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New leadership, new headquarters in Bogotá

# Taking stock

## With new leadership, new headquarters, what is in store for MWC?

By Jewel Showalter



Photo Liesa Unger

When I attended my first Mennonite World Conference assembly in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1962, I remember sitting cross-legged on a gymnasium floor with other youth. I'd just come from Ethiopia—where I had been surrounded by brown faces at the Bible Academy, a high school begun by the Mennonite Mission in Ethiopia.

Here at the assembly I was surrounded by white faces—primarily North American and European. Yet we leapt to our feet to shout out the countries we represented. There was a smattering of international reps, but no Ethiopians—so I decided to be the Ethiopian rep. This was to be a *world* conference.

Today the Meserete Kristos Church of Ethiopia, with more than 218,000 baptized members, is the largest single MWC member body. MKC also sends and supports 335 local and international missionaries.

That MKC now sends almost triple the number of missionaries as Eastern Mennonite Missions, the organization that first sent missionaries to Ethiopia in 1948, is just one example of the growth

that is driving the changes in MWC leadership and office location.

The MKC story is multiplied throughout the Global South where vibrant young churches are changing the face of global Anabaptism.

What does this shift in the center of gravity among Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches mean—in the North and in the South? How does it feel?

In 2011 César García, a first generation Mennonite, was named the new General Secretary for MWC, and in early 2012 the MWC head office relocated from Strasburg, France, to Bogotá, Colombia. What does this symbolize? What is it heralding?

For historian John Roth, secretary of MWC's Faith and Life Commission, it only makes sense that MWC, the most visible expression of the global Anabaptist family, relocates its headquarters to the southern hemisphere.

"From the perspective of a 500-year-old tradition," Roth said, "we are witnessing—in our lifetimes—an amazing renewal movement in which the centre of gravity for the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is shifting from North to South. Indeed, during the past 30 years, the global Anabaptist-Mennonite family has nearly tripled in size, with virtually all of that growth coming from groups in the Global South."

### South now giving back

"For many years," commented Peter Stucky, a Mennonite pastor in Bogotá, "the Global South has received so much, for example the work of missionaries. Now we are grateful for the opportunity to give back." Stucky considers the commissioning of César García as a primary example of the South's "giving back."

He noted how the southern world has been seen by many with disdain and on the periphery. Colombia, he said, has been "not only on the periphery but a source of shame" with its history of violence and drug trade.

Then with tears welling up, he opened his well worn Bible and recalled how God became known in places considered insignificant—such as Bethlehem and Nazareth. He pointed to a number of texts about God's vindication of those who suffer but remain faithful (such as Luke 1:46ff, Isaiah 54 and Revelation 3:8ff).

MWC president Danisa Ndlovu acknowledged that the transition to southern leadership and a southern office comes with some uncertainties. For example, what will happen with the support base from churches in the Global North? "I don't have anxieties about that," he was quick to add, "given the MWC culture with its strong desire to

*Cover: Participants at a peace conference in Cachipay, Colombia, light candles as signs of peace in the midst of violence. The conference was one of the events organized by JustaPaz, a peace and service agency of Colombia's Mennonite Church (see country profile, page 6).*

*Left to right: Pedro Acosta, Jhon Fredy Cardona and Astrid Zuluaga.*  
Photo by Janet Plenert

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*Bogotá, site of the new MWC head office, is the capital of Colombia, home to three MWC member church bodies (see pages 6 to 7).*

see ourselves as a family sharing our joys and sorrows.”

When asked about further changes and challenges, Ndlovu suggested that the transition could mean a different leadership style, “and perhaps a different pace of how things are done.” He also noted that often a change of leadership also opens the door for new issues to emerge.

Yet with the challenges come an invigorating sense of energy. Liesa Unger, 2012 MWC Events Coordinator noted, “It’s a natural step in a journey that we are travelling together as a world-wide community.” Unger, who with her husband pastors a church in Germany, loves the blend of the local church that keeps her grounded, and the global community that helps her see beyond her own horizon.

From India, Cynthia Peacock, Chair of MWC Deacons Commission, believes this is a time for the MWC community to watch, wait, and build on the relationships with the new leadership for new directions—but directions that continue the work already begun.

The foundation of MWC will stay the same, says Markus Rediger, quoting Menno Simons’ favorite Scripture, 1 Corinthians. 3:11. The Swiss journalist and member of the MWC Executive Committee is excited to see the South and

the North serving and strengthening one another with their gifts. The North is rich in history, education, institutions, and leadership training. While the South brings youth, energy, church planting, and mission gifts.

## **Foundation is the same**

Roth noted that under Larry Miller’s leadership the MWC has helped cultivate a strong network of personal and institutional relationships that has nurtured a deeper awareness that we are part of a “global body.” And this has happened without the creation of a strong hierarchical centre or a lot of bureaucratic machinery.

Peacock thinks that the changes in

MWC leadership will bring a more youthful outlook. She observed that the South values relationship-building and connecting with one another for learning and sharing. This models a different perspective and way of working than is typical in the North’s efficiency-valuing bureaucracies.

Even so, MWC leaders expect continuity and growth from the current structures. Rebecca Osiro, Kenyan church leader and vice-chair of the MWC General Council Faith and Life Commission, is confident that “the personalities elected in leadership positions are strong enough to take MWC to greater heights.” The shifting geography of the administration, she says, “should not deter the global faith

## **New office configuration**

*The administrative team at the new head office in Bogotá, Colombia. Left to right: Anna Sorgius, the multi-lingual assistant who has worked for 13 years in the Strasbourg office and will move to Bogotá after the General Council meetings in May; Magali Moreno, who has provided administrative support in Paraguay and France since 2008, and has already moved to Bogotá to serve as administrative assistant; and César García, General Secretary since January 1. The North American office, with major responsibilities in finance and donor support, remains open in Kitchener, Canada. An African regional office is also maintained in Kinshasa, Congo (DRC).*



Photo by Liesa Unger



*César García, right, presents a sculpture of the Lion and the Lamb to outgoing General Secretary, Larry Miller, at a farewell celebration hosted by Bogotá churches. García explained how the image, taken from Revelation 5:5-6, depicts “a multicultural family of faith worshipping Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb, who is the purpose and centre of our global community.”*



Photo by Liesa Unger

community from achieving its set goals and objectives. “The one potential challenge she envisions is a temptation to allow a “regional economy to find room in our minds.”

As Roth observes, García shares a vision of patient growth, based on sturdy relationships built up over time. Like Miller, he is deeply rooted in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, yet eager to build bridges with other religious traditions. He also exemplifies servant leadership, with an ability to combine strong listening skills with a clear vision.

Roth thinks that the basic theological

and organizational trajectory of MWC will not change dramatically. At the same time, he hopes that locating the head office in the Global South signals even greater levels of participation and ownership of MWC by member churches outside of Europe and North America.

Rediger is glad to see MWC standing with its member churches wherever they are all over the world. He believes MWC

is enriched by the decision to change locations and to work in a variety of contexts, languages, and cultures. Member churches have been on the move around the globe during the past 500 years helping to birth what we see today. The last three MWC global gatherings were in the South (India, Zimbabwe, Paraguay) so it’s time to move south with the administrative office, too.

Roth is encouraged by the recent formation of the MWC General Council Commissions. With clearer mandates and broader, more energized bases of support, the commissions should help MWC’s work become more visible and tangible

“on the ground.”

While much of this work is still developing Roth believes that it will provide MWC with better ways of responding to specific needs in the global church. The work that went into the “Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists,” for example, provides a useful framework for ongoing conversations about how our various,

**“We are very pleased with the appointment of our brother César García as General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, and we pray that God continue to give him wisdom, and continue to be with his whole family as he takes on this new role.”**

*—Diego Martínez, President of the Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren) de Colombia.*



Photo by Liesa Unger

## Marking a transition

*Mennonite World Conference officers and staff met in Bogotá, Colombia, December 28 to January 4, to consult about the future of their work together and to meet the Colombian churches. Congregations of the three MWC member churches (see pages 6 to 7) gathered on December 29 to thank outgoing General Secretary Larry Miller for his 22 years of leadership and bless him as he takes up a new post as Secretary of the Global Christian Forum. The evening also included a service of installation for incoming General Secretary César García who previously served as a leader of the Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas (Mennonite Brethren Churches) of Colombia. Left: Colombian believers and MWC leaders worship together at the December 29 celebration at the Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo (Brethren in Christ Church) de Tierra Linda.*

particular identities can be nurtured within a larger Anabaptist-Mennonite theological framework.

But Roth notes that many challenges remain for the global Anabaptist body. For the rapidly growing churches of the Global South there is the happy challenge of leadership development—nurturing spiritual gifts, providing new leaders with adequate training using appropriate materials, and then allowing a new generation of leaders to find their rightful place in the life of the church.

Roth says that both North and South have a responsibility to cultivate more creatively the gifts offered by young people and women. This means paying more careful attention to education and curriculum development rooted in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology.

Some Anabaptist groups also face the challenge of responding appropriately to the growing, sometimes aggressive, presence of Islam, Roth said.

“All of us need to grow in our openness to giving and receiving gifts in the global body, including the gifts of mutual encouragement and admonition,” Roth said.

Rediger added, “Let all of us in MWC be aware of our rich spiritual and financial resources. Now with the General Secretary’s office located in the South, it’s important for us in the North to stay deeply involved—and welcome the revitalizing winds of the new southern leadership.”

*Jewel Showalter is a staff writer for Eastern Mennonite Missions*



Photo by Liesa Unger

*Magali Moreno of Paraguay, who recently moved to Bogotá, stands in front of the building MWC staff will share with Mennonite Central Committee.*

## Historian reflects on leadership shift

John A. Lapp, coordinator of the global Mennonite History Project (see picture and caption on page 9) and a veteran participant in MWC, observes that García’s appointment comes after twenty years of deliberate movement towards the South in Assembly location and conference leadership. What began as an almost exclusively European gathering with a few “tag-alongs” in 1925 moved to more of a North American-dominated gathering after WW II, and remained that way until 1990.

Lapp says that naming a senior staff leader from the South clinches a process long under way—another powerful way of recognizing and symbolizing the numerical size of the Global South churches.

Lapp welcomes a fresh young voice and Latin style to the executive office. He notes that the biggest challenge will be for the North to continue providing financial and spiritual undergirding of the Anabaptist world movement while

relaxing ecclesial control. He hopes the North can enthusiastically support southern spokespersons and a secretariat based in the South.

Lapp expects southern leadership to accent issues perceived and formulated in the South. While this may strain MWC processes which have been in place since the 1950s, there will be new themes and priorities to which the North will have to pay attention. The persistent search to balance unity and respect differences will always be present.

Lapp observes that leadership in the South will need to understand the significance of MWC as a bridge-building, reconciling ministry. There are individuals male and female, South and North, who feel the pulse of the global church. An important role of the General Secretary is to discover, nurture and incorporate such voices into the global movement. The church, locally and globally, is the “body of Christ.”

—*Jewel Showalter*



Photo by Adrienne Wiebe.

*Creando Espacios de Imagination (Creating Spaces for Imagination), is a youth project in a marginal neighbourhood of Bogotá. The project is sponsored by the Brethren in Christ Church and led by Viviana, Diana, and John Jairo Morales.*

## Colombian Anabaptists—a brief profile

# *Being the church in a conflict zone*

by Bonnie Klassen and Elizabeth Miller

When a paramilitary commander demanded a meeting with Mennonite Brethren church leaders in Chocó, a remote rainforest region of Colombia, they went to the appointed location with fear but also with profound clarity. Weapons in hand, the commander insisted that the church-supported rice processing plant must pay a “war tax” to the illegal armed group.

José Rutilio Rivas, Mennonite Brethren Regional President, responded resolutely, “The Mennonite church has been committed to non-violence and peace-building for centuries. We will not support any of the armed groups, not even the state armed groups. If you force us, we will close down our community programs. We will not support you, even if it costs us our lives.”

Surprised by such boldness, the commander promised respect for their position of non-collaboration.

By connecting their understanding of faith to their current context, Colombian Anabaptists have found the audacity to act for justice and peace. As Nelson Martínez, leader of Bogotá’s Mennonite Brethren Churches, says, “Being Anabaptist means being like Jesus Christ. The idea of pacifism and “shalom” is the trunk of Anabaptism. But the heart of this trunk is openness to suffering and

sacrifice. If Jesus Christ brought peace through his sacrifice, then the church must have the same willingness.”

César García, the new General Secretary of Mennonite World

Conference, affirms this vision. “Being an Anabaptist in Colombia means living as Jesus lived in a context of oppression and suffering. It means giving one’s life to the quest for reconciliation, profoundly dependent on the Holy Spirit and firmly grounded in the Bible.”

The three Anabaptist churches in Colombia—the Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia (Mennonite Brethren Church), the Iglesia Menonita de Colombia (Mennonite Church) and the Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo (Brethren in Christ Church)—have not always embraced an explicit Anabaptist identity. But they have always lived out a passionate call to form faith communities that reflect God’s kingdom.

The Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite churches were started by North American mission boards in the 1940s in rural areas. The Mennonite Brethren opened schools and dispensaries in Chocó and Valle, while the Mennonites started a school in Cundinamarca for children whose

We find joy in being communities of solidarity, maintaining a stubborn commitment to working for peace, reconciliation, human rights and justice.

—Isdalia Ortega, Vice President of the Mennonite Church

parents had leprosy. Congregations soon began to gather around these institutions.

The first 10 years of church growth were marked by significant challenges, due to a period of civil war known as *La Violencia*. Many looked to Catholicism, Colombia’s official religion, to unify the country, but such an approach also led to anti-Protestant discrimination and persecution.

Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren believers faced significant opposition, including Bible burnings, harassment, imprisonment, and boycotts. While the persecution kept many from joining, the new believers displayed remarkable resolve and creativity. They led secret Bible studies in their homes, continued evangelizing, and appealed to municipal leaders for fair treatment.

After *La Violencia*, Colombian Protestants encountered increased freedoms. Yet by this time, Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren faced another challenge, as many of their young people began moving to the cities in search of

work and education. Urban mission efforts to gather these young people eventually birthed a network of churches in urban centers across Colombia.

The resulting growth in both denominations included the launching of some common projects. In 1975, with support from Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Economic Development Associates, the churches founded Mencoldes, a community development foundation. Since then, Mencoldes has gained national recognition through agricultural and income generation projects, community work with marginalized women and youth, and natural disaster response.

In the 1980s, the Mennonite Church invited a third Anabaptist group to join them in Colombia. The first Brethren in Christ believers began meeting in private apartments in Bogotá. Today two congregations have emerged from church-planting and community development projects.

As Colombia's armed conflict accelerated in the late 1980s, Mennonites began a lengthy national campaign for conscientious objection and a peace education program within churches. This resulted in the creation of JustaPaz, a program promoting peace and justice, in 1990. During the the same time the Mennonite Brethren started an extensive health program in Chocó.

When dozens of displaced people—including some Anabaptists—began showing up at the doors of Anabaptist churches in the 1990s, local congregations from all three groups responded with community soup kitchens and other programs.

The three Anabaptist groups initiated a number of cooperative ministries:

- Mencoldes and JustaPaz redirected their energies to displacement and other human rights violations.
- The Mennonite Brethren founded Edupaz, a ministry that promotes peace education in Chocó. It also supported social ministries for victims of violence in the region.
- In 2005, the Anabaptist Trauma Committee formed to strengthen the role of local congregations as healing communities.

The churches have also dedicated themselves to theological education. Historically they sent students to other denominational seminaries, but they have also opened their own theological training spaces. In Bogotá they opened the Colombian Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Seminario Bíblico Menonita de Colombia ) in 1990 and the Mennonite Brethren Center for Ministry Development (Centro de Desarrollo

Esquivia, justice and peace initiatives (Mennonite); Alix Lozano, Mission Commission and Women Theologians Group (Mennonite); Carlos Álvarez, Youth Task Force (Brethren in Christ); Jenny Neme, Peace Commission (Mennonite); Peter Stucky, Executive Committee (Mennonite); and César García, new General Secretary (Mennonite Brethren).

“It is a challenge to consolidate church



Photo by Juan Sebastian Pacheco Lozano

*A workshop on peace-building and church organization sponsored by Edupaz, in a local Mennonite Brethren church in Dagua (near Cali).*

Ministerial) in 1999.

Today all three national churches are committed to holistic transformation in Colombia. In 2007 and 2008 Anabaptist leaders formally affirmed that the church must have a spiritual, social and political impact on society and promised to work together towards this end. As Jenny Neme, director of JustaPaz, summarizes, “being an Anabaptist church in Colombia means being salt and light in the midst of violence and socio-political conflict ... It means being a community of believers where people's gifts and talents are offered in service as followers of the Resurrected Christ.”

The Colombian Anabaptist churches have actively participated in Mennonite World Conference. Colombian leaders within MWC have included: Ricardo

plants in diverse regions of the country and sustain all of these initiatives with local funding.” says Isdalia Ortega, Vice President of the Mennonite Church. “Yet we find joy in being communities of solidarity, maintaining a stubborn commitment to working for peace, reconciliation, human rights and justice. We are grateful for the accompaniment of sister churches around the world.”

*Bonnie Klassen of Canada has served with the Anabaptist churches in Colombia since 1997, and currently is the Mennonite Central Committee country representative. Elizabeth Miller of the United States is serving with MCC, coordinating an extensive investigation of the history of Anabaptist churches in Colombia.*

## Colombia at a glance

**Population** - 46 million

**Ethnic Composition** -  
25% Afro-Colombian, 2% Indigenous,  
70% Mestizo (mixed), 3% Other

**Religious Composition** - 85% practicing  
or nominal Catholics, 8% Protestant,  
7% other

### Anabaptists in Colombia

*Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia (Mennonite Brethren)—45 established congregations*  
*Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia (Mennonite Church)—20 established congregations*  
*Iglesia Hermandad en Cristo (Brethren in Christ)—2 established congregations*

## MWC and seminary collaborate on conference

# History and mission link arms

Elkhart, Indiana, USA—“Mirror on the Globalization of Mennonite Witness,” a two-and-a-half-day event, brought together mission thinkers and historians from the Global South, Europe and North America to explore themes within the volumes of the Global Mennonite History Series, a project of Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

The conference, held October 27-29, 2011 at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), became a lively discussion about how awareness of history can inform mission planning and action. Participants examined how

Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches have emerged and flourished or faced challenges around the world.

The conference was prompted by two occurrences: one, the release of the book, *Churches Engage Asian Traditions*, Volume 4 in the Global Mennonite History Series; and two, the 2011 Shenk Mission Lectureship, held biennially at AMBS.

By collaborating on the event, MWC and AMBS brought their particular strengths to the occasion. Mennonite World Conference provided a neutral space for mutual conversation and

piercing questions. AMBS gave its campus and members of its faculty, including former professor Wilbert Shenk, who convened the 1995 consultation at AMBS out of which the Global History Series grew.

The conference program was developed by John A. Lapp, Co-General Editor of the History Series, and Walter Sawatsky, professor of church history and mission at AMBS. More than 170 participants included missiologists and historians, writers and editors of the five volumes of the Global Mennonite History Series, doctoral students in mission and history, and seminary students, professors and administrators.

Jaime Prieto of Costa Rica, and writer of *Mission and Migration*, the Latin America volume of the Global Mennonite History Series, brought themes of history and mission together: “Writing a history of a church is an apostolic calling. It is recording stories of faith; it is extending the call of Jesus. In fact, we hear the stories of Jesus through the church’s stories. Every time you collect a story of a church, you collect a story of Jesus.”

John A. Lapp, who has shepherded the writing of the Global Histories since the project’s beginning, explained the reasoning behind it. “In 1994, we discovered a tipping point: Africa, Asia, and Latin America held 51 percent of the members of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. As Jim Juhnke said in the Global History Organizing



Photo credit: Merle Good

Contributors to the Global Mennonite History Project—writers, editors, translators and members of the coordinating committee—were honored at one of the evening sessions of the conference: (left to right) Barbara Nkala from Zimbabwe; Adhi Dharma from Indonesia; Ken Shenk from the U.S., translator of Japanese contributions; I.P. Asheervadam from India; Paulus Chiou-Lang Pan from Taiwan; and Jaime Prieto Valladares from Costa Rica. Behind them are Luke Martin and Steve Nolt from the U.S.

## Globalization of Mennonite Witness

The concluding address of the 2011 Shenk Mission lectureship was presented by Jonathan Bonk, an ordained Mennonite pastor who is editor of International Bulletin of Missionary Research and president of International Association of Mission Studies.

Bonk suggested common threads among all Mennonite and Brethren in Christ groups whose story is told in the Global Mennonite History Project. “For Mennonites, the ties that should bind across time and place are not ethnic, linguistic, or nationalistic, but theological. Insofar as we are faithful to the witness of the gospels—not just rejoicing in the good news of what Jesus did, but faithfully following

what he said—we will be bound by Gospel ties ... by the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.”

The agenda for the future of the Mennonite church around the world, Bonk continued, is an “epic clash of civilizations—between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom that is not of this world.” This includes addressing challenges such as violence, consumerism, the decline of the influence of the West, and human dislocation and migration.

In conclusion, he emphasized: “If compassion is not the outcome of one’s faith, that faith is ultimately useless both now and in the life to come. If the social margins are not the center of our ministry, we are profoundly out of step with the one we claim as Lord.”

—Mary E. Klassen, Director of Communications at AMBS

Conference that year, 'We need a new global history to explain what this means; ideally, several volumes of stories to stir hope.'

"As the proposal became refined, MWC stipulated that the histories would be written by the new majority members in the South, and that they would be more story than analysis.

"With the release of these four volumes of history, by writers from each respective continent—Africa, Europe, Latin America, and Asia, and the pending publication of Volume 5 on North America in 2012—a new Mennonite narrative has been created. These books accent survival rather than triumph. They give a more diversified accounting of who we are as a church than we've ever had before."

The conference program encouraged the sharing of difficult facts. Adhi Dharma of Indonesia, a contributor to the newly released Asia volume, observed that "Christianity arrived through colonialism" in many parts of the southern hemisphere.

Barbara Nkala of Zimbabwe, one of the writers of the Africa history, commented about a prevalent Western missionary attitude: "Africans can only become Christians by becoming more European."

Juan Martínez, a theologian based in southern California, urged U.S. Mennonites to learn from migrant Mennonites who are increasingly peopling their country. "Are they 'our' people? Do we want to become 'their' people? Are we still in the center? How do the center and the periphery relate? Can we possibly work together?"

"I find it amazing how varied are our expressions of our faith," reflected historian C. Arnold Snyder of Canada, and Co-General Editor of the Global History Series. "How can Africans' view of the Gospel, for example, help us all become more Christian?" he asked.

Getu Abiche of the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia seemed to oblige when he noted in his presentation that, "MKC takes disciplinary action with its members by restoring, preventing infection, and seeking holiness, but this doesn't seem to be true in North America. And in MKC, we seek God's face by fasting and praying, but I don't see this here."



## Asia volume launched

*Churches Engage Asian Traditions: A Global Mennonite History* is Volume 4 in the Global Mennonite History Series. Written by members of Mennonite and Brethren Christ churches of the Asian continental region, the book is the first comprehensive history of these churches. It covers the period from 1851 to the present. Today there are 265,000 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ church members in 13 countries of the region.

This book tells of churches in the northern hemisphere reaching out to

John A. Lapp displays the new volume at the "Mirror on the Globalization of Mennonite Witness" Shenk Lectureship at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

Asia with material and spiritual aid. It is the story of the gospel engaging ancient religions, deeply rooted in local cultures. The book also recounts the development of mission outposts into vigorous indigenous churches, during wars, nationalist movements and revolutions.

Like the volumes on Africa, Europe and Latin America, it is available for purchase (see page 15).

Henk Stenvers, of Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit (ADS) in the Netherlands, was a voice for a church with a long past. "Having a lot of history feels like a big burden. If history stands in the way of renewal, history is a burden. Together, we in the North and South must find our witness. Can we become interdependent? Then we can see our differences as an enrichment. We can be a whole church in our brokenness."

Several participants emphasized the impact of the Global History Series on the communities whose stories are included and who are continuing their exploration of their own history and identity. For example, Mennonites in the Congo are recording oral history interviews. In Colombia, Elizabeth Miller, an AMBS student who presented at the conference, is an Anabaptist identity promoter at the request of the Anabaptist churches there.

Wilbert Shenk extended a challenge to the group: "I am deeply concerned

that all members of our churches around the world have access to this series. I believe these books will help point us to a basis for identity that we need.... My hope and dream and prayer is that this project will be a major resource in furthering that objective."

John A. Lapp highlighted the significance of the Global Histories in his comments: "I believe these volumes, and the process that brought them together, represent the beginnings of new ways to think about the world Mennonite/Brethren in Christ movement.

"Semarang is now essential to Amsterdam. Shamshabad is now life-giving to Hillsboro and vice versa. Kinshasa now partners with Berne and Steinbach, and vice versa. Managua now addresses Ephrata and New Hamburg. Through these churches here, there, and everywhere, the story goes on."

—Phyllis Pellman Good, communications consultant with Mennonite World Conference

## May General Council meetings approaching

“An outstanding opportunity to meet face to face with brothers and sisters from around the world.” That is how the coordinators of the next Mennonite World Conference (MWC) General Council meetings describe a triennial gathering to be held in St. Chrischona, Switzerland, May 20-27.

General Council, held in conjunction with the MWC assemblies every six years and once between assemblies, now draws together more than 120 elected members from more than 50 countries on all continents. They will process issues of common concern and Anabaptist identity, and provide input for the shape of Assembly 16, to be held in the United States in 2015.

The meetings follow on the heels of the European Mennonite Regional Conference (MERK) in Sumiswald, Switzerland, May

17 to 20. MERK, like MWC, is convened every six years, and draws together representatives of six Anabaptist church bodies in Europe associated with MWC.

A number of other MWC-related groups will meet before, during and after the General Council gathering, including the Young Anabaptists (YABs); the four General Council Commissions (Faith and Life, Deacons, Peace, and Mission); Global Mission Fellowship; Global Anabaptist Service Network; International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB); International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA) and a group of Anabaptist educators exploring global connections in educational ministries.

## Caucus training in Asia and Africa prepare members for General Council

In preparation for General Council, the Asia and Africa caucuses met for training events in October and November in Kinshasa, Congo DRC, and Kolkata, India, respectively.

**In Kinshasa**, two separate meetings of MWC Africa representatives occurred on successive weekends at the end of October and early November. Together they marked the “end of the beginning” of a five-year process to put into place a new structure for fellowship and collaboration among MWC member churches in Africa.

The first gathering was a workshop of Central African MWC General Council delegates, while the second was the annual meeting of the Africa Caucus Executive Committee.

A combined total of 65 people participated in the workshops, including 35 of the 37 Africa caucus members. During the workshops caucus members learned about MWC history and mission and the expectations of General Council delegates. Workshop participants also debated the newly developed statutes for the Africa Caucus.

At the meetings, participants from every region expressed a sense of isolation and desire for more regional fellowship. Theophilus Tetteh Akoso of the Ghana Mennonite Church spoke for many when he stressed that “as a caucus we must find ways to strengthen our connections and sharing at every level.”

Africa Caucus Executive Committee members were glad to be able to meet in DR Congo, home to three MWC member church bodies with a total membership of more than 220,000. For most of the committee members, including MWC President Danisa Ndlovu, it was their first time in Kinshasa. Other committee members present were Thuma Hamukang’andu (Zambia), Mawangu Francisca Ibanda (Congo), Rebecca Osiro (Kenya), Emelia Amexo (Ghana), and Timothy Lind (Congo). Tigist Gelagle (Ethiopia), the Young Anabaptists network (YABs) representative for Africa, was also present as an observer, as was Toss Mukwa (Congo), consultant.

The primary agenda of the committee was to review the feedback coming from four regional training workshops



*MWC Africa Caucus Executive Committee Participants (from left): Danisa Ndlovu (Zimbabwe), Toss Mukwa (consultant, Congo), Tigist Gelagle (Young Anabaptists Africa representative, Ethiopia), Francisca Mawangu (Congo), Thuma Hamukang’andu (Zambia), Rebecca Osiro (Kenya), Emelia Amexo (Ghana), Timothy Lind (Congo), Beatrice Kalaki (MWC staff, Congo).*

held since August 2010, including the one convened in November. After studying the proposed changes to the caucus structure coming from each regional group, the committee edited a revised constitution to be presented to the full caucus in May. They also heard reports from each of the four regions, as well as a challenge to incorporate the perspectives of youth in a report from Tigist on the YABs network.

**In Kolkata**, 32 Council members from 18 national churches of the Asia and Pacific region (only Vietnam and Australia were missing) discussed Anabaptist identity, learned more about MWC and their responsibilities in it,

and proposed priorities for the future.

Participants expressed appreciation for the sessions on Anabaptist perspectives led by Robert J. Suderman and Bert Lobe of Canada, who had been invited for similar teaching sessions a year earlier in both India and Indonesia.

In discussions on the meaning of the MWC vision of being “a communion of Anabaptist-related churches” many expressed a desire to strengthen their identity as peacemakers in order to contribute to the wider Christian church and society. They said they want be a community of faith through loving and serving those inside

and outside of the church, and equipping each other through the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

In their roles as General Council members, convener Cynthia Peacock of India told the participants, "The challenge will be to see whether what was learned will be communicated back to the local congregations, and how that will better bring about an understanding of the connectivity we have as a global church through MWC."

Leading the sessions on MWC vision, mission and

program priorities were Bert Lobe, Paulus Widjaja of Indonesia and the two Asia representatives on the MWC Executive Committee—Prem Bagh of India and Adi Walujo of Indonesia.

Both before and after the caucus trainings MWC and church leaders conducted other leadership training events and ministries among the eight MWC member churches in India.

—MWC release



Photo by Bert Lobe

*Singing enlivened the Asia Caucus training sessions. Left to right: Yukari Kaga, Japan; Yoshifumi Tanaka, Japan; Yoshihira Inamine, Japan; (face hidden) Kyong-Jung Kim, South Korea; Amos T. Chin, Myanmar; Jeremiah Choi, Hong Kong; Robert Ching-Po Lee, Taiwan*

## Cross-cultural synergies strengthened at mission gatherings



*Yesaya Abdi, president of the International Missions Association (IMA) that sponsored the HSIM conference, breaks bread at the closing communion service at the Kharispia Church in Medan, Indonesia.*

*Medan, Indonesia*—More than 50 international participants from church and mission groups in 15 nations traveled to Medan, Indonesia, a city of three million, to join Indonesian Mennonites for the Holy Spirit in Mission (HSIM) conference, October 5-7.

The conference was the first of a series

of meetings of the International Missions Association—an Anabaptist association of mission organizations connected to Eastern Mennonite Mission, and many of which are related to Mennonite World Conference member churches.

Congregations from two Indonesian Mennonite conferences hosted the delegates and showcased the vibrancy and witness of the church in the region, which is about 50 per cent Christian.

Believers from Medan led rousing worship times featuring stories of God's work around the world. Following the conference, Indonesian missionaries led teams of delegates on three-day ministry

trips across North Sumatra, including some remote locations. A team of Nepali and Kenyan leaders, for example, visited a small church in a remote jungle area that rarely sees international ministries.

The delegates then reassembled on Samosir Island in Lake Toba for another three days of reporting and mutual encouragement October 10-13.

The IMA, which has grown to 21 member groups, traces its roots to the 1997 MWC assembly in Kolkata, India. In their October business session, the attendees decided to begin an exchange program among groups, allowing young leaders to train for cross-cultural ministry.

—from release by *Eastern Mennonite Mission*

## Tree plantings mark deepening of Mennonite-Lutheran relations

*Wittenberg, Germany*—Mennonites planted two trees in the "Luthergarten" in Wittenberg, Germany in early October to mark the deepening of Mennonite-Lutheran relations.

The garden project, initiated by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), is being developed in anticipation of the 2017 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of his 95 theses on a church door in Wittenberg. Churches from around the world are being invited to sponsor a tree and also to plant a corresponding tree in a significant place for their own church.

Larry Miller, outgoing General Secretary of Mennonite

World Conference, planted a red maple next to a tree planted nearly two years ago by the Lutheran World Federation, when it invited a number of other global church communions (Anglican Communion, World Methodist Council, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Catholic Church) to participate in the garden project.

A second tree was planted by Frieder Boller, president of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden (AMG) in Germany. The AMG and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in

*continued on page 12*

*continued from page 11*

Germany have engaged in ecumenical dialogue and joint communion for the past 15 years.

The tree plantings in Wittenberg preceded a German Lutheran/Mennonite symposium on the topic of “Healing of

Memories—Reconciliation in Christ,” which both celebrated recent advances in Lutheran/Mennonite relationships and discussed new possibilities for their future.

In keeping with the commitment to plant corresponding trees in Mennonite soil, MWC and the Dutch Mennonites

planted a tree at the Mennorode conference center in connection with recent Dutch Mennonite 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The AMG is planning to plant a tree at Menno Simons’ house in North Germany.  
—MWC release

## Anabaptists in Spain experiment with lay leadership training

*Burgos, Spain*—Anabaptists in Spain are experimenting with a new way to train lay church leaders, building a new partnership among the Bienenberg Seminary in Switzerland, a worker of the North American agency Mennonite Mission Network (MMN), and Spanish pastors—with funding from Mennonite Central Committee Europe. The initiators of the project are all members of the Anabautistas, Menonitas y Hermanos en Cristo—España (AMyHCE)—an associate member of Mennonite World Conference.

Three instructors—Antonio González, a former Jesuit who is now a Brethren in Christ leader; Julian Mellado, a BIC pastor; and Dennis Byler, an MMN worker—have begun leadership courses specifically aimed at adults who need a way to learn about Anabaptist values without spending semesters at school. Named Centro Teológico Kénosis (Kenosis Theological Seminary), this is the first specifically Anabaptist training offered in Spain. The one-month courses are offered at a Madrid church and follow the curriculum of Bienenberg Seminary, an Anabaptist school supported by European Mennonites.

—from a release from Mennonite Mission Network



Mennonite Mission Network photo

*Dennis Byler leading an Anabaptist training course, Introduction to the Bible, in Madrid. This is the inaugural course of an ongoing leadership development program and the first Anabaptist training in Spain.*

## Europeans to hire coordinator, seek to be ‘a place of blessing’

*Madrid, Spain*—At their annual gathering, held here in November 2011, leaders among European Mennonite church bodies decided to hire a coordinator to serve as their liaison to Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and to fulfill some coordination tasks for the European member churches. They also reflected on the challenges they face in the European context.

The decision to hire a coordinator grew out of the hope that MWC will still have a visible presence in Europe after the office in Strasbourg, France is closed in June 2012. The leaders also reflected on several realities in their communities.

While church numbers are diminishing in general, certain churches are growing, mostly in France.

Many places in Europe don’t have enough trained pastors and leaders and Mennonite seminaries are lacking in students and finances. Many churches hire pastors from other denominations.

Increasingly, especially in Portugal, people are looking to the churches for help as they deal with the challenges of the economic downturn.

The Swiss Mennonites extended an invitation to Sumiswald, Switzerland for the European Mennonite Regional Conference (MERK) from May 17 to 20, 2012.

## MWC leaders join pilgrimage for peace

*Assisi, Italy*—Danisa Ndlovu, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) president, and Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, joined with leaders of other religious communities and several humanist organizations, October 27, for a day of reflection, dialogue and personal prayer in Assisi, Italy, the home of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Catholic friar and preacher, St. Francis, known for his commitment to peace.

The day marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a day of prayer for peace first called by Pope John Paul II at the height of the Cold War in 1986. Paul

Kraybill, then MWC executive secretary, attended the 1986 event. At a second such day, held in 2002, MWC was represented by president Mesach Krisetya.

The recent gathering affirmed an earlier statement of commitment to promoting peace, dialogue, respect and forgiveness in a world in which terrorism and violence—including religiously sanctioned violence—persist. This year, a statement from humanists was also added, pledging dialogue and cooperation between them and people of faith.

# No longer foolish and small

By Yunarso Rosandono

*Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN!) is a joint program of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC). It places young adults from MWC member churches in the Global South in other countries of the Global South for cross-cultural learning and ministry. Yunarso Rosandono of Sukodono, Central Java, Indonesia, shares his story of personal growth during and since his YAMEN! assignment.*

In 2008 I went to Cairo, Egypt under YAMEN! to work at the Anaphora Retreat Centre of the Coptic Orthodox church. I used my limited English language as a basis for learning Arabic.

After a month and a half, just as I was getting the feel of Egypt, a friend drove me to the immigration office in Cairo to renew my visa. To my surprise, the officer told me that I could not renew it; this was different from what the embassy had told me before I came. I had to return to my beloved Indonesia. The lesson I learned at that time was that God lets good things and bad things happen to us, but he never leaves us alone to walk by ourselves.

When I arrived home, my friends were shocked, wondering whether I was unable to do the work. But they prayed for me that all would work out.

Thankfully, my fellow MCCers in Egypt had talked to other international MCC staff and were able to arrange that my assignment could be transferred to Zimbabwe. Was I dreaming? I had heard that it wasn't a good place to visit. Inflation was very high, and the country was in economic crisis. Health services were unavailable, and many people were

suffering with HIV and AIDS.

I was grateful to God for my host, Pastor Milson Ndlovu, a Brethren in Christ pastor in Lobengula-Bulawayo. He asked me to be his assistant in his pastoral visits and in his Bible teaching. I attended pastors' meetings and visited people in hospital and seniors' homes. I even helped to teach in the BIC's pre-school program in Lobengula.

After nine months, it was time to go home. I was happy that I would see my beloved family, but it was hard to say goodbye to my new family in Zimbabwe. I had experienced Jesus in Africa.

In Indonesia, I completed my studies at my college, STAKKWW Pati, associated with the Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ) synod and the Global Discipleship Training program. (The GITJ is one of three Indonesian member churches of Mennonite World Conference.) Then I took a job as a teacher in a pre-school and kindergarten run by the GITJ in Sukodono, a small city on the Central Java island. In July of 2010 I was married to Deni Kurniasih of the Skodono church. Recently we opened



Yunarso, third from right, with friends in the Lobengula-Bulawayo (Zimbabwe) Brethren in Christ Church, where he assisted in a variety of ministries.

new play group that reaches a variety of families, including people who are not Christian. In it we try to concentrate on character development. I also am a youth discipleship trainer with the GITJ synod.

## What the YAMEN! experience taught me

Before I joined YAMEN! I was not confident with strangers from other cultures and languages. I would feel uncomfortable, foolish and inferior. My experiences in Egypt and Zimbabwe taught me that I am Jesus' own creation, just like anyone else. Anyone visiting a new country feels lonely and small. When I realized this, I knew I could be flexible and grow as a person.

My growing confidence helped me not only in my YAMEN! assignment; it also made me confident in facing new situations here in Indonesia. I came home with a new spirit, wanting to accept God's call for my life. Currently, it is to serve the church in Sukodono.

When I saw the suffering of the people in Zimbabwe, I also learned to be thankful. Today, I would be ashamed to ask God for something that I don't need. I cannot be upset when we get too much rain; others in the world need that rain.

I have moved from an exclusive local mindset to one that is international. I have a new spirit that is always open to learn.

God never left me alone when I joined YAMEN! Thanks to Jesus Christ for calling me to serve him in my life.

## Participants in this year's YAMEN! program

Kenia Vásquez of the Iglesia Evangélica Anabautista, Santa Cruz, Bolivia, serving in Mozambique; Luisa Santos of the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Hondureña, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, serving in Nicaragua; Yohane Mbewe of the Maone Brethren in Christ Church in Malawi, serving in Brazil; Brighton Mashebe of the Kanyama "A" Brethren in Christ Church, Zambia, serving in Brazil; Nancy Sabas of Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Hondureña in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, serving in Indonesia; Aristiya Dwiyantri of the Persatuan Gereja-Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI), serving in Cambodia; Nicole Knelsen Hubert of the Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden, Asunción, Paraguay, serving in Indonesia; Janny Lweendo Hachilenge of the Choma Central Brethren in Christ Church, Zambia, serving in Indonesia; and Godswill Muzarabani of the Entumbane Brethren in Christ Church, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, serving in Laos.

## MERK assembly

People from across Europe will gather May 17 to 20, in Sumiswald, Switzerland, for the assembly of the European Mennonite Regional Conference (MERK), held every six years. The lead organizer, Markus Rediger (also an MWC Executive Committee member), invites us to keep in prayer the planning committee's hopes that:

- many will register and come to MERK, despite the challenging economic times;
- adequate financial support will be found for those who cannot afford to come;
- the worship and sessions around the theme, "Hands reaching across borders" will foster unity among European Mennonites and promote bridge-building with other people and churches in society.

Keep in prayer the leaders and people of each of the participating churches, all associated with the Mennonite World Conference: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland (Germany); Association des Eglises Evangéliques Mennonites de France (France); Konferenz der Mennoniten der Schweiz (Alttäufer) (Switzerland); Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit (Netherlands); Asociación de Menonitas y Hermanos en Cristo en España (Spain); Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Deutschland (Germany). Other participants and observers will come from Italy, Portugal, England, Ireland, Belgium, Austria, Serbia, Ukraine and other countries.

## General Council

See the article on page 12 for details of the triennial gathering. Please pray for the Spirit's guidance on all the deliberations including:

- choice of themes and events for Assembly 16
- the shape of a new global consortium of service ministries to come under the umbrella of MWC
- the extension and growth of the of the General Council Commissions: Peace, Mission, Deacons, and Faith and Life
- for a spirit of deep fellowship and unity that will then be extended globally as the participants return to their member churches.

## Family and congregation of murdered Honduran pastor

On Sunday, January 22, Rafael Erasmo Arevalo, a Mennonite pastor in Honduras, was attacked and killed after leading an evening worship service in Veracruz, about 20 kilometers from his home in Santa Rosa de Copán. Please pray for his wife and children and his congregation. Arevalo served with the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Hondureña, one of two MWC member churches in Honduras.

## Flood refugees in Myanmar



*Amos and Famzi Chin and their daughters (from left): Grace, Christine, Mercy and Joy.*

Amos Chin, president of the Bible Missionary Church (BMC) in Myanmar, experienced firsthand the floods which killed hundreds of people and destroyed many homes last year. He requests prayer for the nation and for his church.

While on a two and a half week mission trip in the Pakokku area, the bus he was riding became submerged in a deep pit and 14 of the 27 passengers drowned. Chin and Mang Chawn, an accompanying national missionary, also survived.

The BMC became a member of MWC in 2009. The church now has 47 congregations and 1,556 adult baptized members. The BMC has been involved in relief activities related to a 2008 cyclone. With the support of MWC in 2009, it has also been involved in a food and education project with the Khualhring Hill Tract People.

## Japan, a year after the earthquake

March 11, 2012, marked the one-year anniversary of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan. The Yamanota Fukuin congregation of the Nihon Kirisuto Keiteidan (Brethren in Christ Church of Japan) initiated a world-wide appeal for a global "ring of prayer" on that day.

According to a letter from the church, 23,000 survivors are still living in rescue camps. At least 20,000 others died or were never found after the earthquake. The Nihon Kirisuto Keiteidan is a Mennonite World Conference member church, and a partner in the East Japan Great Disaster Relief Assistance Committee formed in May 2011 by the Japan Mennonite Fellowship.

## Search for new leadership in Australia

First Mennonite Church of Hope in Marmong Point, New South Wales, Australia requests prayer and help in their search for a new pastor. The congregation's long-time pastor Foppe Brouwer, age 82, and his wife, Aaltje, age 73, are both in failing health. In the late 1970s the Brouwers were sent by the European Mennonite Evangelism Committee to plant a church in Australia. The Australian Conference of Evangelical Mennonites, to which the congregation belongs, was established in 1980 and is a member church of Mennonite World Conference.

## Three years to go before Assembly 16

# How can you extend the work of MWC?

One of the greatest developments in the work of MWC in the last years has been the growth of activities that nurture community among Anabaptist-related churches worldwide. This issue of *Courier-Correo-Courrier* finds us on the eve of the General Council meetings in Basel, Switzerland, in May and three years away from Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, in 2015. As these events beckon the MWC into the future, how will you be involved? Here are some suggestions:

**Help people attend MWC General Council and Assembly.** One of the biggest expenses in the life of MWC is travel. As you read this, many delegates to the triennial General Council sessions are preparing to travel to the meetings. Many are able to come only because of MWC's global sharing. This will also be true of the General Assembly in 2015. If you are able, please contribute to the Travel Fund.

Others will need advocacy in order to obtain visas; this will be especially true for youth delegates to Assembly 16. What can you do to facilitate a large, inclusive celebration in 2015?

**Receive *Courier-Correo-Courrier* electronically and/or donate toward the paper version.** The box below outlines how you can help pay for the cost of the magazine. You may also be in

a position to save MWC money by receiving the magazine electronically instead. If this is possible for you, please ask us to cancel your paper subscription and sign up to receive email notices when a new issue appears. Please make your request by email at [info@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:info@mwc-cmm.org) or by regular mail to the Bogotá office.

**Pray.** Please see the prayer concerns on page 14.

**Send us your stories and prayer requests.** MWC is currently working on new ways to share our stories, our joys and our burdens with each other. We would like to hear from you if you have

- a story of God's work in your church community or region;
- an appeal for prayer.

Please email your story or request to [info@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:info@mwc-cmm.org), or use regular mail to send it to the office in Bogotá.

**Read a MWC book—or two or three.** The global history series is a wonderful chronicle of the way God has worked in MWC member churches over the last century or more—an excellent way to get to know your brothers and sisters. For information about ordering the books, please contact the Kitchener or the Bogotá offices or email your request to [info@mwc-cmm.org](mailto:info@mwc-cmm.org)

Your **financial contributions** can be sent to any of the addresses listed below, while correspondence about *Courier-Correo-Courrier* subscriptions should be addressed to the Bogotá office.



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# Global Mosaic Brings Life

By César García

*There was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. —Revelation 7:9*

In December, while working in what would become the new Mennonite World Conference (MWC) office in Bogotá, I had a few moments for quiet reflection. After months of traveling, meetings and long work sessions, I was exhausted. Questions began to cross my mind: *Why am I doing this? How important is MWC? What awaits us in the coming years?*

Weeks earlier a pastor friend told me, “I don’t see the importance of a global body.” Another person pointed out: “You have been commissioned to lead an official and bureaucratic church body.” Considering how tired I was, these words were hardly comforting. I needed to find vision, meaning and support in the presence of God. Then I remembered Bible texts about God’s vision for his people, especially those in the book of Revelation.

*Vision* is the image of what we want to achieve, something can be accomplished in the future. Vision guides us in making decisions here and now so that the vision becomes a reality one day.

*Does God’s vision address a global and multicultural church? I wondered. What Bible text will anchor us and inspire our actions in the coming years? What text would show God’s vision for his people, bringing hope in the context of suffering experienced by many of our congregations and, at the same time, address the cultural diversity of a global community?*

Revelation 7:9-10 seemed to be the most appropriate text. Here we see how God yearns for his people to be a multicultural family of faith in which diversity is celebrated, where different foods, music, clothing, customs, ways of celebrating and individual identities are accepted and enjoyed. In our current world of cultural segregation among peoples, God calls us to give testimony of the love that destroys the walls that separate.

More than dogmas or human structures, the family of faith shares a common past of faithfulness to God. As the author John pictures it, the community has remained firm before the Lamb. This community has emerged victorious through commitment, suffering, sacrifice and even martyrdom. As at the Old Testament Feast of the Tabernacles where the Israelites waved palm branches, the multicultural family of faith now celebrates around

the Lamb that was slain, free from slavery and materialism.

In Revelation, this family thus finds its purpose. It is in this community where Christ is acknowledged as the Lamb of God, worthy of our adoration, that we discover the One who challenges human standards of glory, authority, leadership and power. Only when we share our faith experience in the context of global diversity can we see clearly who God is and what he is like. Only when we acknowledge our inadequacies and accept the gifts that other global communities share with us, can we have a clear vision of Jesus.

## Only together can we see Jesus

Interdependence in the context of suffering allows us to understand that our God sees leadership as service and commitment. Our God’s authority stems from his sacrificial love for us; he has identified with our pain, and experienced our suffering.

Acting as a global family of faith is similar to what occurs in the photomosaic “Christ II” created by Robert Silvers ([www.mutualart.com/Artist/Robert-Silvers/9A8954C9687978A6/Artworks](http://www.mutualart.com/Artist/Robert-Silvers/9A8954C9687978A6/Artworks)). In this work of art, the face of Christ is made up of hundreds of photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of ancient pieces of Scripture. When the global church shares its faith experiences of Jesus in an interdependent way, the characteristics of each local congregation give us a more complete image of God: Jesus, the Lamb of God, who sacrificed himself for us.

Our vision, then, is the person of Jesus. Thus, as my predecessor Larry Miller said so often, MWC becomes a life-giving experience. Acting as a global family fills us with life because it allows us to see the Lamb in a way we would not have otherwise seen. We are able to enjoy a little of that Kingdom which is still to come, and yet is already here among us!

*César García became General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference on January 1. He works out of the new MWC office in Bogotá, Colombia.*

