

# Courier Correo Courier

October 2018  
Volume 33, Number 2



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

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Mundial Menonita**  
Una Comunidad de  
Iglesias Anabautistas

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Mennonite Mondiale**  
Une Communauté  
d'Églises Anabaptistes

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## A word from the editor



### A Spiritual frame

People of the book. Followers of Jesus. These are the ways Anabaptists are sometimes described. But moved by the Holy Spirit? At times, Anabaptists have believed that was for other denominations.

The work of the Holy Spirit has animated the church from its earliest days, Elisabeth Kunjam writes in her feature article ([page 3–5](#)). The Anabaptist reformers were no exception in seeing the Holy Spirit as an integral part of the renewal they experienced, and the power to follow the call to discipleship and peace witness, as Alfred Neufeld writes ([page 6–7](#)).

“The Holy Spirit transforming us” was the theme for the Renewal 2027 event in Kenya in 2018. (Renewal 2027 is series of events organized by Mennonite World Conference to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism.) David Shenk recounts how the church grew there through the remarkable move of the Spirit in the East Africa revival ([page 14–15](#)).

The Perspective articles in this issue derive largely from the testimonies shared at that event. In accordance with the Shared Convictions of MWC, these Anabaptist-Mennonites reflect on the ways they see the Holy Spirit’s transforming power in their lives personally or their communities collectively.

“We seek to walk in his name by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we confidently await Christ’s return and the final fulfillment of God’s kingdom,” declares the Shared Convictions.

Today, some Mennonites may be hesitant to talk about the third Person of the Trinity.

Yet we agree together in the Shared Convictions that the Holy Spirit is active among us: one of the ways we experience God (#1), the way we hear God’s voice calling us to turn from sin and follow Christ (#3), our guide to interpreting Scripture together in community (#4), and the force that empowers us to be peacemakers (#5).

“We need to remember that the Holy Spirit is a permanent gift to the church until our Saviour returns,” writes Rafael Zaracho in the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Shelf of Literature selection *Life in the Spirit*, by John Driver. This gift was not just for one people or time in history.

“The spirituality that characterized the Anabaptist movement depended on the powerful intervention of the Spirit of the risen Christ,” Driver writes. “What distinguished the Anabaptists most from other traditions was undoubtedly their practices and understanding of the church – for them, participation in the Christian community was absolutely essential.”

United around Jesus as the centre of our faith and community as the centre of our life, we welcome the Holy Spirit as unifier and inspiration in our work for peace.

In this issue of *Courier*, you will also find a report on the General Council meetings in Kenya this past April ([page 13–14](#)), announcements about Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature books newly translated into other languages (including *Life in the Spirit*) ([page 19](#)), an introduction to the new but quickly growing church in Uganda ([page 15](#)), and dates for Assembly in Indonesia in 2021, and the Renewal 2027 event in Costa Rica in 2019 ([page 18](#)).

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

### Cover Photo:

**International guests from around the world worship together and share stories at “Holy Spirit Transforming Us / Roho Mtakatifu Hutubadilisha Maisha” (Swahili), Renewal 2027, at Nyamasaria Primary School in Kisumu, Kenya.**

Photo: Len Rempel

## Courier/Correo/Courrier



### Volume 33, Number 2

*Courier/Correo/Courrier* is a publication of Mennonite World Conference. It is published twice a year, containing inspirational essays, study and teaching documents and feature-length articles. Each edition is published in English, Spanish and French.

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*Courier/Correo/Courrier* is available on request. Send all correspondence to:  
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Email: [info@mw-cmm.org](mailto:info@mw-cmm.org)  
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Twitter: @mw-cmm  
Instagram: @mw-cmm

*Courier/Correo/Courrier* (ISSN 1041-4436) is published twice a year. See <https://www.mw-cmm.org/article/courier> for publication schedule history.

Mennonite World Conference, Calle 28A No. 16-41  
Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia. T: (57) 1 287 5738.  
Publication Office: Courier, 50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206,  
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1 Canada. T: (519) 571-0060.

Publications mail agreement number: 43113014  
Printed in Canada at Derksen Printers using vegetable-based inks on paper from a responsible sustainable forest program.

# A rush of violent wind

## Three reasons the Holy Spirit is relevant to the church today



by Elisabeth Kunjam

**F**ifty days after Passover, the Jewish community gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Weeks. At the same time, the followers of Jesus gathered in a room awaiting the promise of the Holy Spirit.

As they were waiting, “suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting... All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages” (Acts 2:2,4). Jesus’ followers miraculously start to speak languages they hadn’t known before.

Soon, the news of the followers speaking in different languages spreads throughout Jerusalem. People are bewildered, amazed or skeptical.

Then Peter – the same Peter who 50 days earlier had denied any associations with Jesus – stands and preaches his first sermon. Now, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, Peter stands in front of thousands who had crucified Jesus. The crowd that could not stand Jesus 50 days ago now attentively listens to a sermon in defence of Jesus.

Reportedly, 3 000 people believed in Jesus and were added to the church that day.

**Eastleigh Mennonite Choir of Nairobi, Kenya – denied visas to travel to the USA to perform at Assembly 16, PA 2015 – sings for the MWC audience in Kisumu Kenya.**

Photo: Wilhelm Unger

Peter interprets the events of that morning in light of a prophecy of the prophet Joel.

In Joel 2:28–29, God promised to pour out God’s Spirit on all flesh. God promised to empower *all* people to exercise divine power. And this prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. That is how the day of Pentecost became the day of the birth of the church.



**Worship singing at Renewal 2027.**

Photo: Len Rempel



**Preaching at Renewal 2027: Alfred Neufeld (r) with Swahili translator Caren Okello.**

Photo: Len Rempel



**Fellowshipping over food at Renewal 2027.**

Photo: @realfoto\_Kenya



**Participating in Renewal 2027.**

Photo: Len Rempel

Two millennia later, why does it matter to us that the first Christians were filled with the Holy Spirit? What could the church learn from the events of Pentecost?

**1. The Holy Spirit continues to empower the church**

In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised his disciples the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to witness. Before Pentecost, disciples are scared and direction-less. After, they boldly present themselves as followers of Jesus.

The empowerment they received did not end with the day. They do powerful acts of healing, raising the dead, and witnessing in the Sanhedrin. They live with boldness, most to the point of execution.

The Holy Spirit continues to empower the church today. Christian institutions work to tackle major issues such as human trafficking, displacement, poverty and hunger, violence and war.

Individual members of the church risk their lives to live out their faith.

Greta Lindecrantz from Colorado, USA, chose jail over supporting death penalty.

Sang-Min Lee from South Korea refused to complete the government’s mandatory military service and spent 15 months in prison as a conscientious objector.

Mennonite youth from Colombia have refused to join the armed groups because they believe “it is incompatible with the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ.”

In India, believers follow Christ in the midst of growing religious intolerance and persecution.

This is possible only due to the power of the Holy Spirit.

**2. The church is diverse and inclusive in nature**

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled the gathered believers to “declare the wonders of God” in languages they had not spoken before. This miracle symbolically reinforced the diverse nature of the church: multilingual, multiracial and multicultural.

From there onward, instead of a homogenous group of Galileans, the church became a community of people of *all* nations, drawn together by love for Christ.

In his sermon, Peter quotes the prophet Joel to interpret the events of that morning:

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days, I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

The day of Pentecost was a historic event because God fulfilled the prophecy given hundreds of years ago.

In the days of the Old Testament, the Spirit was almost always poured out *only* on prophets, priests and kings. This changed with the day of Pentecost. *All* believers were empowered by the Holy Spirit regardless of their age, gender and economic status.

The church became a place where all people – young and old, men and women – mattered. And everyone received the power to contribute to the life and mission of the church.



**Renewal 2027: an international celebration of worship and remembrance.**

Photo: Len Rempel

### **3. The church displays a foretaste of the kingdom of God**

Acts 2:42–47 shows what the kingdom of God looks like on earth.

The first church lives together in one accord. They fellowship with each other; they devote themselves to the teachings of the apostles. They pray and break bread together. They sell their property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. The Lord blesses them by adding “to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

Characteristics of the kingdom were present in the first church. There was unity in midst of diversity; there was satisfaction – a desire to fellowship and learn instead of dividing and dominating; There was sharing and caring for each other with glad and sincere hearts, with no place for greed; and a desire to praise God.

The first church is a template for us to follow. It is a model for us to examine how the characteristics of the kingdom are present among us.

### **The table before us**

John Driver, in his book, *Life together in the Spirit*, gives us a beautiful picture of a “table of fraternal communion.”

Through MWC, a table of fraternal communion is set before us. At this table are people from around the world, sharing stories of the work of Holy Spirit – empowering the church; declaring the wonders of God; and uniting and including us in the body of Christ.

As we partake of these stories, may we be inspired to have faith in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and submit ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us.

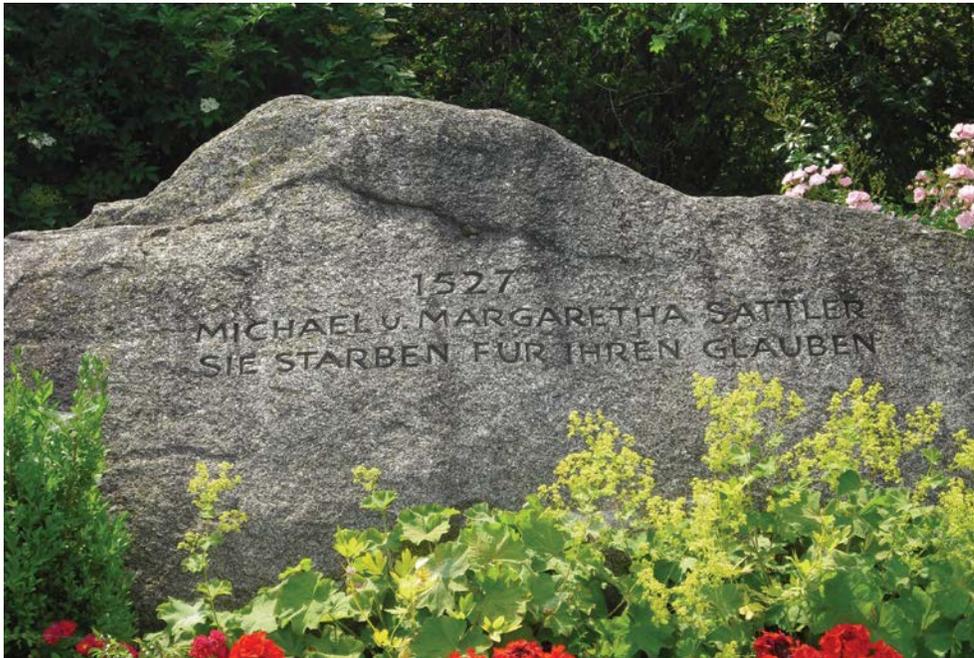
The problems glaring at our generation call for an active intervention by the church. It is not possible to tackle these problems by mere human efforts. The Holy Spirit’s empowerment and a spirit of oneness within the Global Anabaptist Family is needed for the church to raise up a standard that bears a witness to the world; that bears the values of the kingdom.



**Elisabeth Kunjam is a member of the Mennonite Brethren church in India. She served on the Deacons Commission (2015–2018).**

**She spoke at Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us – in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018. This paper been adapted from her presentation.**

# The gift of the Holy Spirit in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and today



A memorial stone in Switzerland for early Anabaptists Michael and Margaretha Sattler.

Photo: Gregor Helms, Wikimedia Commons



Woodcut of early Anabaptist influence Melchior Hoffman.

by Alfred Neufeld

**M**any written testimonies of the early Anabaptist movement point toward the work of the Holy Spirit as the central driving force. The Holy Spirit goes to people who are awaiting. It was the case in Pentecost (Acts 2) while the disciples were praying; it was the case in Reformation times; and it is the case today.

## The Holy Spirit from the time of the apostles to Luther

Anabaptists and Protestants in general have to be careful in remembering that the Christian church did not start with them. There had been 1 500 previous years with many manifestations and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Let us remember the early Christian martyrs, who by the strength of the Spirit

were willing to give their lives and be faithful through torture unto death. There are the many mystics who in monasteries, deserts, caves and often in important church leadership positions who sought to be filled with the Holy Spirit and acted by the Spirit's power and wisdom. And then there are the missionaries who brought the gospel to Europe, Russia, India and North Africa, evidencing that God's Spirit is a sending one, eager to cross all cultural barriers.

## The Holy Spirit in Reformation times

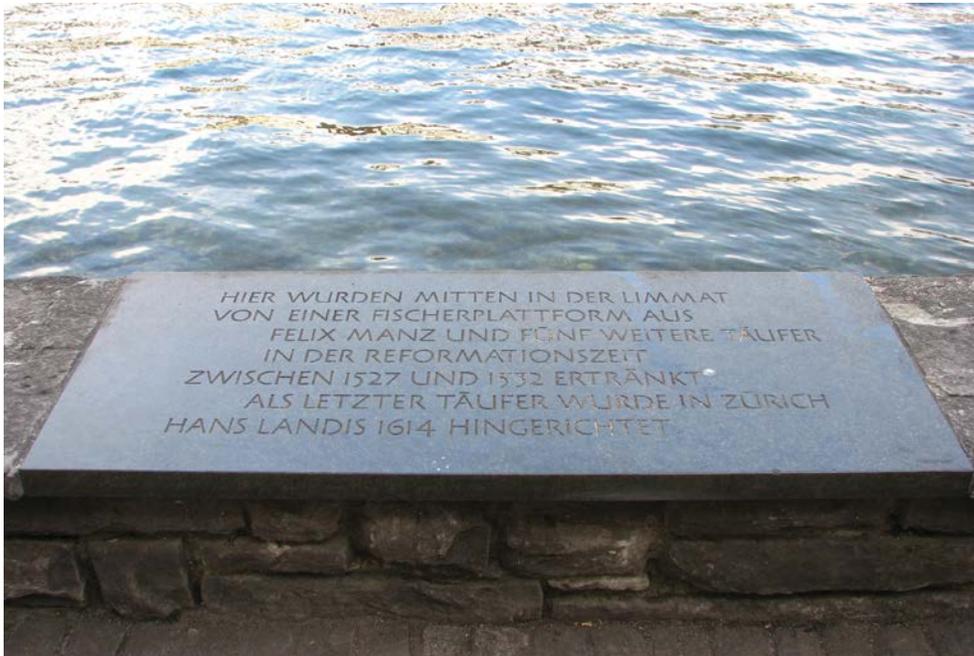
Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin all pointed toward God's Spirit when they rediscovered and redefined the biblical gospel of grace. Not only a deep experience of spiritual peace and comfort, but also a very strong sense of "freedom from religion" and "freedom from social oppression" came with it. Thomas Müntzer, although tragically

misled at the end, applied the work of the Holy Spirit to the questions of social justice and the rights of the poor and marginalized. Melchior Hoffman related with a very special spiritual sensitivity the outpouring of the Spirit to the coming New Jerusalem.

## The Holy Spirit and the Anabaptist dissent in Zurich 1525

The group of young scholars around Zwingli related in a very early stage the authority of Scripture to a church practice under the guidance and leadership of the Spirit. In the October debates of 1523, they challenged Zwingli to subordinate the decision of the city council to the authority of the Spirit. Conrad Grebel put it this way: "The Spirit of God has made a decision already."

In the night of 21 January 1525, "15 brethren were gathered in prayer in the house of Felix Manz after the mandate of



**A memorial stone to Anabaptist martyrs drowned in the Limmat River in Switzerland.**

Photo: Roland zh, Wikimedia Commons

the Zurich council forbade the future propagation of their faith. We are told that they rose from prayer and, moved by the Spirit, George Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him on the confession of his faith...”

Very soon the Anabaptists again got caught in a different problem: Does Swiss nationalism or European security stand above God’s mandate toward nonviolence and love of enemies? The Anabaptist believers in Switzerland exhorted Thomas Müntzer and those joining the Peasants’ Revolt not to take the sword, but to trust in the intervention of God’s Spirit.

And when Michael Sattler wrote the Schleitheim Confession, the congregation made it clear that Christians renounce the physical sword by taking the “sword of the Spirit.” At his death trial, Michael stated that he preferred to be killed by a Muslim to being part of a “Christian army” that kills them.

So, the peace witness and the power of the Spirit are very closely linked in the Anabaptist tradition.

#### **The Holy Spirit in our day**

When Mennonites and Pentecostals met in Pasadena 2006 to celebrate 100 years of the Azusa Street Revival, they realized that renewal movement and the Anabaptist one have a considerable number of things in common, including missions, nonviolence, the doctrine of the new spiritual birth and Spirit baptism.

#### **Conclusion**

In my opinion the Anabaptist movement recovered three crucial dimensions on the theology and practice of the Holy Spirit:

- The Spirit leads to truth and a new life in Christ.

- The Spirit gives strength in weakness and persecution.
- The Spirit breaks down barriers (cultural, social, national) and moves toward mission.

Paul sums up this experience in 2 Timothy 1:7–8: “For God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but of power, and of love, and of discipline. Be not ashamed, therefore, of the testimony of our Lord.”



**Alfred Neufeld was chair of the Faith and Life Commission (2009–2018). He recently served as rector of Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay in Asunción, Paraguay. He is a member of Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden Paraguays (Mennonite Brethren).**

**He spoke at Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us – in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018. This paper been adapted from his presentation.**

# Perspectives

**At Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018, several people shared a testimony of one experience of the Spirit’s work changing people in the church. Several of the columns in this section have been adapted from their presentations. Additional testimonies also tell of the work of the Holy Spirit transforming lives.**

## Switzerland

# A transformed spirit of listening

by Jürg Bräker

It was time to come together for a church community day and celebrate – but celebrate what? God’s faithfulness in the past in our long history despite the threat of decline in the present days? Our rich heritage still present in the churches today?

For the last 15 years, there had been no such gatherings in the Swiss Mennonite churches. The preparations for this one took two years.

We dedicated much time to find a theme to focus of our celebration.

- Someone thought that as we gather together, all the distinct identities of our 14 churches should become visible, a landscape of profiles displaying the richness of the gospel of Christ incarnate in many forms of church communities, each quite different one from the other.
- Someone else suggested that we model the letters to the seven churches in John’s revelation. Churches would be invited to write a letter imagining what God would say about their church **today**: dangers, their strengths and weaknesses.
- Someone else said that our churches need encouragement to step into renewal, to cast a vision for the future that would guide us in the years to come.

We listened to each other. We took home what was discussed, prayed it through, discussed it in other groups.

When we came together again, the idea of writing a letter stuck with us. But we had concerns about taking the letters in Revelation as a model. Who can speak from God’s perspective? This might encourage us to judge one another.

Following the threads of what was in our hearts for our churches, we finally decided that we would indeed invite the churches to write a letter to all the other churches in our denomination.

But it should be a letter about hopes. Imagining 10 years into the future, they



**Representatives from each church of the Swiss Mennonite conference – one adult and one child – stand beside their letter of hopes for the future.** Photo: courtesy Jürg Bräker

would look back on the time that now lies ahead. They would describe how God led them, what paths they travelled, what changes they went through.

We invited them to write down their dreams for the future growth of their churches.

Would the churches respond? Would they show themselves so vulnerable before the others? We were not sure whether they were ready to do this work.

We took the risk.

The theme of the day would be “Morning Air.” Through the letters, we hoped to take in a fresh breath, an aroma of the future that God had laid on our hearts.

The morning-wind of the coming kingdom of God was already present as a scent in our dreams.

The response was amazing.

- Some churches asked if they could write two letters because they were about to found a new church.
- Many churches gathered to discuss how they saw the 10 years ahead of them.
- Most churches wrote a bold story, full of courage. They knew the challenges lying ahead. But they saw these coming changes as a birth of something new they were looking forward to.

This was a **first transformation** by the Spirit. We followed a scent already in the air. The faithful God weaving our future came to meet us in the present.

For our community day, we printed out all the letters on banners. With great curiosity, people from all churches

gathered to read what others had written.

This day became the churches’ pledge to each other: We will pray for you, that God will fulfill what he has laid on your hearts, even if it is very different from what we imagine for our own future.

This was a **second transformation**. We recognized and affirmed that God is incarnating his gospel in many ways that complement each other.

At the end of the day, I asked the congregations to come forward with the panel displaying their letter. As the banners moved through the room, I suddenly saw that they were like sails, ready to catch the wind of God.

In the two years since, we have seen some of these dreams come to be realized.

As a conference, we are discovering common hopes that unite us. Some differences may create tensions that threaten our unity and need to be discussed. But the openness and sincere prayers of these letters ignite a renewed love for each other so that we can approach difficult questions that otherwise might break our unity.

Through a process of listening to each other, what God has laid on each heart, both on the level of local churches and conference leadership, we experienced **God’s Spirit transforming us**.



**Jürg Bräker is a member of the Deacons Commission. He is general secretary of Konferenz der Mennoniten der Schweiz (Alttäufer)/Conférence Mennonite Suisse (Anabaptiste), the Anabaptist church in Switzerland.**

**He spoke at Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us – in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018. This paper been adapted from his presentation.**

## Zimbabwe

# A transformed spirit of answered prayer

by Barbara Nkala

**T**he Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). That is what my church, Brethren In Christ (BICC) in Zimbabwe teaches. We cannot see the Holy Spirit with our eyes, but we see God in action through his Spirit, and the outcome is always astounding and awe-inspiring.

When I was a little girl, we were taught about God the Father, and Jesus, the great friend of children, and our Saviour. The Holy Spirit was hardly mentioned, although we sang songs that espoused the power of this comforter and teacher.

We went to church to worship God with other believers through prayer, Bible study/Sunday school, hymns (praise and worship), offering and the sermon.

For many years, our churches taught the Bible well, but our actions in worship, though proper in form, did not match the ethics, particularly in giving of tithes and offering as well as any other giving.

Then came teachings about the person of the Holy Spirit. I began to witness attitudes changing.

When a church allows the Holy Spirit's transforming power, we see the fruits of love, joy, peace, kindness, longsuffering, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

Prayer time has become a time of truly communing with God.

During praise and worship, the team is genuinely worshipping God, able to lead the rest of the congregants into the presence of God. The lyrics of the hymns take on new meaning.

Giving is improving. Worshipers are no longer giving tithes and offerings because of obedience of the law; but out of love, joy and grateful hearts. Giving generously as did the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8 does not come easy with most people, but we keep witnessing transformation that we can only put to the work of the Holy Spirit.

One example of the Holy Spirit at work happened in 2011, during the BICC women's conference at Mtshabezi Mission.

On the last day of the conference, evangelist Silibaziso Nhliziyo based her message on Genesis 9:17-26. This beloved woman of deep faith challenged the church to care for our spiritual parents, our pastors and leaders who are exposed by lack and want.

She came closer home: "Mam Bishop Ndlovu visits the sick and bereaved and



**Suzen Ngulube with the vehicle the BICC Women bought for the bishop's wife in 2011. It still is functioning well.**

Photo: Barbara Nkala

does a lot of church errands on foot, or by commuter taxis. Yet we live in comfort and drive good cars. Is that right? Today, we are going to give, so that our Mam Bishop can buy a car. Give, women: sow a seed to ease Mam Bishop's life as she serves God.

"We are going to give \$5,000 to buy the vehicle. What you do for her, you are doing for God."

That seemed like a tall order for many who usually gave the barest minimum.

Surprise of surprises, women brought forward pledges that surpassed the amount stated. We all agreed the Holy Spirit was at work. To date, the 10-seater vehicle we purchased is used by the Bishop's wife and other church ladies as they go about the business of women's ministry.

Silibaziso continued: "I feel in my spirit that there are women who are having a problem conceiving. Your hearts are crying for children. Some of you are giving up. Never give up on God!"

Many women flocked to the front for prayers.

Six years later, during the annual BICC women's conference, Lovewyn Mhlanga, a gifted teacher and conference speaker, married to a minister of the gospel at BICC Lobengula in Bulawayo, gave a personal testimony.

"I met with my Jesus in a special way at Mtshabezi [the 2011 women's conference]," she said.

"I was reluctant to go forward. I had had

four miscarriages. Many prayers had been prayed for me before, but my hope had been dashed many times.

"I reluctantly found myself walking to the front, tears rolling down my face. God touched me as prayers were said.

"Soon after, I had a pregnancy that I nursed with joy and anxiety wrapped in one. After nine months, I went into hospital for a Caesarean-section birth. I heard my baby cry while I was still in theatre and I said, 'God, you are so good! You are faithful. You are Jehovah and you deserve all the worship!'

"As you sit here, there are things you believe God for. Believe that God will bring a breakthrough in your life," said Mhlanga. "I had my baby girl, Princess. I prayed for another baby, and God gave me a son, Prince Joshua."

Is the Holy Spirit in our midst transforming lives and situations? Yes, the Spirit is! The same Holy Spirit who brought missionaries who gave us the gospel that came with schools and hospitals is the same Spirit at work today, building the kingdom of God.



**Barbara Nkala is MWC regional representative for Southern Africa. She is a member of the BIC church in Zimbabwe.**

**She spoke at Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us – in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018. This paper been adapted from her presentation.**

## Colombia

# A transformed spirit of courage

by Oscar Suárez

I remember the moment when my family arrived at the Mennonite church in Ibagué for the first time. Two brothers received us with a big hug as if they already knew us. Being greeted as though we were part of the family made us feel comfortable. So we went again the next Sunday, and the next.

Over the past 12 years, my family gradually became involved in the kitchen, as Sunday school teachers, in other ministries and even in leadership of the church.

This all happened because God sent a very special person to help us know the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

My parents were about to separate. Every night, there were loud arguments. My mother was thinking of leaving the family to live somewhere else, but after a few weeks, my father found his courage and took action to restore the marriage.

At this painful time of family crisis, this Holy-Spirit-sent person invited us to church.

I clearly remember the Saturday night my father sent us to bed early because we would go to church the next day. “You are going to a church?!” I laughed.

My father lowered his head and repeated the command.

### A place of acceptance

At church, I learned many things.

In Sunday school, they taught that we are all equally valued. “You are as important as the adults who are preaching.” This resonated a lot with me. In school, I felt rejected, maybe because of my low self-esteem. As a child of 11, hearing that I had the same value as others reinforced my decision to remain in the church.

Before attending church, I had dreamed of being in the air force. In Colombia, military service is mandatory for all young people when they reach the age of 18. I talked with my friends at school about our “duty” as citizens. But the more I knew Jesus, the more the Holy Spirit transformed those dreams.



**Oscar Suárez (l) helps band member Mussie Fisseha Kidane (r) sing a Spanish song at Renewal 2027.**

Photo: @realfoto\_Kenya

So, when I heard about Conscientious Objection to compulsory military service for the first time at age 14, I was very moved by the position of the church on issues of violence and conflict.

Thanks to the work of Justapaz, I began to think more about conscientious objection. (Justapaz is an organization of the Mennonite church in Colombia that works on following Jesus Christ for a peaceful society with nonviolent actions).

Though it is not easy to be a conscientious objector, the support of my congregation strengthened my resolve. This challenge has brought my family, my church and the community together.

### A place for leadership

The church has also given me the opportunity to participate in seminars on leadership, conscientious objection and Anabaptism.

The Holy Spirit has transformed my way of thinking as I volunteered in a project in Combeima, a very needy neighbourhood.

First, I went to help with the music before the Bible study. A year later, we had the idea of creating a music school so that the children could occupy their free time in a good way, different from their context, which includes a lot sex work, theft, and drugs.

We taught music on two broken guitars, a small keyboard and a homemade drum set.

In the teaching of music, I saw an opportunity for social transformation. Thanks to

this experience I started studying music so that I could work professionally in projects like this.

In 2013, my classmates and I created a group called JARIS to make music for God and teach in vulnerable communities. Later, we won a grant from the IOM (International Organization for Migration) and the Colombian Ministry of Health to work on projects for the prevention of teenage pregnancies.

Now, we had four guitars in good condition, three keyboards and a real drums.

When that project came to an end, the church offered me other opportunities to serve.

We are always carrying out campaigns with people living on the streets, offering them a shower, clothing, food, a hairdressing day and a time to listen to their stories and share the love of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit moves us as a community to serve those who need it.

Today, I have the opportunity to be in international settings like this, learning and serving in another way. I'm honoured to work together with the YABs Committee to connect young people from all continents and to share service experiences that encourage others.

From these experiences, I have learned that it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to serve. It is the movement of the Spirit in our community that encourages us to leave the walls of our homes and churches to bring the love of God to those who need it – not only offering words of encouragement, but also examples and action.

As some brothers and sisters in my church say – this is “prayer-action” – *Ora-acción / Oración* – praying and acting for the needs of our communities and contexts.



**Oscar Suárez is the Latin America representative on the YABs Committee. He is a member of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita Ibague, Colombia.**

**He spoke at Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us – in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018. This paper has been adapted from his presentation.**

## Indonesia

# From ordinary to history maker

by Andi O. Santoso

**C**an we talk about a mission without the Holy Spirit, or talk about the Holy Spirit but ignore mission?

I remember when I first learned about missions at the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in Jakarta. I was in my second year in university when I heard Rev. Dr. Mangapul Sagala speak. “The Holy Spirit is for mission,” he said.

This short sentence stuck in my heart and mind.

### Inseparable from mission

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). The Great Commission begins locally to globally.

This is the meaning of being a witness for Jesus. It is an uneasy mandate, but the power of the Holy Spirit is given to us, to be with us in carrying out this task.

When the Holy Spirit is poured out, the apostles are given the power to witness, with authority and miraculous signs (Acts 2:32).

The existence of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from God’s dynamic power, which enables the apostles – and now us – to be witnesses of Jesus.

### Holy Spirit: power to witness

If we read Acts as a whole, we will see how the personal role of the Holy Spirit, the Forgotten God, is the subject throughout the Acts of the Apostles. That is, Acts is

the story of the Holy Spirit working through and in the believers, the early church. After the Pentecost event, the gospel message spread to Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

Peter, John and the apostles were ordinary uneducated people (Acts 4:13). All the figures recorded in the Acts of the Apostles are ordinary people bearing witness to Jesus’ death and resurrection. God is using ordinary people for his extraordinary task, equipped by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### An emboldened witness

I remember when I was on my way to my first mission trip to Lampung, South Sumatra, back in 1997. I was so moved by the desire to be a witness, as I just ended my class on Evangelism Explosion in that day.

One of my friends and I decided to take a 10-day trip to visit churches in Lampung to learn and explore anything about ministry. We were just so excited for God.

We went by bus for several hours, the continued our trip by ship. During the two hours we stayed on the ship, I was praying, “Lord please give me an opportunity to be able to meet a person with whom I can share about You.”

While I was walking and praying I saw one man sitting down by himself, having dinner. It was around midnight, but I asked permission to sit beside him. He smiled and said ok. So, I began a conversation.

I asked, “Sir, I know you are a police officer, and I just want to ask, have you ever shot a person?”

He became quiet and said yes.

Not stopping there, I asked again, “Have you ever killed people during your tasks?”

He suddenly bowed his head and said yes.

What gave me – just a student in university who was excited to share about Jesus – such courage to ask those question to a police officer? It was the Holy Spirit.

**The existence of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from God’s dynamic power, which enables the apostles – and now us – to be witnesses of Jesus.**

That night, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, I shared the gospel of peace to this police officer. In the middle of the night, on that ship, I led the man to accept Jesus.

After our ship arrived in the harbour, and we need to say good bye to each other, I asked my last permission to him, “Did you bring a gun?” He said yes. “Can I touch it with my own hand?” He said sure...

I touched my arm to his pistol underneath his clothes, confirming what he said was true. I said, “God, You are awesome; it’s all about You and it’s not about me.”

Will we walk with the Holy Spirit today, and let the Holy Spirit do mighty works in us?



Andi O. Santoso is general secretary of GKMI (Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia – one of three Indonesian Mennonite churches). This testimony is adapted from *The Holy Spirit and Mission* by Andi O. Santoso, published in *Berita GKMI* (GKMI News), May 2016.

USA

# Remember and learn

by Reuben Sairs

**H**ow could I ever do justice to talking about the Holy Spirit? So often the Spirit's work in my life has been convincingly real, but in a peculiar way it has also defied my ability to understand it, let alone express it.

I've seen the Holy Spirit work in the life of the church, bringing bewildered groups to decisions. I've seen the Holy Spirit work in the unbelieving world, surprising disbelief with the presence of God. I have certainly seen the Holy Spirit work in my own life in predictable ways, trying to make a selfish and destructive person less so.

The work of the Holy Spirit can be the most ineffable and subjective dimension of our spiritual experience. Romans 8:26 has always fascinated me: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

I experienced this as a church planter.

## A discouraging season

I was a pastor in an urban setting. It was a mixed story: half church plant, half a partially established, but small and often unstable congregation. There were some outstanding people there.

Working there, I became relatively poor, and it was not romantic poverty. I was trying to work with people who suffered from what seemed to be intractable problems. Things were not going well. I felt that the pastoral role got little respect, but then I would feel like I must be an especially weak excuse of a church planting pastor to be so sensitive. Why couldn't I be more confident and

## The living water of God's Word that I was trying to pour out into the world is not a finite resource.

believe that God was here and that I was doing what really mattered?

In any event, life didn't seem to be on a tremendous track that would lead to success, well-being, and the love and warmth of a happy community. It was more like I imagine a rough marriage to be. It certainly wasn't what I had hoped for when I stepped out of my former life as an aspiring musician to be a church planter.

It felt like I was wasting years (not months, weeks or days) and talent (such as it was) and energy. Worse, it felt like I was simply being depleted and had nothing appreciable to show for it. I had little power or material comfort to offer my family as they experienced it with me.

It hurt, and I say without balking, it still hurts!

## A vision of abundance

One warm, southern summer evening, I meditated – and mostly whined – about it, looking down my driveway from my oily carport. Half in prayer, half in introspection, I saw an image of pouring water into a bucket with a hole in the bottom and watching it run down my driveway (of all places).

I had come to a place of feeling a kind of apathy about apathy itself. It just seemed sad and futile, but it seemed to be my lot.

Where was God? Why would he waste "our" time and resources like this?

Into that moment, I believe the Holy Spirit spoke to me. I didn't hear words, but the impressions seemed to be authentic and not the convenient creation of my own whirling imagination.

My strength and resources are certainly limited and imperfect, but the living water of God's Word that I was trying to pour out into the world is not a finite resource. It cannot be depleted and doesn't really belong to me anyway. This water was not going to run out at its source. Who knows where all that water pouring out on the ground would end up? It was part of a larger story that I may or may not understand.

My situation didn't change. Somehow, though, I found that even when it was frustrating, I could experience God's peace. That peace could still at times be elusive or vague. Yet it was real and could assert itself when needed.

Since then I have had to remind myself and relearn this truth about God's presence several times, but as I do usually I am carried back to that evening thinking about a leaking bucket and water.

It passed all understanding, and it still does.



Reuben Sairs is an instructor and librarian at Rosedale Bible College and associate pastor at London Christian Fellowship in London, Ohio, a CMC (Conservative Mennonite Conference) church.

# Ripe for evangelism

## Uganda Mennonite Church is growing



Okoth Simon Onyango and Ed Gross of the United States pray for healing of the sick during a special conference at a peri-urban Uganda Mennonite Congregation. Photo: Okoth Simon Onyango

“Uganda is ripe for evangelism and the church is growing,” says bishop Okoth Simon Onyango, national coordinator of Mennonite Church Uganda. The new Mennonite World Conference member church currently reports 553 members in 18 congregations. Accepted by the Executive Committee in 2017, Mennonite Church Uganda has more than doubled the number of congregations reported in the 2015 MWC directory (7).

Congregations in Uganda Mennonite Church are springing up both in the capital city Kampala, and in peri-urban areas (the hinterlands outside cities).

Bishop Moses Otiento of Kenya Mennonite Church was inspired to plant churches in Uganda. Otiento supported mission efforts to Uganda, and John Otiento worked with local leaders in Uganda in 2004 to plant four churches that officially registered in 2006.

Growing greatly in number, Uganda Mennonite Church congregations face many challenges: buildings barely covered by a roof; lack of chairs for church members to sit on during services, pastors who have no formal training and sometimes no paycheque.

Mennonite Central Committee has served in Uganda since 1979, initially with war-reconstruction efforts; now with peace and reconciliation work.

Youth from Uganda have served in Mennonite World Conference and MCC’s exchange program YAMEN, learning about the global church by serving in a different part of the world.

The English-speaking East African country on the northern edge of Lake Victoria borders Kenya, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Tanzania. Some 45 percent of the nearly 40 000 000 Ugandans identify as Protestant, 40 percent as Roman Catholic, and more than 10 percent as Muslim. Uganda struggles with a high number of deaths from HIV/AIDS and with large numbers of refugees fleeing neighbouring countries.

“The Mennonite Church Uganda is quite happy and honoured to be member of the global family of the MWC,” says Okoth. “Our prayer is that God will identify us partner churches or individuals to stand with us in some of our voluminous challenges. May God sustain us together.”

— Karla Braun

### Uganda

#### MWC member:

##### *Uganda Mennonite Church*

Baptized Members	553
Congregations	18
Presiding officer	Okoth Simon Onyango

#### Non-member churches:

##### *Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Uganda)*

Members	38
Congregations	4

##### *Nationwide Fellowship of Churches (Uganda)*

Members	39
Congregations	2

Source: MWC World Directory 2018



Some members sit on the floor at a Uganda Mennonite Church congregation which lacks the finances to purchase chairs. Photo: Okoth Simon Onyango



Worship at a congregation of Uganda Mennonite Church. Photo: Okoth Simon Onyango

# Holy Spirit Breakthrough in East Africa



Migori choir performs the history of their church in song and dance at Renewal 2027.

Photo: Wilhelm Unger



Bishop Joseph Kamau of Happy Church, Nakuru, Kenya.

Photo: Len Rempel

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17).

Bishop Kisare was sitting by the great tree where the first Mennonite missionaries had embarked by dhow 70 years ago.

I asked the dear bishop brother, “What happened here at Katuru Hill those many years ago?”

A couple tears trickled down his cheeks as he responded, “You are referring to the day the fire of God fell on Katuru Hill.

“That day God touched me and began his transforming work in my soul. My calling as a minister of the gospel began that day. That was a day I shall never forget.

“Jesus touched me and transformed me. People bypassed Katuru Hill for the word in the villages was that all who will come near will be burned for the fire of God is burning on Katuru Hill.”

## Child evangelists

That was 1942. On that August Sunday the fire of God fell upon the newly developing

Mennonite church at Katuru hill in Shirati.

The congregation experienced the convicting fire of God as people wept in repentance throughout the day and into the evening hours. Wilson Ogwada and Nikanor Dhaje, 12-year-old students at the Shirati elementary school, experienced such compassion for those who didn’t know Jesus that they left school to preach the gospel.

They became the first African Mennonite missionaries as they travelled from community to community to proclaim the Word of God. They pressed onward even though beaten at least once. They preached along the Kenya-Tanzania borderlands.

## Speed-walking revivalist

In the providence of God, Rebeka Kizinza “Speedy” opened her home on the Kenya border for the Tanzanian emissaries of the gospel. Twenty-four kilometers a day by foot was her normal speed to serve the Lord uninhibited. Through her speed walking, she knit together a relationship between the Kenyan and Tanzanian revivalists.

There is a mystery in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but

you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8), Jesus said. So it was within the East Africa revival fellowship.

## Repenting teacher

Those among us who want to know dates and places will probably trace the beginnings of the revival to a high school teacher in Rwanda, Blasio Kigozi, who invested 12 days in prayer and fasting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the students, staff and faculty.

Blasio came from his room, a transformed man, first asking his wife forgiveness and then convened a meeting of all faculty and staff to announce that the Lord has revealed the need for repentance. The whole school was convicted. The Anglican bishops in Kampala invited Blasio to meet with the bishops and they also were touched with a deep need for repentance. Within six weeks Blasio took ill and died. But his message across East Africa has never ceased.

## Fruit of the revival

The Mennonites were not passed by as the convicting power of the Holy Spirit moved.



**Eighteen Maasai women from a Mennonite fellowship slept the night on the grounds to attend Renewal 2027 and perform a traditional dance.**

Photo: Wilhelm Unger

The revival moved as a people who loved Jesus and who loved one another. Early on, the leaders gave attention to continuing the revival. In various ways, all the countries of eastern Africa were touched by the revival that still continues today.

1. The revival is centred in Jesus Christ. Regular fellowship meetings are centred in Jesus. Everyone knew that the revivalists loved Jesus. Whether gathering as thousands or only a few, revivalists meet in Jesus' name and there Jesus meets the fellowship of believers.
2. The confession of sin, repentance and walking in the light of Jesus is paramount. Every gathering includes the confession of sin and the celebration of the cleansing blood of Jesus. 1 John 1:7 summarizes the central commitments of the revival fellowship: "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

3. The revivalists ministered with fervency. They were nicknamed the people inflamed with passion for Jesus, *Balokole*.
4. The fellowships are communities of joy. They encompass people from tribes and nations all across east Africa, resembling the picture of the church from Acts 2:5-6: "Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each."

The movement became the most authentic intertribal community in East Africa. Their spirit of inter-community relationship was a key development in encouraging peaceful efforts for healing the political strife in Kenya. They also modelled the principle of receiving and sharing counsel.

### Revival works reconciliation

Small teams of *Balokole* travelled occasionally to South Africa urging a peaceful political resolution. It is amazing how the revival that

began with students enlarged its embrace to invite reconciliation even within the most difficult challenges to the way of peace.

As the fellowship grew, many in the West including the USA were profoundly touched by the grace of Christ that was proclaimed by the fellowship. The legalism of Mennonites in the 1930s and 40s was destructive; the grace-filled messages of the East Africa Mennonites was life giving. Fellowships of revivalists spread into several North American communities, bringing encouragement and new life.

### People of the Lamb

The East Africa revival fellowship resisted becoming a denominational fellowship. They stayed within the established churches. But that did not mean that the revivalists did not have an identity.

In the midst of the political turmoil in the region of East Africa, the *Balokole* were recognized as people of peace. They were called the People of the Lamb, people who laid down their lives in their commitment to Jesus.

Very early on in the movement in Kenya and Uganda as well as Burundi and Rwanda, there was turmoil from tribal or international conflict. The revivalists refused to participate in these violent conflicts. Hundreds died bearing witness that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Several times in Kenya's tumultuous post-independence history, the Mennonites have stood boldly with the People of the Lamb, declaring that they are committed to the healing of the nations, not the destruction of the nations.

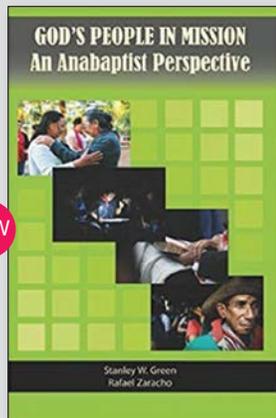


David W. Shenk is a globalist whose commitment to bearing faithful witness to Christ in our pluralist world has taken him to more than a hundred countries and regions. David is an author, missionary, teacher, preacher, and leader who with his wife Grace have invested especially in peacemaking with Muslims. He was born in East Africa and is a member of Mountville Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania, USA.

He spoke at Renewal 2027 – The Holy Spirit Transforming Us – in Kisumu, Kenya, 21 April 2018. This paper has been adapted from his presentation.

## MWC books

There are newly translated titles in Global Anabaptist Mennonite Shelf of Literature: books that help member churches nurture a common Christian faith.

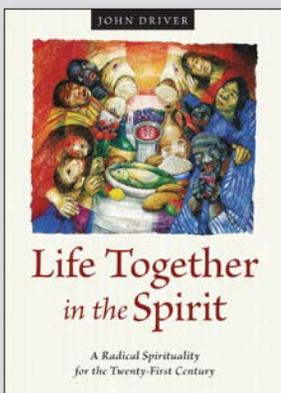


### **God's People in Mission: An Anabaptist Perspective** edited by Stanley W. Green & Rafael Zaracho, MWC Mission Commission

Contributors: Nzash Lumeya, Antonio Gonzàlez, Petrus Eko Handoyo, Victor Pedroza Cruz, Mvwala C. Katshinga, Janie Blough and James R. Krabill, David W. Shenk, César García

Languages: English, Spanish (forthcoming: *El Pueblo de Dios en Misión: una Perspectiva Anabautista*), French (forthcoming: *Le peuple de Dieu dans la mission : une perspective anabaptiste*)

Available on Amazon/Kindle



### **Life Together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century** by John Driver

Contributors to Responses from the Global Anabaptist church appendix: Mvwala C. Katshinga, Christina Asheervadam, Rafael Zaracho, Hermann Woelke, Chiou-Lang "Paulus" Pan, Patricia Urueña Barbosa, Nellie Mlotshwa

Languages: English, Spanish (NEW: *Convivencia Radical: Una Espiritualidad para el siglo XXI*), French (NEW: *Vivre ensemble, unis dans l'Esprit: Une spiritualité radicale pour le 21<sup>e</sup> siècle*), Indonesian (NEW: *Hidup Bersama dalam Roh*), Portuguese (forthcoming: *A Vida em Comunidade no Espírito: Uma Espiritualidade Radical para o Século XXI*), Korean (NEW: 성령과 함께 하는 삶 -21세기의 급진적 영성-)

Available online:

[www.archive.org/details/instituteforthestudyofglobalanabaptismgoshen](http://www.archive.org/details/instituteforthestudyofglobalanabaptismgoshen)  
(English, French, Indonesian)  
[www.plough.com](http://www.plough.com) (English, Korean)

### **God's Shalom Project** by Bernhard Ott

Languages: English, Spanish (forthcoming: *Shalom – el proyecto de Dios*), French, German, Japanese (NEW: シャローム 神のプロジェクト)

## Save the date! Indonesia 2021



Holy Stadium (Mennonite church).

Semarang, Indonesia  
Assembly Gathered: 6–11 July 2021  
Global Youth Summit (GYS): 2–5 July 2021

- Bersama-Sama Mengikuti Yesus Melintas Batas (Indonesian)
- Sesarengan Ngetut Wuri Gusti Yesus Nratas Wewates (Javanese)
- Following Jesus together across barriers (English)
- Seguir a Jesús juntos, superando las barreras (Spanish)
- Suivre Jésus ensemble à travers les frontières (French)



Indonesia  
2021

06-11  
07 2021

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

## The Holy Spirit transforming us



"I have seen the Spirit of the Lord working in India, transforming the lives of people in spite of persecution. The Spirit of the Lord is touching the hearts of the people

who are away from Christ and they have changed their life in a wonderful way. We praise God because the Spirit is working. The same thing that has happened 2 000 years ago is still happening now. The Lord is alive and doing mighty things in the world."

—Bijoy Roul, Brethren in Christ Church, Odisha, India



"To be transformed by the Holy Spirit is the principal objective that I want for my church. The Holy Spirit must drive the church. As a people, we must really be transformed to be truly agreeable to God."

—Jean Claude Ambeke Ilonga, Igreja Evangélica dos Irmãos Mennonites em Angola

## World Fellowship Sunday worship materials



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

Materials for 2019 were prepared by Latin American church leaders on the theme “Justice on the Journey: Migration and

the Anabaptist-Mennonite Story” from the texts Leviticus 19:33–34, Luke 4:18–21, 1 Peter 2:11–12.

Nearly 500 years ago, Anabaptists were persecuted because they claimed primary citizenship in God’s kingdom. Anabaptists recently celebrated 100 years of presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Latin America is experiencing a large displacement crisis, where organized crime, violence and poverty are forcing thousands to flee their homes. Migrants, including Anabaptists, face hardship as they seek safety. Our churches are investing in missional outreach to these vulnerable people.

Anabaptist Christians today are called to follow Jesus in his ministry of justice-making. This includes welcoming migrants. In Latin America, Anabaptist churches are composed of both those who have been migrants, and those who welcome migrants. It is not easy to be or have been displaced, nor is it easy to welcome these strangers. God is faithful in the midst of these stories of uprootedness and change.

Download this resource to celebrate World Fellowship Sunday in your local congregation with the global Anabaptist family in January or at whatever time is convenient for your congregation in 2019. Send pictures and stories from your congregation’s celebration to [photos@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:photos@mwc-cmm.org).

[www.mwc-cmm.org/wfs](http://www.mwc-cmm.org/wfs)

## Pray for Renewal 2027

6 April 2019



Renewal 2027 is a 10-year series of events commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement.

Focusing on the theme, Justice on the Journey: Migration and the Anabaptist-Mennonite Story, Renewal 2027 will take place in Costa Rica in 2019 along with the Executive Committee meetings.

Pray for a joyful time of unified worship as locals and international guests participate in Renewal 2027. Pray for wisdom and grace as the Executive Committee discerns together.

## The Holy Spirit transforming us



“Romans 12:1–2. The Spirit, the breath of God [is] the thing that unites us, transforms us, and allows us to come together in spite of our differences. We all need to be transformed,... I need to listen to the Spirit of God to continue to help me to see beyond my own insecurities, my own biases, to understand how God would have us work together.”

—Glen Guyton, Mennonite Church USA

## Give a gift to MWC

Your prayers and financial gifts are deeply appreciated. Your contributions are important.

They will:

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

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

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17808 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA
- Calle 28A No. 16–41 Piso 2, Bogotá, COLOMBIA

# A supportive space: General Council fosters relationships



General Council delegates raise orange cards to show consensus.

Photo: Len Rempel

“Stand up if you are weary, worn down by the cares of ministry.” From Portuguese-speaking countries on either side of the ocean, a Brazilian pastor crossed to embrace an Angolan pastor who stood in response to the Deacons Commission’s calls to prayer during the evening devotional time at the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) General Council meetings. Throughout the room, huddles of delegates surrounded leaders, easing burdens with prayers of encouragement.

Much of the time, MWC’s mission to create space for the Anabaptist family to meet together is fulfilled virtually, on social media or through email connections across continents, but once every three years, it occurs in person as the General Council (one to three delegates from each member church), commissions, and networks (Global Mission Fellowship, Global Anabaptist Service Network) meet. Representatives from up to 107 national churches from 58 countries gathered for triennial meetings 23–26 April 2018 in Limuru, Kenya. They discerned decisions, learned from teaching – and ate together and shared their hearts.

General Council meetings are about “making connections, meeting beautiful brothers from here in Kenya, all parts of Africa, Indonesia, Japan, China, and from different parts of the world,” says Juan C. Colón of Convención de las Iglesias Menonitas de Puerto Rico, Inc. “Learning from them, seeing how they pray, learning from the humility that they show... – it has

been a rewarding experience for me.”

“We learn it’s not only in Congo we have problems that affect the life of the church; problems are everywhere, but each corner has its own. I was moved by the hardships of the church in Panama who have been displaced from their own land,” says Alphonse Komuesa of Communauté Mennonite au Congo. “The fact that we have shared these experiences together gives us an opportunity to comfort each other.”

“We have space to be able to talk and get to know each other,” says Colón.

## A space to share prayer

During a prayer time, Komuesa shared about the difficulties in DR Congo where a violent military group has displaced many of the Mennonite church’s members, resulting in deaths, separated families and poverty.

From Germany, Alexander Neufeld of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Deutschland said the many Middle Eastern refugees making a new home in the country challenge the church to learn and grow.

Delegates from Nicaragua shared their concern about the government suppression of student-led protests happening during the meetings.

The small church of 1 000 members in Nepal has been affected by flooding and earthquake in the past few years, and is restricted by anti-conversion laws, yet it continues to grow, said Hanna Soren of

## Commission documents approved at General Council meetings 2018

### *Declaration of Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples*

In the Christian Scriptures, we encounter Yahweh who hears the cries of the dispossessed and the suffering, feels deep concerns for their welfare, and moves to save.... MWC desires to follow Jesus’ example to respond to the cries of Indigenous peoples worldwide. This response is not concerned only with caring for people suffering within unjust structures. It also includes efforts to disarm (Colossians 2:15 the structures of oppression themselves, in order that all God’s People and Creation might experience the psalmist’s hope that truth and mercy will meet, and justice and peace will kiss each other (Psalm 85:10).

[mwc-cmm.org/solidarity-indigenous-peoples](http://mwc-cmm.org/solidarity-indigenous-peoples)

### *Identity and Ecumenicity: A Theology of Interchurch Hospitality and Denominational Identity*

One can lament the split of the Christian church into so many denominations and traditions. But this reality after 2 000 years of Christianity is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as we remember the Lord’s Prayer for Christian unity in John 17.

Churches and denominations should not remain alone or isolated from each other. They need interchurch hospitality and dialogue.

In the house of God (ecumene) we need to be ready to live in “reconciled diversity,” being both *brave* in claiming our denominational heritage, legacy and contribution, and *humble* in acknowledging our limited understanding.

[mwc-cmm.org/identity-ecumenicity](http://mwc-cmm.org/identity-ecumenicity)

Nepal BIC Church/Brethren in Community Welfare Society.

## A space to learn

Gathered in a rainbow striped tent that was both a metaphor for the diversity of the gathering and a real tabernacle for God’s people, delegates approved the Program Plan and financial projections 2018–2021, and reviewed Fair Share 2016–2021, and had lively discussion around Commissions Proposals. Strategic goals for the triennial: live out anabaptist identity, interdependent relationships, reconciliation and hope.

“The unity of the spirit is the reason we walk together, not the result of walking well together,” said Thomas Yoder Neufeld, Bible scholar, new Faith and Life Commission chair, and speaker at three plenary teaching sessions.

## Meet your Faith and Life Commission



Faith and Life Commission pictured l-r: Lydia Adi, Antonio González, Manjula Roul, Rebeca González, John Roth, Tewodros Beyene, Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, Nzuzi Mukawa.

“God is to blame for the diversity in our unity,” he said. “This is a permanent problem we do not want God to solve for us.”

The imagery of breaking down boundaries show how costly peace is, he said.

### A space to wrestle

Delegates experienced pain when disagreement surfaced over the Faith and Life Commission’s guideline on responding to controversial issues.

Yoder Neufeld’s teaching – patience, suffering, forgiveness, seeing in each other the face of God are the ways to walk in unity – were put to test. The General Council did not reach consensus on accepting the document which means that MWC continues without a clear process on how to discuss controversial issues.

Two other Commission documents received delegate approval: a statement of solidarity with Indigenous peoples and a teaching resource “Identity and Ecumenicity: A Theology of Interchurch Hospitality and Denominational Identity.”

Delegates ratified new national church members approved by the Executive Committee since the previous General Council and new members in 2018: Lancaster Mennonite Conference (full member); and Iglesia Misionera Anabautista, Bolivia (associate members).

Henk Stenvers was elected President Elect, to assume presidency at Assembly in Indonesia in 6–11 July 2021. Currently serving vice president Rebecca Osiro was affirmed to serve a six-year term.

New Commission members and Executive Committee members were approved.

Prior to the General Council, delegates and representatives of Anabaptist service and mission agencies travelled to western Kenya to participate in Renewal 2027, a day long celebration of the Holy Spirit in the history and life of the nearly 500-year-old Anabaptist church. The next day, they worshipped in local churches in the Kisumu area.

Osiro described it as a great honour for Kenya Mennonite Church to host the gathering of Anabaptist leaders worldwide. “We feel encouraged and strengthened that we come to this reality,” she said. “Where the roads are not defined clearly..., You bear with us and forgive us,” she said. “How nice, how pleasant and good that we stay together in unity.”

The Faith and Life Commission enables MWC member churches to receive and provide counsel on Christian faith and practice, and on Anabaptist-Mennonite witness in the world today. This commission encourages MWC member churches to develop relationships of mutual accountability in the convictions they hold and in the lives they live – locally, internationally and cross-culturally.

### The activities of the Faith and Life Commission include

- 1. Support interchurch/ecumenical dialogue:** MWC is committed to nurturing a deeper understanding of other members in the Body of Christ. Our commission offers support to MWC ecumenical dialogues and promotes conversation around the documents that emerge from those discussions.
- 2. Develop teaching resources for MWC:** Building on the MWC Shared Convictions, our commission has developed a series of resources on topics such as Koinonia, the Anabaptist tradition, identity and ecumenicity, and other relevant themes.
- 3. Promote Anabaptist-Mennonite identity among member churches:** our commission has identified a list of theologians, historians, and peace experts who are available for short-term teaching assignments around the world; we recently facilitated the publication of John Driver’s *Life Together in the Spirit* as part of the MWC Shelflist series.

- 4. Support emerging networks:** in addition to a formal relationship with the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Encyclopedia On-line (GAMEO), the commission encourages global networks among Anabaptist-Mennonite historians, educators, and the Women Doing Theology initiatives.

### Highlights of three-year goals

- Promote discussion of the Mennonite-Lutheran-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012-2017 (“Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church”); explore ecumenical relations with World Communion of Reformed Churches in preparation for the upcoming commemoration events in both of our global fellowships
- Support Executive Committee in on-going conversations around: 1) exploration of MWC Name Change; 2) “Policy for Responding to Controversial Issues” document
- Encourage a deeper sense of Anabaptist Identity in member churches through “Renewal 2027” events and other activities

### Faith and Life Commission members

Thomas R Yoder Neufeld, chair (Canada)  
John D. Roth, secretary (USA)  
Tewodros Beyene (Ethiopia)  
Antonio González (Spain)  
Nzuzi Mukawa (DR Congo)  
Manjoula Roul (India)  
Rebeca González (Mexico)  
Lydia Adi Sidharta (Indonesia)



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PHOTO: Life TV Indonesia

## President's column

# Messengers of hope



Jürg Bräker at Messenger Fountain.

Photo: J Nelson Kraybill

Mennonite pastor Jürg Bräker stopped at Messenger Fountain [*Läuferbrunnen*] in his home city of Bern, Switzerland. He wet his hands in the flowing spout, and declared, "This water turned blood-red on the day Hans Haslibacher was beheaded in 1571."

Today, Amish still sing from the *Ausbund* [hymnal] about Haslibacher, the last Anabaptist executed in Bern.

Haslibacher had foretold that his severed head would *laugh* when it fell from the executioner's sword: "The sun will, like my blood, be red,... the town well likewise blood will shed."

All three predictions came to pass.

I am not certain I believe all details of that story, but the symbolism rings true: when there is war or corrupt government, messengers of hope sometimes die. The light of truth turns dim, and waters that should give life turn red with blood.

I am grateful for the courageous witness of our 16th-century forebears. We should honour them, but then get on with the day-to-day task of laying down our lives in living sacrifice for others in the name of Jesus.

Anabaptists today can collaborate with Christians of other traditions to include peacemaking as part of inviting others to know and follow our Lord.

While in Switzerland, I represented Mennonite World Conference at World Council of Churches (WCC) meetings. In

that global body representing 500 million Christians, Mennonite Fernando Enns has been a messenger of hope as a leader in the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

"At the end of the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2011) initiated by Historic Peace Churches within the WCC, we had built up a consensus on the understanding of Just Peace within the WCC," says Enns. "The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace builds on this consensus, adding the spiritual dimension to the churches' engagement in peace with justice. As we walk together within the ecumenical family, we realize how important it is that Just Peace is rooted in our Christian confession of faith, in our prayers, in our spiritual lives. It is much more than a political strategy.

"The pilgrimage metaphor teaches us that unless Just Peace becomes an identity marker of our discipleship, our witness – as individuals, local communities, and a global Christian family – will hardly be credible."

This project helps Christians of many traditions follow Jesus toward "just peace" in the world.



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