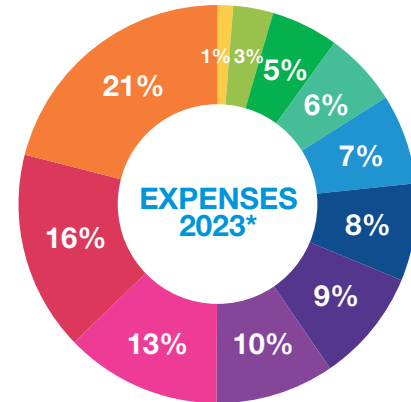
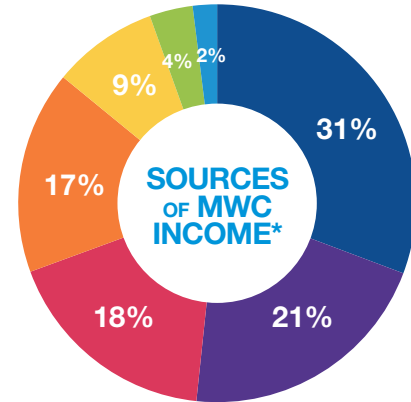
Tigist Tesfaye has been actively participating in MWC’s global ministries for more than 15 years: In MWC, **following Jesus** together (Matthew 4) is at the centre of our call.

Deacons Commission secretary Tigist Tesfaye with Anabaptist-Mennonite church leader Sipra Biswas (General Council delegate for Bharatiya Jukta Christa Prachar Mandalī [India United Missionary Church]) in India. Photo: Cynthia Peacock



- 429 205 Individuals
- 292 480 Agencies
- 247 795 Member churches
- 230 639 Foundations
- 120 023 Congregations
- 49 123 Business
- 27 548 Other

TOTAL REVENUES
1 396 814



- Interchurch relations
- Governance
- Global gatherings
- Commissions
- Global Church Sharing Fund (GCSF)
- Global Anabaptist networks
- Regional representatives
- General secretariat
- Communications
- Development
- Administration & operations

*All amounts in US\$



Your investment in MWC’s global mission...

- **empowers Anabaptist leaders:** through connecting and training, leaders of all ages deepen their capacities as we **follow Jesus** together;
- **strengthens Anabaptist congregations:** through resourcing and networking, faith communities thrive in **living out unity**;
- **fosters a vibrant global communion:** through community-building and barrier-crossing, Anabaptists **build peace** within our global family and beyond.

Become **part of God’s bigger picture** by making a gift to MWC today!
 Scan the QR code, donate now at mwc-cmm.org/donate or send your contribution to
 Mennonite World Conference
 PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA
 17606-5364, USA

Mennonite World Conference
 50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206,
 Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1, Canada



Baptized members of Mennonite World Conference member churches

TOTAL MEMBERS: **1 472 488**

Africa 769 670 (53%)

Asia 354 428 (24%)

North America 224 407 (15%)

Latin America 107 197 (7%)

Europe 16 786 (1%)

Following Jesus, living out unity, building peace

Growing in Faithfulness

MWC develops resources to build up the worldwide Anabaptist family of faith.

In 2023, MWC's Faith & Life Commission published a study guide called *"Growing in Faithfulness: Living out our baptism."*

This resource provides a guide to the trilateral dialogue report on baptism, published after several years of collaborative work in the broader Christian community.

MWC leaders involved on this multi-year journey say: "We also sense a deep need among us as Anabaptists to recover why baptism matters and to rekindle its connection to discipleship".

The trilateral dialogue report and MWC study guide highlight convictions, learnings and challenges from this ecumenical dialogue on the meaning of baptism in our faith communities today.

MWC's mission includes relating to other Christian world communions. The baptism report represents diverse perspectives and practice from very different life experiences and church settings both within MWC and beyond.

MWC creates vibrant spaces for worship, dialogue, learning and prayer as together we are **living out unity**.



The courage to love
ZURICH 29 MAY 2025

Commemorate with us!



The courage to love: Anabaptism@500 – Looking forward to 2025

The courage displayed by our spiritual forebearers is also reflected by our Anabaptist sisters-and-brothers today. Facing severe situations, they encounter those challenges with courageous love. From Myanmar to Malawi and Uruguay to Ukraine, our diverse global faith community is stronger as we stand together in 60 countries.

2025 is a year of milestones for MWC and the global Anabaptist family of faith. Commemorate with us!

Be inspired by acts of courageous love and peace building across centuries.

Celebrate the diverse faces of Anabaptism today.

Pray for the courage to love as we live out God's renewal of the church today and into the future.

Together, in this Anabaptist stream of Christ's church, we are **building peace**.



MWC's Executive Committee at annual meetings:

Curitiba, Brazil, April 2024

Back (l-r): Sindah Ngulube (Africa), Samson Omondi (Africa), Henk Stenvers (president), Wieteke van der Molen (Europe), Doug Klassen (North America), Jürg Bräker (Europe), MZ Ichsanudin (Asia), Francis Perez (Latin America), Sunoko Lin (treasurer)
Front: Lisa Carr-Pries (vice-president), César García (general secretary), Amos Chin (Asia), Carlos García Martínez (Latin America), Linda Dibble (North America)



Peace Sunday 2024 Worship Resources

Prepared by the
MWC Peace
Commission for
22 September 2024

1

Theme and texts

a. Theme:
Kintsukuroi:
The broken vessel is often more beautiful than the original

b. Why this theme was chosen:

2 Corinthians 4:7 describes the gospel as a “treasure” in “clay jars.” These humble vessels bring to mind the Japanese tradition of *kintsukuroi* that creates (or recreates) pottery from broken pieces. Damaged vessels are put back together, often with gold binding, to create a useful object once again. The new piece tells a story about the past and is infused with glory that is greater than the former, as in Haggai 2:9.

c. Biblical texts:

- 2 Corinthians 4:7
- Haggai 2:9

2

Prayer Requests

- We mourn with our brothers and sisters in Myanmar for the losses they have experienced in the civil war and the ongoing trauma. We weep for all who have been exposed to war and violence. We pray for the Spirit of comfort and power to enfold the church members that they may be beacons of light and Christ’s peace to those around.
- We pray for Mennonite Church South Korea as they advocate against war in a militarized society. We pray for courage and creativity as they voice opposition along with the local residents to the construction of a factory to produce weapons, and advocate against war. We pray for their work alongside ‘The Frontiers’, engaging in peace activities with the aim of transforming the military base on Jeju Island into a University for World Peace.
- We pray for the farming families in rural Colombia who fear for their livelihoods and their lives. May they be able to safely return to their land. We pray for the peace processes that continue to struggle to take root in all corners of Colombian society. May patience and nonviolence prevail. We pray for the people of the Mennonite Brethren church “La Samaritana.” May they receive an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so they can act with courage and love to transform violence into justice, truth telling and shalom.
- We confess our fears to God about the growing climate crisis. The resulting disastrous weather causes disruptions to food production and displacement from homes and creates conditions of violence. We pray that the church would be empowered by the Spirit of Christ to be beacons of peace in a time of turmoil. May we live with simplicity and generosity. May we place our hope in the Creator and follow the call to seek shalom with all creation.

3

Song Suggestions

From the MWC International Songbook 2022

- #11 Kirisuto No Heiwa / May the peace of Christ be with you
- #2 Dhuh Pangeran / O Prince of Peace
- #36 True Evangelical Faith / Wahrer Glaube wird / La fe de Cristo / Iman Injili Yang Murni

Please check your church’s copyright protocols before using these songs in public gatherings.

4

Additional resources

mwc-cmm.org/peacesunday

a. Additional resources in this package

- Liturgies
- Teaching resources
- Testimonies

b. Additional resources available online:

- Pictures (including all used in this package)



**5
Activities**

2 Corinthians 4:7 describes the gospel as a “treasure” in “clay jars.”

These humble vessels bring to mind the Japanese tradition of kintsukuroi that creates (or recreates) pottery from broken pieces. Damaged vessels are put back together, often with gold binding, to create a useful object once again.

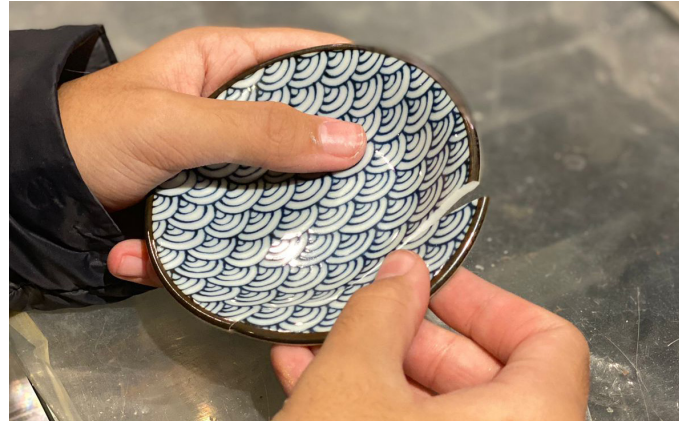
The new piece tells a story about the past and is infused with glory that is greater than the former, as in Haggai 2:9.

As a community, try out this form of art.

- Go throughout your neighbourhood, collecting rubbish, and cleaning up.
- Find broken vessels (e.g., dishes or vases).
- Clean the broken items that can be reused.
- Work together to piece them back together, not into what they were but to create (or recreate) something new and beautiful.

For example, see the pictured cross constructed from broken clay jars. Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Centre de Fe, Anolaima, built this park “Igleparque” in their town about 2 hours’ drive from Bogotá. It is open to the public. Church members guide visitors through to view its many features and to share the message of the gospel.

With permission, send your story and photo to photo@mwc-cmm.org to share with the global Anabaptist family.



Elina Ciptadi



Andrew Suderman



Andrew Suderman

Contact Information:

Andrew Suderman | MWC Peace Commission Secretary

AndrewSuderman@mwc-cmm.org | mwc-cmm.org/peace-commission

How did you use these resources to practice peace?

✉ Send your stories, photos, videos or artwork to photos@mwc-cmm.org

The biblical texts, prayers, song suggestions, sermon ideas, testimonies 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.

Netherlands Holding space

by **Wieteke van der Molen**

We live in a society – in Western Europe – that does not speak our language anymore. We have been the dominant culture for ages and ages...be it Roman Catholic, Protestant or Mennonite. The Christian language, Christian imagery, Christian norms and values were absolutely dominant within the Dutch culture. And within a generation that all disappeared.

Oh, of course, we had secularization before. It has been going on for a few decades. And we lived with it.

Our churches have always been small, our congregations too. We like that. We like to know each other.

But there was a turning point, apparently. And we reached it without actually noticing it. Some of us don't even recognize it still.

It is not only about secularization. It is about a whole culture with all its references that disappears, in the blink of an eye.

But there it is: the people around us don't understand us or our story anymore. It is like Pentecost in reverse. We speak and tell our story, using the same language as the people around us. But no one understands what we say. The words we use have no meaning – or even have another meaning to our listeners.

We are waking up in a strange, strange reality. Incomprehensible.

This is different than decline. This is a new world.

And I like it.

We are beyond trying to salvage what was. We are beyond trying to turn the tide. We are on the brink of re-inventing ourselves, our churches, our storytelling. We are on a route of discovery.

There is no fallback position. Not even our money can save us now. That is very, very scary.

And I like it.

Exile in our own land

This strips everything down to the bone. Even the gospel. We need to read it, study it, find it again. What is of worth? What is truth? What is tradition? What story? What are ancient answers to even older questions? And what still speaks to us, to our hearts, our souls now? We have to search ourselves, our motives, our confessions. There is no easy way out.

And that is the thing. Our growth must be measured spiritually for now. Not in numbers, but in gentle wisdom. In humanity. In community.

We need to delve deep. We need to sit with the loss of our being at home in this land, this world, this language and mourn that loss.

And the Bible will tell us how.

We have done this before. Different time, place, situation; same problem. We are in exile within our own land and continent: "Rivers of Babylon," even if we are the only ones left that understand that reference (and we don't mean the Boney M song).

And here we find new ways.

We don't tell people about our faith. We live it.

A different world

A lot of our younger people have met the church through AKC – our summer camps. Not a word of gospel is uttered during these camps. But in these camps, we create a



Courtesy AKC

world that is utterly different from what these children and young adults know at home or at school. A healing space, without pressure or judgment. A space where they learn that the ways of this world around us may not be the final answer.

We don't push, we don't lecture. We have fun, we hold the space for them...and we wait.

At one point, they become curious. They start asking questions: *what is so different here? And why?*

In the *broederschapshuis* where I work, all sorts of people come and stay. We don't share our faith unless asked. But we ask everybody to meet, to work together, to be part of our community while they stay.

In doing dishes together, we encounter God – or at least questions about God. In each question we try to find something that we can learn.

We don't have answers any longer. But questions of people that don't know about God or faith show us our way.

It touches me when a young volunteer at our *broederschapshuis* visits our church for the first time, finds the courage to stand up and testify: *'There is something here. I don't have the words for it yet, but it lives in my heart now.'*

In our situation, *that* is a testimony of faith. Because it is true: we don't have the words. Yet.

Our growth will not focus on numbers, but on being human-with-God. Our mission is our own finding of the Way. And in doing so, we try and live it out.

People notice. People ask questions. We try and answer them and we fail. And that is the beauty of it. That's what keeps the conversation, the learning process going.

We will grow in not knowing at all. And being hesitantly fine with that.

Thanks be to God.



Wieteke van der Molen is a pastor and spiritual director within the **Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit** (Dutch Mennonite church). She is co-director of **Dopersduin**, a Mennonite **Broederschapshuis** (fellowship house) and retreat centre in **Schoorl**, Netherlands.

Uruguay

A rich and satisfying life

by **Valentina Kunze**

In these last few years that I've been involved with Mennonite World Conference and particularly the Young AnaBaptists (or YABs) it has been awesome to connect with people from around the world and be enriched by their perspectives and ways of living their faith. This has opened my eyes and shown me Jesus in a way I hadn't seen him before.

Today I want to share with you a testimony of how I've seen God move in a special way.

In Uruguay, we have beautiful beaches, and most Uruguayans love to take time off during the summer to go to the beach.

This is a time to unplug and rest, but also a time to party for most of the young people. And in church it is also a great time to do something cool with our youth because the pressure to go partying is huge.

So, we organize summer camps – one for the teenagers and one for the young adults of our Mennonite conference. Every year, around 40 teens and almost 100 young adults attend our camps which happen at a campsite right next to the beach! (This is awesome, as we can go to the beach at least twice a day.)

This is now the second year that I've led these camps with a friend, and it's been a huge blessing.

Deep and nourishing chats

During the camp, I had several very deep and nourishing chats with some of the participants, which were often a great blessing to both of us.

One conversation in particular stood out for me. A girl came up to me one afternoon and asked if she could speak with me. I agreed and we sat in the grass in the shadow of one of the trees. She shared with me part of the story of her life and how she'd lately been very hesitant to accept Jesus as her Saviour because she didn't feel ready. After hearing the messages at the camp, talking to our guest speaker and some others she had concluded that the gospel is much simpler than she thought, and she wanted to make the step to accept Jesus into her life.

I had the huge privilege of helping her make that prayer! And around a month later I received an invitation to attend her baptism. It was such an honour to be a part of it.

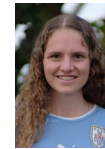
Another amazing experience was in our youth camp. On the first day the guest speaker conveyed the importance of sharing what we're going through with others. Through an interactive activity he showed that everyone is being challenged, that it's ok not to be ok, and to share this with others for support. This was super nourishing for everyone.

Sharing with others for support

In particular, I was amazed by how a small group of boys of around 13-14 years old immediately took action. All participants had to get up at 7:15 in the morning for morning sport. But from that day on till the end of camp, they got up at 6:00 a.m. They prepared their maté, talked about their challenges, and then discussed ways to build each other up and achieve their goals. Seeing the fruits of all the previous work is amazing because before the camps, the entire team felt opposition. I faced a lot of challenges, struggling again with things I thought I had already won. But thanks to Jesus who kept inviting us to see all that he was about to do!

I think a verse that reflects pretty well what we experienced during this time is John 10:10: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life" (NLT).

Through this challenging time, I was able to see a glimpse of the rich and satisfying life that God has prepared for our youth and young adults and also even for myself.



Valentina Kunze is the Young AnaBaptists (YABs) representative for Latin America. She is a member of Konferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Uruguay.

This article is adapted from the speech she presented at Renewal 2024, "Transformed, together we live Jesus" 6 April 2024 in Brazil.



Ebenezer Mondéz

Valentina Kunze, chair of the YABs committee, shares a testimony at Renewal 2024 in Curitiba, Brazil.



Irma Sulistyorini

Valentina Kunze and Felix Pérez Diener are the YABs Committee representatives for Latin America and North America.



Sam Abhinav

As GYS delegate for Uruguay, Valentina Kunze fellowships with other young people over a meal at the Assembly in Indonesia.

Colombia

The gospel without walls

by Pastor Eduardo and Lucy Bautista

Called and chosen for God's purpose on earth.

Where there is vision there is provision.

When the intention is to bring heaven to earth, it has God's full support.

Thirty-three years ago, we heard a call for evangelism and church growth.

We began to participate in the Mennonite congregation in our home town Anolaima. At that time the pastor Peter Stucky gave us the endorsement to participate in the leadership and direction of this community. In those days there was a decline in membership to the point of wanting to close.

In the municipality of Anolaima it was never easy to evangelize because of its cultural background. We began the tasks of evangelizing in places outside the temple (church building). We wanted to preach the gospel where the lost were.

So we decided to go to the schools to preach to the children and to the young people, providing them with biblical principles and values as tools.

We also organized family conferences with the sole purpose that they would know us as an open broad-minded alternative, developing a culture of the kingdom of God.

We created a school for businesspeople as a model of self-sustainability.

We worked in the parks recovering spaces as an example of service and living better.

In those days, we received a vision from God to create a park to evangelize from nature – where the heavens tell the glory of God and the firmament announces the work of his hands (Psalm 19).

So we dreamed of a park in the midst of nature recreating the Word to help in the meeting of needs and delivery of the good news of salvation.

Why a park?

We couldn't understand it but we began to dream without knowing, without money, but intent on it being God's dream. In a meeting of fifty people from the church and using

a clay vase as a symbol of our intention, we sowed a sunflower seed and gave birth to God's dream of building a park so as to create a kind of tourism involving conversion and transformation.

It took some time before we were able to invest in a property. We saved US\$ 30 000, bought and sold a 6 000 m² property for US\$ 45 000, and then acquired a 51 000 m² plot of land for that amount.

When the vision is from God, faith becomes the currency that buys without money, since the seller charged US\$ 75 000 and honoured us by sowing the remaining amount.

God is always faithful to provide for his own dreams when we make them our own.

We have had to learn to trust God: the work is God's; we only accompany him.

An encounter with God

"IgleParque" (church park) presents moments from the biblical narrative in a natural setting. We respect nature, making the most of its majestic colours, diversity of birds and animals to enrich the biblical panorama.

Over the year, we attend to some 2 000 to 3 000 visitors including young children, families and congregations who spread the news by word of mouth.

Our purpose is to encourage visitors in their faith and in each of their felt needs, whether emotional or physical; to bring direction, light to their paths, through the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

We transmit a message of peace, since this is our mission as Mennonites.

IgleParque is an open space in a natural environment where visitors take with them an "unlimited" experience with God, since this project's skies break the barrier that hinder their encounter with their Creator. Creativity is the primary instrument for a different evangelization, contemporary but with biblical elements.

For those who visit it, the park is a voice of hope because for any need there is a solution. There are 17 spaces to share biblical advice and interact with the good news of salvation.

IgleParque is a blessing not only for the visitors but for the city itself, since through it there has been blessing to hotels, restaurants and transportation. Due to its proximity to the capital city Bogotá (we are only 70 km away), it has been a meeting point for international visits. IgleParque has become a place to visit that opens a door for evangelism.

God has given us the strategy for an evangelization without limits. It is a two-hour tour that recreates faith, history and conviction for those of us who need God.

The park is at 60% of its construction, according to the vision, but the community is committed to finish what God faithfully began with us.

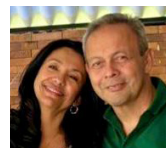
Passion drives the work

For more than 10 years, we have developed the IgleParque project step by step. It is a process with ups and downs, but we do not lose heart because God has given us his strength. We are learning to build by the power of the Word, faith and perseverance, making the impossible possible and the invisible visible.

In the process God has added people, one after another until we became a team and a family with the passion to turn a dream into a reality.

We have learned to build on the model of Jesus serving and managing divine, human and physical resources and transforming them with the creativity and blessing that God places in our hands.

We hope to be inspiration, motivation and testimony for the fulfillment of the Great Commission to go and make disciples of the nations from the perspective of a peacebuilding gospel (Matthew 28:19) but above all of faith in God and his Word.



Eduardo and Lucy Bautista are pastors in the community of leaders at Iglesia Menonita Anolaima, Colombia.

Faith & Life Commission

The unity of the Spirit

Anabaptist churches around the world live their faith diversely, addressing local challenges and opportunities while adhering to [Shared Convictions](#).

The [Faith & Life Commission](#) enables MWC member churches to receive and provide counsel on Christian faith and practice, as well as on Anabaptist witness in the world today. This Commission encourages MWC member churches to develop relationships of mutual accountability regarding the convictions they hold and in the lives they live – locally, internationally and cross-culturally.

“The Faith & Life Commission is one nerve centre among many by which we do not ‘build the *koinonia*’ but tend, nurture and maintain the unity the Spirit creates. We thus hope in our small way not to impede, but to speed the signals the life-giving Spirit is sending along to the various parts of the body, or mosaic, to mix metaphors,” says Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, Faith and Life Commission chair.

What does the Faith & Life Commission do?

Members of Faith & Life and some other MWC representatives have engaged in dialogue with World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). After years of planning, this process got underway in March 2023 in Canada.

Dialogue members have collaborated on a statement for the Zurich 2025 ecumenical worship service in Zurich, Switzerland. It will include remembering the past, lament for division and persecution, gratitude for steps toward reconciliation, desire to live in unity and commitment to common witness and engagement in justice and peace.

“In 2023 we launched the [dialogue report on Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church \(2020\)](#) and a [study guide](#) to the report by Tom Yoder Neufeld. We continue



Commission secretaries and chairs meet in Brazil in April 2024 (l-r): Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, James Krabill, Rafael Zaracho, Tigist Tesfaye, J Ron Byler, Andi Santoso, Andres Pacheco Lozano, Andrew Suderman.

to invite churches to engage with this report and send their response to it by November 2024,” says Anicka Fast, Faith and Life Commission secretary.

In the past year, Faith & Life has been sharing stories about entry into the global Anabaptist tradition and what the challenges are to unity in our various regions. These stories nurture initiatives to support member churches in living out unity in an increasingly polarized world.

In 2023, the [Global Anabaptist Education Networks \(GAEN\)](#) entered a relationship with the Faith & Life Commission, with two of its members becoming part of the Commission, pending General Council approval in 2025.

“Education networks are key to transmitting Faith & Life Commission resources to GAEN member schools, and supporting its goal of strengthening the church through Christ-centred faith formation,” says Anicka Fast.

Plans for the next year

Leading up to the commemoration of 500 years of Anabaptism in 2025, Faith & Life is envisioning some workshops for the General Council meetings in Germany in May 2025. The workshop materials will be made available to all churches after the meetings.

A major focus of the workshops will be on baptism, both because it’s the 500th anniversary of the first “believers baptism”

in Zurich, and because Faith & Life has been centrally involved in helping MWC member churches engage the materials coming out of the Trilateral Dialogue on baptism.

“Most importantly, we want to encourage our churches to take this as an opportunity to strengthen and deepen our understanding and practice of baptism, especially its relationship to grounding our discipleship,” says Thomas R Yoder Neufeld.

Other than baptism, two increasingly urgent topics will be on the Commission’s scope:

- **Unity in diversity** – continuing to work at helping our communion of churches deal with the real challenges of being one in the face of great diversity.
- **Creation care** – in the urgent pressure that the climate crisis brings, Faith & Life sees an urgency to extend beyond human relationships. Sustainable ways of living are an issue of faith and life.

“We are seeking ways to help our church family to engage with creation, as per God’s mandate for people to *work it and take care of it* in Genesis 2:15. We will be publishing a brief document on this topic this year,” says Anicka Fast.

“We have also been listening to Commission members emphasizing the importance of producing theological resources for the global church that respond to felt needs especially in the Global South. Within this are some passionate discussions about how to connect these theological resources with today’s youth and young adults. We hope to work at this in collaboration with GAEN and the Creation Care Task Force,” says Anicka Fast.

“In essence, we are helping churches to be faithful in discipleship and to learn to live with diversity. Since the church is God’s peacebuilding project, everything we do to assist the church to be more faithful is peacebuilding. In this way, Faith & Life lives the MWC tagline *Following Jesus, Living Out Unity, and Building Peace*,” says Thomas R Yoder Neufeld.

News

AMBS-MWC collaboration forms leaders for the global church

by Annette Brill Bergstresser

(l. to r.): AMBS Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism graduates Teferi Setena, Tariku Wondimu, Sisay Worku, Getachew Tegegne, Frew Tuke, Desta Debele and Girma Bossen ring their AMBS bells in celebration of completing their degrees. The AMBS graduates — all Meserete Kristos Seminary (MKS) alumni — were honored along with 94 undergraduate MKS graduates during MKS's Commencement Service on May 20, 2023.



Mercy MH Abiy

A collaboration formalized in 2020 between [Mennonite World Conference](#) (MWC) and [Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary](#) (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, is opening doors for people across the world to gain Anabaptist pastoral and leadership education.

Through existing programs and new initiatives, pastors and church leaders are taking both for-credit and noncredit AMBS courses in biblical and theological studies, ministry and church history in their home countries.

MWC General Secretary **César García**, PhD, described the collaboration as a response to a 2003 call for “sharing of gifts” among MWC member churches. AMBS is owned by [Mennonite Church Canada](#) and [Mennonite Church USA](#) — two of MWC’s 108 member churches.

Through AMBS’s connection with MWC, the seminary has been receiving a growing number of invitations from national church leaders to support the formation of Anabaptist leaders in their contexts. This has led to increased sharing of gifts as MWC member churches and other Anabaptist organizations have joined with AMBS in response. The seminary’s [Forming Leaders Together](#) campaign has been helping fund these collaborative efforts as well.

For example, in October 2023, **Andi Santoso** (MA 2022), Regional Director for Asia and the Middle East for Mennonite Mission Network (MMN); **Joe Sawatzky**,

PhD (MDiv 2005), AMBS Global Leadership Collaborative Project Specialist, also of MMN; and **David Boshart**, PhD, AMBS President, were invited to teach a three-day course on leadership for about 30 students from five Anabaptist conferences in India. Each conference sent two women, two men and at least one youth to be trained to teach the material in their area going forward.

“We tested the materials with the leaders in advance and then revised them for contextual relevance, providing spaces in the curriculum for trainers to include case material from their local context,” Boshart said. “This material now belongs to these churches to use and adapt in ways that are most helpful in their settings.”

A partnership formalized in 2019 between AMBS and Meserete Kristos Seminary (MKS: Ethiopian Mennonite Seminary) in Bishoftu/Debre Zeit, Ethiopia, also has been strengthened through AMBS’s relationship with MWC. Together, MKS and AMBS leaders created a customized version of AMBS’s **Master of Arts: Theology and Global Anabaptism** to educate leaders for the Meserete Kristos Church. The students take a combination of semester-long online courses and short-term intensive courses adapted for the Ethiopian context and taught in person at MKS by AMBS professors. The program has 29 students; the first seven students graduated in 2023.

“Engaging with churches and emerging leaders in context strengthens our Teaching Faculty members because they are gaining broader exposure and appreciation for the global Anabaptist community, especially in the Global South,” David Boshart noted.



Annette Brill Bergstresser is Communications manager at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), a learning community located in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, on ancestral land of the Potawatomi and Miami peoples. AMBS offers theological education for learners both on campus and at a distance and a wide array of lifelong learning programs — all with the goal of educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God’s reconciling mission in the world. ambs.edu



Save the date!

Renewal 2025

The courage to love: Anabaptism@500

Celebrating 500 years of Anabaptism

Thursday, 29 May 2025

Zurich, Switzerland

Workshops, musical performances and a panel discussion culminating in an ecumenical worship service.

Online prayer hour

“Prayer has been our spinning wheel,” says Okoth Simon Onyango, leader of the Mennonite church in Uganda. “Thanks to the global church for the resilience in your prayers. It is encouraging to know that someone somewhere in the globe is reporting your issues to God.”

You are invited to join the Deacons Commission and regional representatives on a Zoom prayer call.

“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,” says Tigist Tesfaye, secretary of the Deacons Commission.

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

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



Next events: 14:00 UTC

- Friday, 20 September 2024
- Friday, 15 November 2024
- Friday, 17 January 2025

Feast at a buffet of music

Five vocal ensembles display God’s love in the diversity of culture through music in 10 concerts at 500 anniversary event in Zurich

“Dalam Yesus...” For many Assembly participants, the multilingual, multicultural music of plenary worship sessions is one of the most memorable parts of this global family encounter. Rashard Allen wants to expand on that at “The Courage to Love: Anabaptism@500” in Zurich, 29 May 2025. The Mennonite World Conference event commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptist movement.

The director of music and worship at Neffsville Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania, USA, has gathered one ensemble from each of the five MWC regions for the day.

“We want to represent all that Anabaptism is now and what will it look like in the future: 70 percent of Anabaptists are in the Global South. Anabaptism is very diverse,” he says.

“Music is a huge part of expressing our diversity. Although we all speak different languages, music is a language all of us can relate to. And so, it gives us a window into a culture.

“We can espouse Anabaptist theology and values, but music represents our diversity culturally,” Rashard Allen says. “The group from Latin America will sound different from the group from Africa. The way they express Anabaptism is contextualized through their music.”

Consulting with MWC’s regional representatives and his own musical contacts around the world, Rashard Allen booked five ensembles:

- Africa: Eastleigh Fellowship Church (EFC) choir (Kenya)
- Asia: GKMI Anugerah worship band (Indonesia)
- Europe: Songs of Peace (Switzerland)
- Latin America: Agape Band (Paraguay)
- North America: Eastern Mennonite University Chamber Singers (USA)

In line with event’s theme, “The Courage to Love,” each of the ensembles is committed to the work of reconciliation, says Rashard Allen. “They have a global ecumenical outlook in terms of how they

understand their role in being an Anabaptist choir/ensemble.”

Each group will present two concerts and participate in the mass worship gathering at the close of the day. Indoor concerts at the Predigerkirche will be 45 minutes long. The ensembles will also give a 30-minute outdoor concert. Due to local bylaws about amplification, the outdoor concerts will have a modified instrumentation style.

“Each experience will be unique because the groups do things in different ways,” says Rashard Allen.

There’s going to be a lot going on: workshops, a walking tour, a panel discussion and the choirs.

“My hope is that other people will see the ensembles as a centrepiece of the event and take in as much as they can,” he says.

“Treat it like a buffet: see one outdoor concert and one indoor concert. I would encourage people to watch a group that is not from their home continent. Allow yourself to experience something new. Each experience will be unique.”

“I believe each person and each culture gives us a window into an aspect of who God is. I hope people will look for that in the music.”

“I’m looking forward to worship once again with such a diversity in music, so many different expressions of love for God and God’s love,” says Rashard Allen, who was part of the international ensemble for Assembly 17.

“You will get a sense of where the Anabaptist church is now and where it has been. I’m really excited to be a part of it.”



The international ensemble at Assembly 17 in Indonesia.

News

Executive Committee approves theological education and creation care grants

Funding for theological education and carbon tax small grants was passed at the annual meeting of Mennonite World Conference's Executive Committee meeting, 8-11 April 2024 in Curitiba, Brazil.

Two new funds

For many years, MWC member churches have called for more opportunities for Anabaptist-rooted theological training. "Now that the majority of our Anabaptist membership is in the Global South, we have a huge need to do theology, forming an Anabaptist identity in each context. We need to develop strong Anabaptist identities, focused on the centrality of Christ," said César García, MWC general secretary.

The Theological Education Fund will offer scholarships for theological training for pastors and other church leaders in places where Anabaptist theological education is difficult to find, specifically in the Global South. "We hope this will help leadership in our global communion more closely reflect the vision of Revelation 7 of a great multitude from every nation and people and language," said César García.

The Executive Committee also approved the creation of Carbon Tax Small Grant Fund. Since 2010, MWC has set aside a carbon tax surcharge on all organizational air travel. The funds collected over the years will now be available to national member churches in the Global South to implement creation care projects with direct relevance to reducing carbon emissions.

"The intent of the surcharge is to 1) acknowledge the impact of air travel in a concrete way, 2) publicly demonstrate MWC's commitment to taking care of God's creation," says Doug Graber Neufeld, Creation Care Task Force chair, who joined the meetings in Brazil via Zoom. "We're pleased to offer a way to use the funds for an activity that in some way offsets the impact of flying."

Strengthening networks, expanding membership

Over the last decade, MWC Executive Committee approved the placement of several emerging networks in MWC: Global Anabaptist Education Networks (GAEN), Global Anabaptist Health Network (GAHN),

and Global Anabaptist Peace Network (GAPN). At these meetings, they approved a revised Terms of Reference (TOR) that explains how the networks interact with Commissions. The new TOR includes a different fee structure and provides greater clarity on the composition and organizational structure of the Networks.

The revised TOR will also apply to existing networks Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) and the Global Anabaptist Service Network (GASN), part of the Mission Commission. The revised TOR will be considered by the General Council in 2025 before implementation.

The Executive Committee also affirmed a proposal for constitutional change that will make room for Young Anabaptist (YABs) delegates to become members of the General Council, which will be tabled at next year's General Council meeting. Saskia Horsch of Germany was confirmed as YABs representative for Europe as Gaëlle Oesch stepped down in 2023.

Two new membership applications were also accepted: the Association of Christian Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ukraine (AMBCU) and Kanisa La Mennonite La Kiinjili Tanzania (KMKT – Evangelical Church of Tanzania). This brings MWC's worldwide membership to 110 member churches in more than 10,000 congregations in 60 countries, with over 1.5 million baptized members.

Ecumenical relations

In preparation for the 500th anniversary commemoration events, the Executive Committee approved a joint statement with the World Communion of Reformed Churches. An international team of five theologians from each communion drafted "a common statement of confession, gratitude and commitment" to be presented at the event 29 May 2025.

The Executive Committee approved the 2023 financial report and 2024 budget. It also considered proposals with the potential to redefine aspects of membership in MWC.

In addition to decision-making sessions, the Executive Committee also had equipping sessions. Faith and Life Commission chair Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld gave three sessions on the new tagline: following Jesus, living out unity, building peace. Conflict, change and leadership consultant Betty Pries of Canada facilitated strategic planning for 2025-2031.



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Photo:
Irma Sulistyorini

Add your fragment to the MWC mosaic!

We invite you to **join the MWC movement!** Stand in solidarity with Anabaptist sisters-and-brothers from Argentina to Zimbabwe. When we work together, we learn from each other while blessing the world.

You can make a difference through **investing your financial gifts** in the worldwide mission of Mennonite World Conference as together we form a beautiful mosaic as a global Anabaptist family of faith. Like all mosaic, our beauty comes from every piece that forms part of the whole.

When you contribute, you form part of this diverse image:

- resource and strengthen Anabaptist leaders around the world
- encourage congregations to live out Anabaptist faith
- nurture a thriving global communion through MWC gatherings in person and online
- equip MWC's commissions, networks, YABs (young adults) to serve the church

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

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Photo: Irma Sulistyorini

Continuous movement and a contrite heart

“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.” Romans 12:2 (NRSVUE).

Renewal is the name that Mennonite World Conference has given to a decade of regional events around the memory of the five centuries of our existence as a community of faith.

We are approaching these 10 years of commemorations by focusing on our history from a global, ecumenical and transcultural perspective.

These words from the apostle Paul help us to remember the past and look toward the future.

We express gratitude to God for inheritance of the faith we have received.

But we also come before the Lord in a spirit of repentance and renewal, committed to learning from the past to grow in our relationship with God both here and now and in the years to come.

Transformation

We explore how our Anabaptist tradition has understood discipleship as an ongoing process of transformation.

First: transformation is a journey where we leave things behind and take other new things along the way.

It implies continuous movement. We constantly abandon a place and move forward. We move against the religious spirit that affirms absolute certainty of doctrines, dogmas and ethics, we affirm the need to renew our minds, therefore being open to challenging beliefs and ethics as our spiritual ancestors did in the 16th century.

Second: transformation in the Bible is never an individualistic experience.

It is always communal. We do it together because it requires dialogue and interdependency. Our community’s diversity of positions allows us to correct the direction we are taking in the transformation process.

Focussed on Jesus

Our brothers and sisters help us discover those things we need to change, leave or incorporate to become like Jesus.

And that takes us to the third biblical comment or component of transformation: the person of Jesus.

Not all change is valid.

As followers of Jesus, we cannot support transformation in any direction. To be faithful disciples, changes in our beliefs and ethics must be made to make us similar to the character and person of Jesus.

As Paul says, “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Transformation in unity is a challenge historically faced in the Anabaptist world. Too often renewal movements have faced rejection which has produced divisions. Transformation has not always been toward Jesus’ character.

So today we need to recover the vision of Mennonite World Conference:

We want to be a global church where we follow Jesus, live out unity and build peace

We are a body of more than 10,000 local congregations in distributed in 110* national churches distributed around the world, with more than 1.5 million baptized believers.

We need each other to be transformed to the image of Jesus.

As we thank God for opportunities to be transformed, let us also maintain an attitude of repentance for our divisions.

Let us ask for forgiveness for our hesitance to change.

Let us repent from our pride and the attitude of judging the transformation process of others instead of participating in it with love and patience.

Let’s seek the renewal from a contrite heart that recognizes its need for continuous transformation.

May we be transformed together into Jesus’ image.

César García is general secretary of Mennonite World Conference. Originally from Colombia, he lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

**Number of MWC member churches after Executive Committee meetings in Brazil, April 2024.*