

# Courier Correo Courier

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

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

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## A word from the editor

### Cover Photo:

#### A baptism in Ivory Coast with Eglise des Freres Mennonites de Cote d'Ivoire.

Photo courtesy Gnahore Boessi Frank



### “Believe and be baptized!”

These words of Jesus (Mark 16:16), repeated at Pentecost by the apostle Peter (Acts 2:38) inspire Anabaptists and spur us to action. “Baptism” is in our very name – and our practice is a key marker in our formation as a group of Christ followers.

But what is our practice? Sprinkling, pouring or immersion?

When is a person old enough to make their own decision to follow their faith?

What are the consequences of baptism? Is it a personal declaration of faith or a rite of membership to become an official part of a local family of faith?

These are questions that challenge Anabaptist-Mennonite churches around the globe, and there are different answers influenced by our contextual factors.

Returning to the Scripture texts also show us diversity: we find both the spontaneous baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch after Philip’s teaching and a cross-generational large group baptism of Cornelius’s household. The early church continued to develop practices and symbols of baptism beyond the book of Acts.

Mennonite World Conference encourages its member congregations to remember the early baptisms that sparked our faith movement: each January, we celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday around 21 January, recalling the courageous faith of Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz and Georg Blaurock who re-baptized each other in Zurich on that date in 1525.

This issue of *Courier* shares the presentations from the Renewal 2021 webinars held online in June 2021. These sessions reviewed Anabaptist history and looked at how we are now learning about baptism from other traditions – even the Catholics and Lutherans from whom our ancestors in faith so sharply diverged in 1525.

Baptism for those early believers was not only an act of personal faith but also a rebellion against political powers of the day. As we seek to reflect the faith and fervour of our spiritual ancestors, how do Anabaptists today live out bold commitments?

How does our baptism teach us to set aside self-interest and pursue the good of the community out of love for the other?

How does our baptism spur us to resist the powers of greed and domination, and instead live out the alternative values of peace and reconciliation in the already-but-not-yet kin-dom of God?

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

The trilateral dialogues report discussed on page (6-9) can be downloaded on the MWC website along with a study guide for churches to learn more about its implications.



## Courier/Correo/Courier



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# “Believe and Be Baptized: A Global Conversation on Baptism”

Following a 5-year conversation with theologians from the Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions, the Faith and Life Committee invited the members of Mennonite World Conference to consider our practices of Anabaptist together at Renewal 2027 in two webinars entitled “Believe and Be Baptized: A Global Conversation on Baptism.”

by John Roth

## **B**iblical, theological, and historical context of believers baptism

On January 21, 1525 a small group of young people gathered secretly in the Swiss city of Zurich for an unusual worship service. They had been raised as Catholics; but for several years they had been meeting for Bible study and discussion with their mentor, Ulrich Zwingli, the priest of the city’s main church, the Grossmünster.

As they read Scripture together, the group began to question several practices of the Catholic church – including infant baptism, but they were divided about

the next steps. Zwingli, supported by the Zurich City Council, insisted on a course of moderate reforms, introduced slowly. Members of the Bible study group resisted. If Scripture was clear, they argued, changes in church practice should be made immediately, regardless of the political or social consequences.

So, on that January day in 1525, the small group formally renounced their baptisms as infants and, in the pattern of Jesus and John the Baptist, received baptism as adults as a symbol of their voluntary commitment to follow Christ and to support each other in this new step of faith.

For modern Christians, the action seems almost trivial. After all, what could be so troubling about a group of people gathering for prayer and then pouring

water over their heads? Yet this action – which marked the beginning of the Anabaptist (or “re-baptizer”) movement – had profound consequences. Within days, the Zurich City Council ordered the arrest and imprisonment of anyone who participated in such baptisms. By 1526, authorities declared the baptism of adults a capital offense. And in January 1527, Felix Manz, in whose home the group had met, suffered the ultimate consequence of his convictions. With his hands and feet bound to a wooden pole, Manz was “baptized” once more – pushed into the icy waters of the Limmat River in a public execution.

As the Anabaptist movement spread, church and political leaders condemned them as heretics. Over the next few decades, some 3 000

### **A baptism in South India**

Photo courtesy Gilgal Mission Trust

believers were executed for the crime of being “Anabaptists” or “re-baptizers”

Yet the movement they started lives on. Today some 2.2 million Christians around the world identify themselves as part of the Anabaptists tradition including all 107 national member churches that are part of Mennonite World Conference

The ingredients seem simple enough: water; a gathering of witnesses; and a few carefully chosen words. To a secular person looking in from the outside it might seem hard to understand why the Christian practice of baptism is so significant. But despite its simplicity, virtually every Christian group regards baptism as a foundational event – a ritual that expresses convictions basic to their faith.

Few practices are more central to the Christian church, yet few have been the source of more disagreement and debate among Christians.

- Is baptism essential to salvation?
- What is the appropriate age for baptism?
- How should the ritual be done?
- Does baptism confer salvation in itself or is it a symbol of salvation already received?

### Baptism in the Christian tradition

The roots of Christian baptism draw deeply on the biblical images of water – an enduring symbol of cleansing, refreshment, and life itself. In the Old Testament, water is often associated with God’s healing presence – a spring in the desert; a life-giving well; or justice that flows “like a mighty river.”

The symbol of Christian baptism comes directly from the Old Testament story of the Exodus when God parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow the children of Israel to flee slavery in Egypt and escape from Pharaoh’s pursuing armies. That dramatic act of “crossing through the waters” marked the rebirth of the children of Israel. Having passed through the waters, they were no longer slaves – they had become a new community of God’s people, bound to each other by the gift of the Law and by their dependence on God for guidance and sustenance.

Echoes of the Exodus story can be clearly heard in the New Testament

account of John, who was nicknamed “The Baptist.” John’s fiery preaching called for repentance – a transformation of the heart symbolized by a ritual cleansing in the waters of the Jordan River. According to the Gospels, Jesus began his formal ministry only after he had been baptized by John. That act –accompanied by God’s blessing and the clear presence of the Holy Spirit – marked a “crossing over” for Jesus into a new ministry of healing and teaching that culminated three years later in his crucifixion, death and resurrection.

The early Christians understood baptism as a symbol rich with meanings drawn both from the Old Testament and from the life of Jesus. Like the Exodus, baptism in the early church symbolized the renunciation of a life enslaved to the bondage of sin and a “crossing over” into a new identity with a community of believers who, like the children of Israel, were committed to living in dependence on God.

Many early Christians also regarded baptism as a re-enactment of the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptismal candidates walked into the water naked – stripped and vulnerable, like Christ on the cross, dying to the old self. After emerging from the water, they were dressed in robes of white as a symbol of the resurrection and their new identity as followers of Jesus.

Strong evidence from the second and third centuries suggests that the early Christians baptized only adults; and then only after a long period of rigorous instruction and training. In other words, the early church reserved baptism for those who had experienced a transformation of the heart; were committed to a life of daily discipleship; and were ready to become part of a new community of believers.

### From voluntary baptism to infant baptism

Sometime during the fourth century, however, this practice began to change. At the heart of this shift in baptismal practice was the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in AD 312, an event that slowly transformed the very nature of the Christian church. During the century after Constantine’s conversion, the church went from a small, persecuted minority to a powerful institution whose bishops came to rely on the armies of

the Roman empire for their protection and as a means of eliminating heresy.

Gradually, Christianity became the “official” religion of the Roman emperors – a kind of religious-cultural “glue” that could help to unite a fragmenting empire.

Since everyone within the territory was now compelled to be a Christian, it no longer made sense to associate baptism with repentance, a transformation of life, or with a new identity within a community of believers.

About the same time, new arguments emerged to defend the practice of infant baptism. For example, St. Augustine (354–430), insisted at the end of the fourth century that from the very moment of birth, human beings were trapped in bondage to sin. The baptism of infants, he argued, was necessary for the salvation of the child’s soul. In his teaching, the act of baptism itself conferred a spiritual gift of grace to the child. The sacrament of baptism incorporated the infant into the church, saving its soul from the stain of original sin and the clutches of hell.

In later medieval society, baptism also marked a child’s membership in the civic community, registering the infant as an eventual tax-paying subject who owed allegiance to the local feudal lord.

The Reformation leaders Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others agreed that infants should be baptized at birth. Luther argued that infant baptism confirms



**An outdoor baptism in the Dominican Republic.**

Photo courtesy of Mariano Ramirez

that we are totally dependent on God's free gift of grace for our salvation – not our own actions. Zwingli noted that Jesus taught that we must become “like children” to enter the kingdom of God. Infant baptism, like circumcision for the Jews of the Old Testament, was a sign of inclusion into the body of believers and a commitment on the part of believers to raise that child in the ways of God.

### Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of baptism

So when Anabaptist leaders began to challenge the practice of infant baptism, people reacted with confusion, anger, and eventually, violence.

For Anabaptists, the primary argument for believer's baptism, as opposed to infant baptism, rests on a bedrock principle of the Reformation itself: “Scripture alone.” In their reading of the New Testament, the Anabaptists of the 16th century could find no scriptural justification for the practice of baptizing babies. Instead, Jesus' teachings explicitly linked baptism with repentance and belief – something that an infant clearly could not do. While instructing the disciples to preach the good news of the gospel, for example, Jesus promised, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). The sequence here is clear: belief comes first, then baptism.

At the end of his ministry, in a final admonition to the disciples, Jesus

again spoke of baptism. “Therefore go,” he told the disciples in Matthew 28:19-20, “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.”

Here again, the order is important. Jesus commanded his followers to first “make disciples,” and then to baptize with the expectation that the new converts would also be taught to obey Christ's commandments. In other words, people become followers of Jesus by hearing, understanding and responding to a call – just as the first disciples had done.

This same sequence reoccurs in the story of the first baptisms of the apostolic church as recorded in Acts 2. The story begins with Peter preaching a sermon to a crowd of Jews who have gathered in Jerusalem for the annual celebration of the Passover. He ended his sermon with a call to repentance. “Those who accepted his message,” the account concludes, “were baptized.”

For Anabaptists – and the groups that came after them – the commitment to follow Jesus implied a conversion or “turning around” – a radical reorientation of priorities – symbolized by baptism, that could lead to persecution and even death. Not a decision that could be made by an infant!

### The meaning of baptism: A three-stranded cord

So when Anabaptist leaders began to challenge the practice of infant baptism, people reacted with confusion, anger, and eventually, violence.

Symbols, of course, can have more than just one meaning. Drawing on a verse from 1 John 5, the Anabaptists frequently described baptism as a kind of three-stranded cord: spirit, water and blood all pointed to essential qualities of baptism:

Children of God are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ and follow his commandments. Three things, 1 John says, testify that Jesus is the Son of God: “the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement” (1 John 5:8).

1. At its most basic level, baptism is a visible sign of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. It is a public recognition that the believer has repented of sin, has accepted God's forgiveness, and has “turned their life over to Christ.”

Baptism celebrates the gift of salvation – the gift of God's loving, forgiving and enabling grace.

2. At the same time, baptism is also a sign of membership in a new community. In the baptism of water, we place ourselves into the “care, discipline and fellowship of the community.” At baptism, we promise to “give and receive counsel,” to share our possessions, and to serve in the broader mission of the church.

Salvation in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is never purely private or inward; our faith is always expressed in relationships with others.

3. Finally, in baptism, new believers promise to follow in the way of Jesus; to live as he lived and taught, even if that includes – as it did for Jesus – misunderstanding, persecution, suffering or even death. It is not enough to claim the forgiveness of sins or to have your name included in a church membership list. Baptism also implies a way of life that looks like Jesus – a way of life that loves God with your whole heart, and loves your neighbour as yourself.

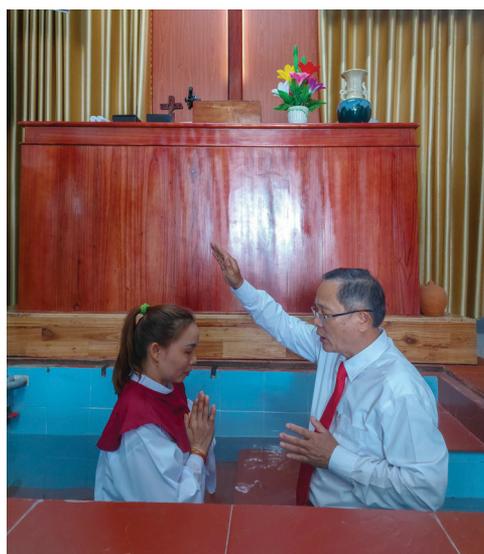
The Anabaptists in the 16th century sought to recover these teachings that had gone out of focus in the history of the church – based on these biblical insights, they understood baptism as a sign of the Spirit's transforming presence; as a mark of membership in a community; and a readiness to follow Christ, even at great cost.



John Roth is secretary of the Faith and Life Commission. Professor of history at Goshen College, he is a member of Berkey Avenue Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana, USA.



Watch this presentation online.



Pastor Sang Nguyen Minh baptizes Nguyen Thi Lien in Vietnam.

Photo courtesy Hoi An Mennonite Church

# “Believe and Be Baptized: A Global Conversation on Baptism”

## Giving and Receiving within the Body of Christ: Learning from the Mennonite-Catholic-Lutheran Conversations on Baptism

by Thomas R Yoder Neufeld

*The second webinar examined the report: **Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church—Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012–2017.***

*Thomas R Yoder Neufeld interviewed Larry Miller, co-secretary of the Mennonite delegation in the trilateral conversations.*

*Scan here to read the report*



**Tom Yoder Neufeld**

Can you tell us how these conversations came about?

**Larry Miller**

The trilateral conversation on baptism grew out of two previous Mennonite World Conference conversations, one with the Catholic Church (1998-2003) and the other with the Lutheran World Federation (2005-2008). In each case, it was the first official conversation at the global level between these churches and the Anabaptist-Mennonite family of faith since the conflicts of the 16th century – conflicts not least over the meaning and practice of baptism.

The goal of each of those conversations was better understanding of and better relationships with one another.

A foundational point of divergence highlighted in both conversations was baptism.

The question of focused conversation on baptism arose with these two churches at about the same time (2009-2010). MWC

leadership agreed that such conversation was important, but thought that we could not undertake simultaneously two global conversations on baptism. So, we proposed a trilateral dialogue.

**Tom Yoder Neufeld**

Were there surprises, both positive and negative?

**Larry Miller**

Yes, there were some of each of those for the MWC delegation.

We were surprised to hear the Catholic delegation report that some Catholic theologians refer to adult baptism as “normative” in Catholic doctrinal and liturgical history since, as they said, “it is the form that fully expresses the meaning of baptism” and that Catholic “history clearly shows that it is the rite for adults that is the model of the baptismal process” (Report, §79 and footnote 97).

We were surprised by the ready theological agreement on the different elements included on the path of incorporation into the church and life in the body of Christ: the loving initiative of God’s grace, the human response of faith and commitment, times of catechism and spiritual formation, a life-long process of growing in the faith and discipleship.

We were surprised by how strongly the three delegations agreed that baptism is for discipleship. Baptism into discipleship is not only a Mennonite thing!

For me, this is one of the most important fruits of the conversation. “All three of our churches see repentance, faith and committed discipleship as necessarily related to Christian life within the body of Christ, the Church, which has as one of its essential starting points the celebration and reception of baptism” (Report, §79).

I was surprised and humbled to feel that it seemed more difficult for us Mennonites to confess the tension between our ideal theology of baptism and the way we too often don’t live out the implications of our baptism than it seemed to be for the Catholic and the Lutheran delegations to confess the gap between their theology and, sometimes, their practice.

I was surprised and embarrassed to learn, as I listened to the Catholic and

Lutheran delegations, how little I have considered the deep pain some Catholics and Lutherans feel when we automatically reject the validity of their baptisms, especially when they opened the path of the baptized to repentance, confession of faith, and a life of discipleship.

### Tom Yoder Neufeld

Were there obstacles that emerged during your interactions?

### Larry Miller

How were we to present contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings and practices given the diversity of understandings and practices in our worldwide family of faith today?

As general secretary of MWC for a couple of decades, I was deeply aware of this diversity. Even between the several different churches from which delegation members came, there was significant diversity. This is why in the “Concluding Mennonite Reflections” of the report (§116-133) the delegation speaks only for itself: not for Mennonite World Conference, not for the wider Anabaptist-Mennonite family of faith.

After five years of meetings, each one with multiple presentations and intense debate, how do we write a final report that can only include what each delegation considers essential?

### Tom Yoder Neufeld

What were the greatest gifts received? Did you come away grateful for what God has graced us with, in our own communion in relation to baptism?

### Larry Miller

I did come away grateful for what God has given to the church through the Anabaptist-Mennonite family of faith, thanks to our understandings and practices of baptism. In these conversations and already in the preparation for them, I saw more clearly the significance of this gift not only for ourselves, but for the entire Christian church.

The conversations made clear how significantly the situation has changed since the 16th century.

Then, believers baptism as practiced by Anabaptists provoked hostility

and sometimes persecution by Lutheran and Catholic authorities.

Now, those churches officially recognize and respect Anabaptist-Mennonite baptism of persons not previously baptized. I think that this transformation is a sign that God’s grace has worked through us in spite of our weaknesses and failures.

What are the greatest gifts offered to us in this dialogue?

The “challenges” we received from the other churches (cf. paragraphs 124-130), especially:

- The challenge to better hold together in our understanding of conversion and baptism an awareness of our continuing tendency to go against God, on the one hand, and the possibility of faithfully following Jesus Christ, on the other.
- The challenge not to allow our concern for the human response in conversion, commitment and baptism to overshadow God’s initiative in every aspect of salvation, including baptism. Adult baptism begins with God’s act of grace, not with my personal confession of faith. Discipleship depends on God’s enduring grace, not on my proper baptism.



**A coronavirus baptism in Canada.**

Photo supplied



**A baptism in Burkina Faso.**

Photo courtesy of Siaka Traoré

- The challenge to develop greater consistency and depth in preparing people for baptism and in making remembrance of our baptisms a recurrent motif of discipleship. Believers baptism is a life-long journey not a one-day event, even if it is adult baptism.

If we take these challenging gifts seriously, I believe that we will be enriched immeasurably.

### Tom Yoder Neufeld

The Mennonite delegation have put recommendations to us as churches of the MWC: namely, that we “consider” taking into membership those who were once baptized as infants, who have owned their baptism and lived it out faithfully, and that we do so without requiring (re) baptism. Could you elaborate on that?

### Larry Miller

At the end of the trilateral conversation and report, the MWC delegation reaffirmed the “historic belief” of Anabaptist-Mennonite churches that “the baptism of believers is the normative teaching and practice of the New Testament” and that “this teaching and practice is normative today” (§131).

We also affirmed the oneness of Anabaptist-Mennonite believers “with the whole body of Christ in trinitarian faith lived out through trust in and obedience to Jesus Christ” (§132). Taken together, these two affirmations raise implicitly the question of how we bear witness to oneness in Christ when we are divided in some aspects of our understandings and practices of a foundational Christian act, baptism.

The problem may not be quite as great for the Catholic church and for Lutheran churches. Both are deeply pained by our rejection of their infant baptisms since they feel it is also a rejection of what they believe to be Christ’s gracious action and promise, in infant baptism, of communion with Christ.

Nevertheless, today, both officially recognize and accept as valid Anabaptist-Mennonite baptism of persons not previously baptized.

They have moved a long way since the 16th century!

The situation may be more difficult for us since we do not affirm or practice infant baptism. It may be most complicated for us in those cases where a person seeking membership in an Anabaptist-Mennonite church was baptized as an infant but has previously, as an adult, confirmed personal faith in Christ and been living a life of committed discipleship. Must that person be baptized again? Or is a public personal confession of faith and commitment to continued discipleship sufficient for membership in an Anabaptist congregation?

In regard to a still more specific question, what should an Anabaptist-Mennonite church do if the candidate for church membership requests rebaptism? Could the process of discernment prior to reception of the believer into the Anabaptist-Mennonite church include a conversation between the candidate, the church of origin, and the receiving church out of respect for one another, to bear witness to one another, and thus together to seek more unity in the body of Christ, including the local body of Christ?

The delegation proposed (§133a) that consideration be given these questions by our churches as we seek to affirm both baptism for following Christ – discipleship – and oneness in Christ.

The delegation also proposes (§133c) that, however these questions are answered, our churches ask all members – including those being received from churches with infant baptismal practices – to affirm our historic understanding and practice of adult believers baptism.

I would like to call attention to the fact that the delegation suggests several other ideas for consideration which may contribute more significantly to the shaping of our churches’ spiritual life than does the matter of how we receive believers baptized as infants (cf. §133d-f).

Specifically, the delegation suggests that our churches consider:

- Looking for ways of enriching or developing practices of thanksgiving and blessing for infants, for their parents, and for the local nurturing congregations.
- Providing occasions for all members to “remember their baptism” and to

renew their baptismal commitment to a life of discipleship.

- Reflecting on why it has been so difficult for many churches of our tradition to hold together faithful discipleship and unity with one another and with others. We are a church known ecumenically not only for adult baptism and Christian discipleship but also for church splits.

### Tom Yoder Neufeld

Any final comments you’d like to share?

### Larry Miller

The report is published “as a study document” – not as a legislative document – in the hope that, through wide discussion both within the three communions and beyond, it will contribute to “better mutual understanding and greater faithfulness to Jesus Christ.”

That is certainly my hope: that our three communions grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

### Tom Yoder Neufeld

It is my prayer and all of ours that the efforts of you and the others who participated in these six years of conversation will enable us to become more faithful to our baptismal vows in how we live out our new life in Christ.

## Surprising gifts

We can sense the great gift that comes when sisters and brothers, who have often been deeply at odds with each other, take courage to live into the unity we have in Christ. This is a unity *not dependent* on agreement, but on the foundational reality that it is the same God who in Christ, through the Spirit, has brought us together into the one body of Christ.

**We practice believers baptism because practically all our members are converted members. (They don’t come from a Mennonite or protestant or evangelical family.) Baptism is an important part to commit to following Jesus with a community of believers who confess Jesus as their Lord and Saviour and together they want to follow Jesus.**

— Carlos García Martínez, Mexico



**A baptism in Thailand.**

Photo courtesy ICOMB

In this exchange with Catholics and Lutherans we have an example of that gift of the Spirit being received together with communions we have been deeply estranged from over one of the central events in a Christian's life, baptism.

Let me highlight a few "surprising gifts" from the report.

## Grace

For Catholics and Lutherans, baptism is first and foremost *God's* act of grace. *God* is the actor in this sacrament, whether baptism of infants or adults. This is how God deals with "original sin" and begins the lifelong work of transformation and incorporation into the body of Christ.

This can help us understand why Catholics and Lutherans believe it is important to offer such saving grace already at the very beginning of a person's life. True, faith is required, but in cases of infants it is primarily the faith of parents and church. We can then also better understand why Catholics and Lutherans are troubled by Anabaptists rejecting the baptism of infants. In their eyes, we are rejecting the gracious action of God.

Of course, as Anabaptists, we too treasure God's grace. In the Anabaptist understanding it is God's grace through the Spirit that calls persons and enables them to seek God, to offer their lives to God, and, finally, in baptism to pledge themselves to following Christ in discipleship and participation in the local gathering of believers.

All of that is the enabling and saving grace of God at work – before, during and after baptism.

Nevertheless, might we too easily lose sight of God's grace when we as Anabaptists put such emphasis on the believer's own decision to seek baptism, and to commit to discipleship and church?

## Discipleship

Another surprising gift Larry identified was to learn that **discipleship** is not a Mennonite or Anabaptist concern only, but one Catholics and Lutherans share.

Of course, there were serious differences among the delegations on what discipleship looks like.

For example, one serious difference between the communions is how the church relates to the state and its demands, especially the bearing of arms. And that connects, of course, to the central importance Anabaptists place on nonresistance and nonviolence.

All agreed strongly, however, that baptism is intimately linked to discipleship, to "living out our baptism," as they put it in the Report.

## Falling short in living out our baptism

All three communions named and lamented the great distance that exists between often beautiful and profound theology of baptism, on one hand, and

the way many of the baptized fail to "live out their baptism," on other.

We can join Catholics and Lutherans in stressing the importance of **formation**, as the Catholics put it, or "remembering baptism" as Lutherans like to speak of it.

Perhaps as Mennonites we can recover something of the basic meaning of being a disciple, namely, to be a student, a learner. And that means also teaching about baptism and how to live it.

## Taking up the invitation of Mennonites "to consider"

The Mennonite delegates fully affirm that "believers baptism" is the most biblically faithful understanding.

The second conviction is that we must be biblically faithful as well to Christ's prayer that we live into the unity we have by God's grace with those who too are members of the body of the Christ.

The Mennonite delegation is asking us to honour *both* the desire to be biblically faithful *and* Christ's call to living into the unity God has already created in Christ through his Spirit.

It is an astonishing moment in time when members of Christ's body that have often been so very tragically hostile to each other are jointly wanting to build each other up, together to encourage Christians to be more faithful in discipleship to Christ in living out their baptism.

Let's take this splendid opportunity as an Anabaptist/Mennonite family of churches to make this call for living *out* and *into* our baptism a central part of our Renewal process leading up to 2028 – and beyond.



Thomas R Yoder Neufeld is chair of the Faith and Life Commission. Theology professor emeritus, he is a member of First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.



Watch this presentation online.

The Renewal 2022 will be held in conjunction with Assembly 17 in Indonesia.

# Baptism in a barrel



It is very difficult to go to the northern part of Ethiopia after the war broke out. Despite the security concerns, when I heard that members of our church in western Tigray were in difficult conditions, I organized a team. We would go there to show our love for MKC members in the area.

The situation is dire. Pre-war infrastructure, housing and commercial activity are no longer there. It's empty.

We were able to visit the towns where MKC local churches still exist. At a place called Abduraf, there was a new convert who received training in basic Christian doctrines and was ready for water baptism. Unfortunately, before he was baptized, the war broke out. Church leaders were scattered; the new believer could not get water baptism.

When we visited the area, this new believer came and asked me to baptize him. When I inquired about his testimony, the local believers told me that he had learned the truth but had not yet been baptized.

We often baptize people in a river or in a big bathtub. Neither was available in the area. I told him that baptism was not possible there.

The new believer thought a little and told me that I could baptize him in a barrel.

But there was scarcity of water in the area. Undeterred, he and other believers purchased jerrycans of water and filled the barrel with water.

Then I began to wonder how this man could get into a barrel. He replied, "I have military training, I can."

The believers brought me a white robe with a cross for me to look like a priest. They also brought one for the new believer. I dressed him in a white robe with a cross and baptized him in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

To my surprise, he was filled with the Holy Spirit as soon as he got out of the barrel. I was amazed! I had never seen a person filled with the Holy Spirit in such a difficult situation.

Everyone thanked God. We forgot that we were in an insecure zone. We all felt God's presence.

What was happening seemed to be like watching a drama, not a reality. It was a unique incident to witness.

After he was baptized, the believers received him by singing. They gave him hugs one by one and said, "Congratulations."

Our brother rejoiced that he was baptized.

"In an impossible situation, God opened the way for me to be baptized. This day is historic for me. God sent the president of our church to baptize me."

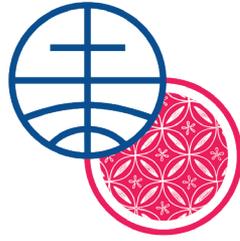
God is everywhere regardless of the situations and is doing God's business when we are willing to go into the world and share the good news to people.



**Desalegn Abebe is president of Meserete Kristos Church (Christ our Foundation), an MWC member church in Ethiopia.**

## The barrel baptism

Photo courtesy Desalegn Abebe



## Indonesia 2022

05-10  
07 2022

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

Jessica and Assembly team  
met in Semarang, Indonesia in  
late 2019. Photo: Liesa Unger



Gamelan ensemble from  
Conrad Grebel College,  
Pennsylvania 2015.  
Photo: Dania Ciptadi



Art exhibition,  
Pennsylvania 2015.  
Photo: MWC



Collaborative art project,  
Pennsylvania 2015.  
Photo: Jonathon Charles



## A Celebration of Cultures

*"My first Assembly was in Calcutta, India, in 1997 – a gawky 17-year-old then! I volunteered at the first ever Global Church Village where I worked with an international group of 18 people. The entire experience helped me see that even though we are from different cultures and languages, we worship the same God."*

Those were the words of Jessica Mondal, Assembly's Global Church Village coordinator, about her first global church experience in her home country.

Fast forward six years, she attended another first: the Global Youth Summit (GYS) in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. "By being a GYS delegate, I saw that young leaders need to exhibit initiative and integrity that will enable church leaders to trust us."

Jessica Mondal has since become a part of church leadership in Emmanuel Chapel and later Hastings Chapel, both part of the Bharatiya Jukta Christa Prachar Mandali (BJCPM) conference in India. She taught Sunday school classes, was secretary of the church board, led worship, prayer meetings and Bible study. She now ministers as a pastor's wife while being the children's representative of the BJCPM conference for the last three years.

Assembly only circles back to the same continent every 25 years, so upon hearing that Indonesia would host the Assembly, she was already planning to come with her husband. "And then Liesa asked if I would like to organize the Global Church Village. I was immediately transported back to my experience in Calcutta, excited about bringing a miniature global village to life once more! I'm thankful for the opportunity to contribute," Jessica Mondal says.

The Global Church Village will be a celebration of what each Anabaptist culture represents, and will be available to virtual participants.

- Each continent will have a booth to host activities, display photos or videos of their churches, and share their perspective
- A stage will host a multitude of cultural performances
- A storytelling booth will host people who want to share their unique faith journeys
- Everyone will also be able to participate in a mural or collaborative art project

Indonesia as the host will be given its own space to showcase their diversity.

"Here, all Assembly participants can learn a little something about other cultures and churches. It will be a multisensory experience: people can taste, dance, sing, watch, listen, feel, and interact with each other!"

Jessica Mondal says.

Support Assembly by going to [mwc-cmm.org/donate](https://mwc-cmm.org/donate), click DONATE NOW and indicate that your donation is for Assembly.



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

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

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

## ASSEMBLY

### Assembly Scattered

Before and after Assembly Gathered various locations in Indonesia

1-4  
July  
2022

### Global Youth Summit (GYS)

Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia

#### Theme:

Life in the Spirit: Learn. Serve. Worship.

5-10  
July  
2022

### Assembly Gathered

Holy Stadium, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

#### Theme:

Following Jesus together across barriers

## Assembly Gathered Program

### July Daily Themes

- 05 Tuesday (opening): following Jesus together across barriers
- 06 Wednesday: following Jesus, learning together
- 07 Thursday: following Jesus, living together
- 08 Friday: following Jesus, caring together
- 09 Saturday: following Jesus, celebrating together
- 10 Sunday (closing): following Jesus together



Getting a henna at Global Church Village's Asia booth, 2015.  
Photo: Kazutomo Ray Epp

### Global Speakers, International Choir

For five days, be part of a multicultural worship experience that involves an international choir and ensemble, global speakers and a truly global communion. Apply to be part of the international choir on [mwc-cmm.org/A17choir](http://mwc-cmm.org/A17choir)



Global speakers.  
Photo: Kazutomo Ray Epp

### Global Church Village

Visit the fairground where people experience cultures represented in the global Anabaptist family. Learn our history, taste our food, participate in singing and dancing, listen to stories, or share your testimony!



Learn about MWC's work.  
Photo: Dania Ciptadi

### Tours, Service Projects, Anabaptist World Cup

Every afternoon offers an opportunity to learn, share and make friends. A wide array of tours, service projects and fun activities like the Anabaptist World Cup football tournament is lined up for you.



Many service opportunities.  
Photo: Jonathon Charles

### Workshop

Assembly offers sharing and discussions in peace and justice, youth, creation care, baptism, interfaith dialog, creative ministry and more! Or submit another topic to [mwc-cmm.org/A17workshops](http://mwc-cmm.org/A17workshops) if you feel called to host a virtual or in-person workshop.



Attend a different workshop every day.  
Photo: Jonathon Charles

### Children, Teen and Youth Program

Young people will have a special focus during all parts of the Assembly. From exploring Biblical messages, inspiring music, Young Anabaptist speakers, sports to service opportunities, there will be tons of fun!



Special programs for children, teens and youth. Photo: Dania Ciptadi

### For more information

[Indonesia2021@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:Indonesia2021@mwc-cmm.org)



Print your own Assembly poster; share information about Assembly.  
[mwc-cmm.org](http://mwc-cmm.org)

## Registration

Registration opens in December 2021

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

There will be special rates for children, youth, families, volunteers and GYS attendees.

Please see website for more details: [mwc-cmm.org/A17-registration](http://mwc-cmm.org/A17-registration)

### Lodging, breakfast included

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

### Registration fee GYS:

including food and lodging  
**A \$15, B \$35, C \$75, D \$275 US, E Rp. 200.000** depending on country of citizenship (see rate groups on website).

### Online Registration Fee

#### Assembly

**A - \$US 0, B \$US 25, C \$US 50, D \$US 150, E IDR 200,000**

#### GYS

**A - \$US 0, B \$US 12, C \$US 25, D \$US 75, E IDR 100,000**



Indonesia  
2022

## Austria

# To overcome obstacles in unanimity

## Mennonitischen Freikirche Österreich (MFÖ) / Mennonite Free Church of Austria

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*The Mennonite Free Church in Vienna is the community in which I had the privilege of growing up. We are a small but incredibly family-oriented church, centred around Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*

*I can identify myself very well with the Mennonites because they see themselves as commissioned by God to bring about peace and to meet one another – and one’s neighbor – in love.*

*In practical terms, this means that as a “living community,” we are constantly faced with challenges and a variety of difficulties. Nevertheless, there is the willingness and love to grow together with these obstacles and to want to overcome them in unanimity. However, unanimity does not mean that we always have one and the same opinion, but that we want to submit to the decision made together in the community meeting in peace.*

*When I was baptized in faith in September 2011, I personally made the decision to serve in this church and therefore officially asked for membership. Since taking this step, I can say that it is incredibly blessing and enriching to follow Christ in the midst of God’s great family.*

*I have been encouraged so often by other members to serve God with my personal gifts (in praise and in children’s services). I have learned a lot, experienced ups and downs and have been carried through difficulties. My character was formed; I can gratefully state that I have a patient Lord who is patient with me, even when I face the same problem for the third time.*

Franziska, a member of MFWien, a Mennonite congregation in Vienna, Austria

## Mennonitischen Freikirche Österreich (MFÖ) / Mennonite Free Church of Austria

Since the beginning of organized Mennonites in Austria, participation in Mennonite World Conference has been shared with German Mennonite Brethren national churches: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Deutschland (AMBD) and the Vereinigung der Menoniten Brudergemein von Bavaria (VMBB). After the AMBD was accepted as a member of the MWC, the MFÖ has been represented by its own delegate.

The MFÖ currently consists of 6 parishes with 385 members. After the number of members had slowly decreased for almost two decades because two congregations were closed and four church planting works were unsuccessful, an increase in members was recorded in 2019. Unfortunately, the “corona year” 2020 stopped this tentative growth of the MFÖ.

### History

Anabaptism, starting in Switzerland, spread very quickly in the Habsburg hereditary lands. It is estimated that about one third of the population, next to the Catholics and Lutherans, were Anabaptists. However, the Habsburg monarchs saw themselves as defenders of the Roman Catholic church and thus fought the Reformation. Many Lutherans and Anabaptists were expelled from Austria. While “secret Protestants” may have existed in remote mountain areas, the Anabaptists disappeared.

Only after the Second World War did Mennonites come to Austria again to help the Mennonite refugees from Eastern Europe. Communities have emerged through the refugee work in Upper



**A baptism in the Steyr congregation**

Photo courtesy MFO

**Mennonites were allowed to serve with a balancing position between widely differing attitudes, such as charismatics and evangelicals can have. It seems that Mennonite peace-loving serenity is valued.**

Austria and Vienna. Missionaries from the Mennonite Brethren were active in Upper Austria. A community was founded in Vienna, in cooperation between MCC and Sonnenberggemeinde in Switzerland.

The Mennonite congregations, like other Free Church congregations, were not recognized as churches in Austria. This has resulted in a variety of disadvantages. In order to remedy this unequal treatment towards the recognized churches, the Roman Catholic church, the Lutheran and Reformed churches, the Institute for Legal Philosophy of the University of Vienna and the ecumenical movement “Paths of Reconciliation – the round table” have endeavoured, in cooperation with the Free Churches, to obtain state recognition of the Free Churches (FKÖ). This was achieved in 2013 through the merger of the Free Church conferences of Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostal and charismatic movements, the Elaia Christian community and the MFÖ.

In 2019, the Bruderhof movement was accepted into the MFÖ as the Bruderhof parish Austria.

Today the MFÖ consists of six parishes in Gmunden, Linz, Retz, Steyr, Wels and Vienna, with 385 baptized members.

The people in our communities consist mainly of Austrians and members of various European and non-European countries. Because of the international refugee movements, people from the Middle East find a home in our communities. Therefore, the composition of the churches is very international, more in the larger cities, as expected.

Many of our members come from Catholicism, some from the evangelical church. Due to the short history of the Free Churches in Austria, there are only a few Christians of the second generation and hardly any third generation.

Currently, the congregations have sent missionaries to Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan and support them financially and with prayer.



**An outdoor fellowship meal at the Steyr congregation in Austria.**

Photo courtesy MFO

## Challenges

The Mennonite churches are small. The largest community is in Wels with around 100 members. Three churches have employed pastors on a part-time basis. Two churches are led by people who provide spiritual and practical leadership for their communities in addition to their full-time employment. In the foreseeable future, many leaders who have been tried and tested over many years will have to be replaced by younger colleagues – who in turn are busy with their professional and family tasks.

In the communities there are also young families and co-workers whose heartfelt concern is to plant churches.

In these matters too, the pandemic was and is a significant obstruction.

Our people have brought different theological ideas from their personal stories and religious backgrounds. There is clear influence of the Brethren Movement through literature and influences of North American evangelicalism. What is typically “Mennonite” is less understood; as a more or less interesting history. Our pastors do not come from a Mennonite tradition, but from other traditions and therefore they do not have an eye for what is special in being Anabaptist. It remains to be hoped and expected that by participating in international Mennonite events our pastors and co-workers will discover these particularities.

## Opportunities

The Austrian population is very traditional and likes to orientate itself towards decisions made by authorities. This could be an aftermath of the long monarchical rule in Austria.

As a result of the state accreditation, the Free Churches surprisingly have a significantly better acceptance among the population and, above all, with the authorities. Even if the diversity of the Free Churches still represents a considerable problem of understanding, explanations from the accredited Free Churches are increasingly being requested. The FKÖ therefore has the opportunity to join boards that discuss topics of high relevance to society and also the chance to help to shape those boards, both in ecclesiastical and political directions. Dialogue with other churches and religious societies is also more possible now.

Through the Mennonites’ 500-year history of Anabaptism, Austrian society realizes the European roots of the Free Churches, as well as permanence, consistency and also reliability – good signs of an old tradition.

Years ago, controversy and sometimes

## Austria

### MWC member:

***Mennonitischen Freikirche Österreich (MFÖ) / Mennonite Free Church of Austria***

Baptized Members	385
Congregations (2021)	6

Source: MFO (2021)

enmity between the Anabaptist-minded traditions and other Free Churches was possible, now the collaboration has led to much more respectful togetherness.

Within the FKÖ, Mennonites were allowed to serve with a balancing position between widely differing attitudes, such as charismatics and evangelicals can have. It seems that Mennonite peace-loving serenity is valued.

The five Conferences within the Free Church of Austria (FKÖ) have the chance to prove themselves in everyday interaction and thereby show that it is possible to be unified without having to give up one’s own identity. With the belief of the Evangelical Alliance, the FKÖ has given itself a theological framework and works with one voice on legal and social issues. Yet the conferences and their churches remain autonomous. In this way, Austrian society can be shown at once the diversity and unity of the five different traditions through our public appearance.

These or similar principles could also be exemplary beyond the borders of Austria.



**Reinhard Kummer is the presiding officer of Mennonitischen Freikirche Österreich (MFÖ) / Mennonite Free Church of Austria**



Read more



**Medical workers dispense vaccines at JKI Holy Stadium in Semarang, Indonesia.**

Photo courtesy JKI Injil Kerajaan



**Community members from a Quranic school attended the vaccination clinic at JKI Holy Stadium, Semarang, Indonesia.**

Photo courtesy JKI Injil Kerajaan



**Community member get their blood pressure taken before vaccination at JKI Holy Stadium, Semarang, Indonesia.**

Photo courtesy JKI Injil Kerajaan



**A UN worker displays a vaccine vial.**

Photo: UN/Nick Sells

## Love neighbours: share vaccines

In Tanzania – home to 66 744 baptized members of Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania – less than one percent of the population has received vaccination protection against COVID-19 (at time of writing).

Mennonite World Conference is calling on its members around the world to love their neighbours by donating to UNICEF’s campaign to share coronavirus vaccinations around the world.

While some countries are removing health restrictions, allowing vaccinated citizens to resume economic and leisure activities, others like Tanzania do not have enough supply to vaccinate their health care workers. This leaves the population vulnerable to illness and risks health care worker shortages. Some data models project it could take until 2024 to vaccinate the world population.

“The world has a lot of COVID-19 vaccines, but currently less than 1 per cent of global supply is reaching people in low-income countries,” UNICEF reports.

UNICEF aims to distribute 2 billion doses in more than 180 countries before the end of 2021. Through the global agreement known as COVAX Facility, UNICEF, in collaboration with the PAHO Revolving Fund, has been entrusted to lead vaccine delivery.

Donations to UNICEF cover costs of purchasing and distributing the vaccines, including transportation, cold chain protection, health worker training and safe disposal of waste.

In Canada, more than 70% of adults have received at least one vaccine dose. Aware of

their privilege, leaders at Hagerman Mennonite Church, Markham, Ontario, Canada, created a vaccination project to help multiply funding for more vaccinations worldwide.

“Our first step is to encourage our congregation to make personal donations,” says Andrew Reesor-McDowell, church member. These donations are matched both by Hagerman Mennonite and the Government of Canada.

“We felt it was important to try contribute where we can to this vaccine gap between Canada and poorer countries,” says Andrew Reesor-McDowell.

Mennonite World Conference joins with other faith-based organizations to call its members to share vaccines around the highly interconnected world by donating to the UN’s vaccination program through UNICEF.

“The story of Cain and Abel teaches us about the deep relationship of brotherhood and sisterhood that exists among all human beings (Genesis 4:7-10). The shepherd and the farmer, though they express different ways of relating to God, are relatives,” says César García, MWC general secretary. “This global pandemic challenges God’s invitation for us to take care of all humanity: are we going to consider the wellness of others over our interests?”

Did you give?

Email Henk Stenvers, MWC Deacons secretary at ✉ [vaccines@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:vaccines@mwc-cmm.org) to let MWC know you are supporting our global family in this way.



The Mennonite church in Rajnandgaon shares a meal together after Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday.

Photo: Preshit Rao

## #OneLunch

### What does lunch look like where you live?

What's your favourite food? Send us your recipe and photos so the global Anabaptist family can try your meal!

[photos@mw-cmm.org](mailto:photos@mw-cmm.org)

Did you know?

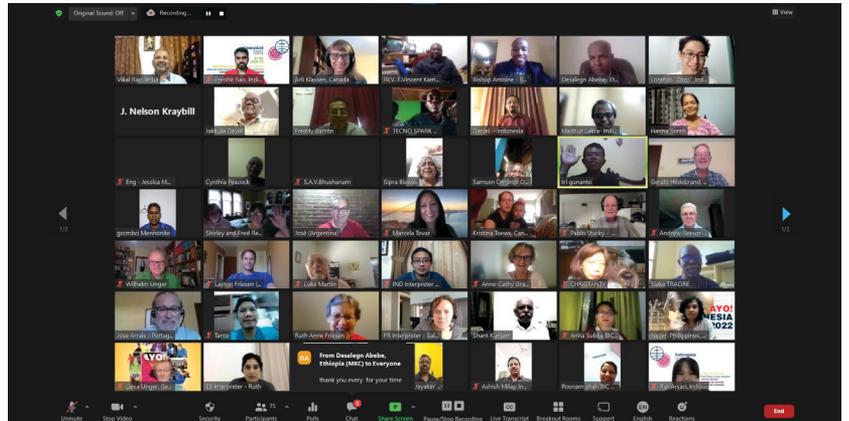
If every one of Mennonite World Conference's **1.47 million** baptized local church members donated the cost of **one lunch** in their community once a year, MWC would meet its budget for contributions by national member churches (Fair Share). This supports the networks and resources of MWC that serve the global family.

"Sacrificing one lunch is our humble way of giving thanks to God and supporting the ongoing ministry of God through MWC," says Arli Klassen, MWC regional representatives coordinator.

"**One Lunch** is only a small part of one's whole property, but a very apt symbol of sharing daily food/life," Hiroshi Mori, pastor Asahikawa congregation, Hokkaido Mennonite Conference.



Congregations often take a #OneLunch offering on Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday, but you can contribute at **any time of year** through your local church or directly to MWC.



From Argentina to Zimbabwe, church members share joys and sorrows during Online Prayer Hour.

## Executive Committee

# God works in digital ways

"The growth of digital platforms has increased the awareness of what our MWC family is doing during the pandemic," says Carlos Martínez García, Executive Committee member for Latin America and the Caribbean. "I realize a greater awareness that we are a global community."

With continuing pandemic restrictions on travel, 2021's Executive Committee meetings take place three times throughout the year as two days of 90-minute meetings on Zoom.

At April's meetings, the Executive Committee received reports from Administration, Commissions, Communications, Development, Operations, Regional Representatives and Mennonite Central Committee.

At the July meeting, they approved the Peace Commission's statement on conscientious objection, and two membership applications. The General Council will consider these proposals at the 2022 meetings.

"In the midst of the pandemic, natural disasters and difficult circumstances, churches have found in MWC a source of inspiration, consolation and support that contributes to affirming their faith, strength and hope," wrote Willi Hugo Perez, MWC regional representative for Latin America. The region has not only been battered by COVID-19 infections but also two hurricanes and existing crises of everyday violence and migration.

The pandemic resulted in job losses around the world which affected ability to give. Individual contributions are strong;

some areas of the budget were on pace at the July meeting; however, Assembly budget was only at six percent. "We still have a big task in raising funds for Assembly," says Sunoko Lin, MWC treasurer.

"The team working on Assembly preparations has shown outstanding flexibility and creativity dealing with many unknowns while planning a global event," says Chief International Events Officer Liesa Unger. The Assembly planning team is preparing a hybrid event for several possible scenarios – all with many online participants – from a widely attended in-person participation, to delegates and some on-site participants, to a fully online event if travel is not allowed.

"The possibility of relying on Zoom opened our eyes to new possibilities for witness and fellowship," says MWC president J. Nelson Kraybill.

However, online meetings highlight inequities of internet quality. Problems connecting prevented attendance for parts of the meeting, including vice-president Rebecca Osiro from Kenya.

The Executive Committee is discerning how to ensure equitable access to Assembly with all the economic and travel factors exacerbated by the pandemic.

"Finding new ways to connect, missing the old, but also shedding some old habits that were keeping us back without noticing so, COVID-19 has broadened our practice and strengthened our faith. God works in digital ways too," says Wieteke van der Molen, Executive Committee member for Europe.

—Mennonite World Conference release

## Meet your MWC Officers

The Executive Committee delegates responsibility to the **officers** to provide oversight to the life and work of MWC between its annual meetings.

- **president** and **vice-president** elected by the General Council,
- the **general secretary** (ex officio) appointed by the General Council
- a **treasurer** appointed by the Executive Committee

An **officer** must be a member of an MWC member church, and must be approved by his/her member church.

### Officers

#### General Secretary: César García



**Congregation:** First Mennonite Church, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

*We are grateful for the gifts we share in our family of faith: missionaries who have given their lives to bear witness to Christ; brothers and sisters willing to serve the needy; teachers who disciple others with their life and character; pastors who care for local congregations; donors who give generously to the work of Christ; peacemakers who model a new way of dealing with conflicts in the manner of Jesus. Our global community is greatly blessed!*

#### President: J. Nelson Kraybill



**Congregation:** Prairie Street Mennonite, Elkhart, Indiana, USA

*Through MWC relationships, I have seen the greatest hope, deepest faith and most life-giving Christian community among Christians in places of material or political insecurity. Power and wealth create a false sense of self-sufficiency instead of a bedrock of unshakeable assurance and joy in knowing Jesus.*

#### Vice-President: Rebecca Osiro



**Congregation:** Eastleigh Mennonite Church, Nairobi, Kenya

*MWC's genius is fellowship and networking. We share our stories. We come together and find that we are one. We find strength beyond class, beyond status. MWC gives me courage.*

#### Treasurer: Sunoko Lin



**Congregation:** Maranatha Christian Fellowship, Reseda, California, USA

*Serving the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church has deepened my spiritual formation. My prayer for the global church is that God would bring peace, comfort and hope to suffering members of Anabaptist/Mennonite global family impacted by COVID-19. This has brought a great loss: not only human lives but also economic severity in many developing countries. God, have mercy!*

#### President-elect: Henk Stenvers



**Congregation:** Doopsgezinde Gemeente Bussum-Naarden, Netherlands

*What I have learned through serving the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church is to appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in all parts of the world, in so many different contexts, creating a wonderful diverse communion.*



Photo: Lorenzo Fellycyando

### Online Prayer Hour

## A blanket of prayer

“What a beautiful and rich experience it was to join in this prayer meeting,” says Kathy Giesbrecht, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada; associate director of leadership ministries, Mennonite Church Manitoba.

She participated in one of Mennonite World Conference's bimonthly online prayer meetings.

“I suspect I shall share my experience widely, as I was deeply moved by being joined in prayer with our global family.”

During a one hour Zoom call, the MWC Deacons Commission and regional representatives offer a brief welcome and reflection in English (with simultaneous interpretation into Spanish, French, Hindi and Indonesian), then participants are divided into smaller language-based breakout rooms to pray together for around 40 minutes.

The hour concludes with brief reports from each room leader.

“In this one hour, a blanket of prayer is laid upon the world,” says Henk Stenvers, Netherlands; Deacons Commission secretary.

After a closing prayer, the call remains open for a joyously chaotic time of multilingual greetings as friends from around the world recognize each other and call out blessings.

Visit [mwc-cmm.org/online-prayer-hour-registration](https://mwc-cmm.org/online-prayer-hour-registration) to register for the next online prayer meeting.



#### Next events

- Friday, 19 November 2021
- Friday, 21 January 2022
- Friday, 18 March 2022
- Friday, 20 May 2022

## President's column

# A changed life

At a place where springs appear in the desert east of the Jordan River, a guide explains that this is where John baptized Jesus – at “Bethany beyond the Jordan” (John 1). Modern wooden structures stand where early Christians once built churches.

Here, John called crowds to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.



In the desert east of the Jordan River, a guide explains this is where John baptized Jesus.

Photo: J. Nelson Kraybill

Repentance meant a changed life: people with plenty of food and clothing must share, tax collectors must be honest, soldiers must not abuse their power (Luke 3).

Jesus did not need baptism to mark forgiveness of sins. But “repentance” also can mean a turn in life direction.

Empowered at baptism by the Spirit, Jesus turned from private life to fully embrace God’s call to proclaim the reign of God.

Jesus crossed the Jordan where Israelites once crossed into the land God had promised.

There, Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness, rejection at Nazareth, harassment from religious and political leaders, and eventually the cross.

Along the way, he called disciples, healed, forgave, feasted, taught, loved, and prayed.

Baptism was costly for Jesus, and it is for us. Mercifully, few of us will meet a violent end at the hands of opponents. But the life turnaround that follows baptism means we move away from ego-centered living to a discipline of following Jesus. Daily choices of obedience to God are the path to a meaningful life. Jesus, “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12).

Early Anabaptists spoke of a triple baptism—water, Spirit and blood. Who do you know who paid a high price for keeping baptismal promises?

What self-centred impulses are you ready to leave behind in the waters of baptism to follow Jesus in joy and resurrection power?



J. Nelson Kraybill is president of MWC (2015–2022). He lives in Indiana, USA.



Scan to donate

Photo courtesy MFO

## Be a part of MWC's work

You make a difference in the Mennonite World Conference family through your prayers and financial gifts.

Your contributions help to

- support and sustain the worldwide community of Anabaptist churches grounded in Jesus
- grow a thriving global communion through MWC commissions, networks and gatherings
- uphold service and witness in our faith communities

Visit [mwc-cmm.org](http://mwc-cmm.org) to get involved.

Or

Send your cheque and share your story by mail to

- PO Box 5364, Lancaster, PA 17808 USA
- 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA

Thank you for participating in the MWC global family!



## Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday worship materials

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

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

Materials for 2022 were prepared by Indonesian church leaders on the Assembly theme “**Following Jesus together**” from the texts Genesis 12:1-5; Psalm 1-4, 24, 31-33; John 20:19-23; 1 Corinthians 12:3-13.

- God’s call to Abraham and Sarah expanded to include all **followers of Jesus**, a call to be a blessing to the world.
- As creatures of God’s creation and **followers of Jesus** we together testify to the glory of God.
- As **followers of Jesus** in MWC, we come together as a communion – sisters and brothers in Christ – learning from each other and supporting each other in times of suffering and joy.

Download this resource to celebrate Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday in your local congregation with the global Anabaptist family in January or at whatever time is convenient for your congregation in 2022.

Send pictures and stories from your congregation’s celebration to [photos@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:photos@mwc-cmm.org)

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

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#AnabaptistWorldFellowshipSunday



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Photo: Karla Braun

## Dialogue: “Through the Word”

“For those who do not want to believe, no argument is valid, and for those who want to believe, arguments are not necessary.”

I shared that phrase (from an unknown author) with a friend in Ontario a few days ago. We talked about how difficult it is to see someone change their position on any topic due to a conversation that contains logical and rational arguments. In matters of faith, it is even more complicated, because commonly each party in a discussion on doctrinal or ethical issues believes that they are right.

Have you seen someone change their thinking as a result of listening to a logical debate?

The phrase: “Oh yes, I was sure of what I believed, but after listening to you, I changed my position,” is not expected in my experience. Instead, I have seen emotions get involved in the discussion, voices raised, and conversation partners fail to listen and understand in their rush to respond and contradict.

In my talk with my friend, we concluded that changes in our thinking are more of a long-term process. Often, it requires at least a constant and cordial relationship rather than well-structured and logical arguments.

However, dialogue between disciples of Jesus is essential to strengthen identity and foster unity in the body of Christ.

We find an example of this in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 24. In verses 13-35, we hear the story of two disciples who argued, with a certain level of disagreement, about the person of Jesus and the events around his death. That conversation was indispensable for the growth of the disciples’ identity as followers of the risen one. It was also vital for their unity, found in the communion or breaking of bread with Christ at the table.

What if the disciples had rejected the possibility of conversation given the security of their convictions? Speaking with the sincere desire to listen and understand the other requires an immense degree of humility and openness. Without this attitude, both components of following Jesus – identity and unity – are impossible, according to Luke’s text.

The doctrinal and ethical dialogues that we develop within and outside of our fellowship at Mennonite World Conference (in official inter-church conversations, for example) have the intention to build our identity and maintain the gift of unity that only the Spirit of God makes possible. Dialogue between churches requires clarity and firmness in our convictions and humility and openness in our encounters.

That is why in this issue of *Courier*, we highlight the conversations that we have recently had within our communion regarding baptism and the inter-church dialogue that we have developed on this subject in recent years with the Catholic church and with the Lutheran World Federation.

It is my prayer that, as a global church, we maintain clear and firm positions in a framework of humility and openness that allows us to grow in identity and unity as disciples of Christ. May our understanding continue to be enlightened by the presence of Jesus, and our hearts keep burning as the Spirit works in our lives and relationships!



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