

Courier Correo Courier

October 2016
Volume 31, Number 2



**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

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Word from the Editor



What's an Anabaptist?

What does it mean to be an Anabaptist? There are 2.1 million Anabaptist-Mennonites in the world, representing 305 groups in 87 countries. Yet many people within the Mennonite World Conference family wrestle with this question.

MWC and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism worked together to gather data in answer to this issue.

The resulting Global Anabaptist Profile (GAP) trained Research Associates to sample congregations in their 24 national churches.

Elizabeth Miller presents some findings from the Profile in “A unique opportunity for greater unity” (pages 3–7).

The GAP was structured around the seven “Shared Convictions” of MWC that you will find on pages 10–11 of this issue. (You can pull out the page from the magazine, or download it from the MWC website.) These seven statements are simple affirmations about what we believe as Anabaptists, regardless of denomination or culture.

In the Perspectives section (pages 8–14), writers from Switzerland, Canada, Mexico, Indonesia and Zimbabwe reflect on how the churches in their context live out these principles in the local life and culture of their churches.

This project of understanding who we are is important as we look ahead to the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and look back on how we came into being. In a rapidly changing world, what are the gifts of Anabaptism that equip us to follow Jesus together today?

The 500th anniversary of Anabaptism falls a few years after the commemoration of Martin Luther’s momentous posting of 95 Theses. To mark our date (1525), the Faith and Life Commission is spearheading Renewal 2027, a decade-long initiative to remember our history, consider our present and plan for our future. How will our movement – one that began with disruption and questioning – employ the best of that subversive impulse while we mature as followers of Jesus? How will we pay attention that our growth is not merely numeric, but deepens our understanding of the cost of living as God’s people who are *shalom* agents in every corner of the world?

And what does renewal mean for unity and collaboration? Can our Shared Convictions help us move closer to other Anabaptist-related churches? Though the gospel has been inculturated differently according to geography and language, perhaps our convictions can unite us in Spirit not only with those across the world but also drive us to work more closely with our neighbouring Mennonites and Christians.

Could our goal for the next 500 years be to undo the schisms that characterized our first 500 years and even to build bridges where no connection existed before?

Centuries from now, when we ask what it means to be Anabaptist, what will the answer be? I pray that we might be a church both one and many, following Jesus in unity and diversity through the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18) among those who are far from God *and* those who are near.

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

Cover Photo:
The global Mennonite-Anabaptist family is diverse.

Photo: Jonathan Charles

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A unique opportunity for greater unity

Global Anabaptist Project collects data on the MWC family worldwide



by **Elizabeth Miller**
Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism

The results of the recent Global Anabaptist Profile (GAP), an extensive three-year survey of 24 member conferences of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), are cause for celebration: the church is growing and the gospel is spreading – and the churches of the Global South are the primary witnesses. Although the survey confirms what many of us already knew – that MWC’s growth is predominantly to be found in Latin America, Africa and Asia – the GAP’s unprecedented scope reveals new demographic data and additional information on identity and practice, offering a level of analysis that will serve churches in both the Global North and the Global South for many years.

For those conferences who participated in the GAP, the results of the survey are already providing them with new tools and insights to enrich their ministries. “We see much in the information that is very

valuable to us,” said Research Associate Reynaldo Vallecillo from Amor Viviente in Honduras. “This helps us see our needs, especially in areas of teaching.”

Tigist Gelagle of the Meserete Kristos Church, Research Associate in Ethiopia, agreed. “Cultural context is important, but our context also includes our Anabaptist roots. We want to take this back to our churches.”

Sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism, the GAP provides church leaders with the most comprehensive portrait of MWC member churches to date. Twenty-four MWC member conferences from five continents were selected for participation in the profile. Conference leaders appointed a Research Associate to conduct the survey in their respective churches.

In 2013, these Research Associates met together with GAP directors John D. Roth (Goshen College, Indiana, USA) and Conrad Kanagy (Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania, USA) to determine their research approach. Together, the group

GAP research associates, church leaders and GAP staff at 2015 consultation.

Photos courtesy of the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism.

“Despite different languages and cultures, the numbers communicate [a unity] across culture in ways that words could not.”

Conferences participating in the GAP

- Argentina (Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina)
- Brazil (Aliança Evangélica Menonita)
- Canada (Brethren in Christ General Conference)
- Canada (Evangelical Mennonite Conference)
- Colombia (Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia)
- Congo (Communauté Mennonite au Congo)
- Congo (Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo)
- Ethiopia (Meserete Kristos Church)
- Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden)
- Germany (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland)
- Guatemala (Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Guatemala)
- Honduras (Organización Cristiana Amor Viviente)
- India (Bihar Mennonite Mandli)
- India (Conference of the MB Churches in India)
- Indonesia (Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa)
- Malawi (BiC Mpingo Wa Abale Mwa Kristu)
- Nicaragua (Convención de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas)
- Paraguay (Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet)
- Paraguay (Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays)
- Philippines (The Integrated Mennonite Church of the Philippines)
- South Africa (Grace Community Church)
- USA (Brethren in Christ General Board)
- USA (U.S. Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches)
- Zimbabwe (BiC Ibandla Labazalwane kuKristu eZimbabwe)

formulated a significant portion of the questionnaire, organized around the seven Shared Convictions of MWC, with additional questions on demographics and specific beliefs and practices. The resulting questionnaire was then translated from English into 26 languages, followed by back-translation into English for purposes of comparison and accuracy.

Research Associates began their work in 2013, generally travelling in person to the selected congregations to explain the GAP, implement the survey and conduct interviews. In some of the conferences, congregations were relatively close together or could be reached via email. But in others, like the Communauté Mennonite au Congo and the Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo, travel required fording rivers and spending long periods away from home.

Research Associates reconvened in 2015 to share their experiences and initial findings. In the intervening year, Kanagy (who has extensive experience in carrying out other church member profiles) spearheaded an analysis of the composite data from all participating conferences. The resulting profile is based on 18,299 individuals representing 403 congregations.

“[The GAP] was a massive effort,” said Kanagy. “To have accomplished this in three years is a credit to God’s grace and amazing efforts by many.”

Who are the member churches of MWC?

The conclusions of the GAP, to be published in full later this year, identify certain areas of significant commonality within the global church, as well as highlighting major differences. Overall, the survey found that the differences between the churches of the “Global North” (North America and Europe) and those in the “Global South” (Latin America, Africa, and Asia) are more important than differences related to denominational affiliation.

- The average age of a respondent in the GAP survey is 46 years. Among continents, however, there is substantial variation; North American and European church members are nearly a decade older on average than members in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Furthermore, 54 percent of members in the Global South are between the ages of 18 and 45. A concentration of members in this range predicts future church growth, since this is the range in which people bear and raise children.

The data from the GAP survey is a call to repentance. But it is equally an invitation to wonder and praise for the different ways the gospel is inculturated in each context.

In the Global North, just 34 percent of members are of childbearing age.

- On a global scale, GAP respondents were evenly divided between men and women. Respondents were more likely to be female in Latin America and Europe, and more likely to be male in Africa and Asia. In Africa, however, these rates were almost certainly affected by higher illiteracy rates among women. Despite efforts by Research Associates to accommodate church members who were unable to read, illiterate women were often unable to complete the survey.
- Sixty-two percent of all GAP respondents live in a rural area. However, continental differences are again important. Nearly 90 percent of Asian respondents and close to two-thirds of Africans live in rural communities, while European and Latin American church members are more likely to live in urban areas.
- There are striking educational disparities among MWC groups surveyed, a factor underscoring much of the social and economic disparity present within the global church. In the Global South, educational levels remained fairly consistent, with between 46 and 58 percent of church members graduating from high school. In the Global North, that range jumps to between 78 and 93 percent.
- The average age of conversion among GAP respondents is 19 years. North American respondents had the lowest age of conversion at 14 years of age, while Latin Americans had the highest



Top: Research associate and church members from BiC Ibandla Labazalwane kuKristu eZimbabwe travel together for GAP.

Above: Research associates from Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo travel to visit congregations.

at 23 years. Differences regarding age of conversion can reflect evangelistic activity: newer churches tend to be more active in attracting adult members from outside the church, resulting in a higher average age. Older churches more often rely on conversions of children and youth within the church, pushing the average age lower. [See “Average age of conversion by continent”]

- Many of the respondents are relatively recent Christians, with Latin America at the epicentre of this growth. Sixty-five percent of Latin American respondents have converted since 1991. In Africa, 54 percent of members have become Christians within the past 25 years. Meanwhile in North America, only 22 percent of respondents had converted since 1991. This finding helps to explain the remarkable growth within conferences in the Global South during the past 25 years, particularly in Latin America and Africa. [See “Average year of conversion by continent”]

Average year of conversion by continent

North America – 1975
 Europe – 1982
 Asia – 1984
 Africa – 1991
 Latin America – 1995

Average age of conversion by continent

North America – 13.6
 Europe – 17.3
 Asia – 16.3
 Africa – 20.7
 Latin America – 23.2



Women from Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo fill out the GAP survey.

What are their beliefs and practices?

Some beliefs and practices – many of them core Anabaptist Christian convictions – are almost universal among GAP respondents. For example, 94 percent of respondents claim that it is very important to be born again, and 91 percent identify Jesus as the only way to God. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents identify the Bible as the Word of God.

There is also a noticeable wariness regarding military service. Seventy-six percent of respondents, if faced with obligatory military service, would either refuse to serve or would select non-combatant military service. In the Global North and the Global South, a nearly identical percentage – 61.9 percent and 62 percent respectively – would choose conscientious objection.

But the survey also reveals points of major difference. Overall, there are greater differences between the Global North and the Global South, but denominational and continental differences are also present. For example, awareness of Mennonite World Conference – the body that draws each of these conferences into active relationship with the others – diverged along both regional and denominational lines. Fifty-five percent of those in the Global South express awareness of MWC, compared to 75 percent of Global North respondents. By denominational affiliation, 66 percent of Brethren in Christ are aware of MWC, 76 percent of Mennonite Brethren, and 46 percent of Mennonites.



Members of the Bihar Mennonite Mandli Etkey congregation fill out the survey in India.

When examined in greater depth, even some of the commonly shared beliefs and practices reveal shades of difference. For example, although the majority of respondents claim the Bible as the Word of God, 55 percent of respondents from Africa, Asia and Latin America add that the Bible should be taken literally. Only 20 percent of North American or European respondents shared this view (74 percent of respondents in the Global North favoured “interpreting the Bible in context”). Furthermore, different regions identify more strongly with certain portions of Scripture. While Europeans and North Americans find the New Testament to be the most relevant for them, only 28 percent of those in Asia, Africa and Latin America said the same. Instead, respondents in the Global South were more likely to identify both Old and New Testaments as relevant.

Charismatic gifts are also more common among those respondents in the Global

The GAP was translated into 25 languages

- Afrikaans (South Africa)
- Amharic (Ethiopia)
- Bahasa Indonesia
- Chichewa (Malawi)
- Chishona (Zimbabwe)
- Dorze (Ethiopia)
- English
- Enlhet (Paraguay)
- French
- German
- Hindi (India)
- Javanese (Indonesia)
- Kikongo (DR Congo)
- Lingala (DR Congo)
- Oromo (Ethiopia)
- Portuguese (Brazil)
- Russian
- Sindebele (Zimbabwe)
- Spanish
- Swahili (DR Congo)
- Tagalog (Philippines)
- Telugu (India)
- Tshiluba (DR Congo)
- Tumbuka (Malawi)
- Xhosa (South Africa)
- Yao (Malawi)

South. Eighty-four percent of those in Africa, Asia and Latin America have prophesied, spoken in tongues, been miraculously healed or involved in liberation from demonic oppression, compared to 31 percent of those in Europe or North America.

The Global North and Global South should not be seen as homogenous groupings, however, as there are also important regional differences. Africans and Asians, for example, were most likely to have experienced liberation from demonic oppression, while 56 percent of Latin Americans have been miraculously healed from an injury or illness.

Personal evangelism, a strong characteristic of the early Anabaptists, similarly varies. Whereas 51 percent of African respondents speak of their faith to people



Alfonso Cabañas implements the GAP survey with the Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet (Paraguay).

The purposes of GAP are

- To develop a deeper understanding of global Anabaptism.
- To provide information to guide mission and priorities.
- To strengthen relationships among MWC churches.
- To inform the development of MWC priorities.
- To establish a baseline against which to measure future change.
- To train leaders to conduct church profiles in the future.

outside of their family and church circles at least once a week, only 13 percent of Europeans do the same. Thirty-three percent of Asians and 26 percent of Latin Americans invite non-Christian friends to church on a weekly basis, compared to only 9 percent of North Americans.

The GAP suggests that personal evangelism is a regular practice among many in the Global South, but a relatively rare exercise for those in the Global North.

What does the data tell us?

What accounts for these differences? We all read the same Bible, but we interpret it differently and find differing degrees of relevance in its various parts. We all claim the presence of the Holy Spirit among us, but experience very different manifestations of that same Spirit. We have all joined the same peace church tradition, but military service or policing roles are alternatively tolerated or resisted. We have all received the good news, but some are much more likely to evangelize than others.

Some Research Associates responded to the differences they saw in the GAP results with anecdotal explanations. When faced with a divisive civil war, for example, the Convención de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas de Nicaragua developed a strong stance against military service that

Definition: inculturation

“The missiological process in which the gospel is rooted in a particular culture and the latter is transformed by its introduction to Christianity. Christianity and culture are thereby mutually enriched.”

(U.E. Umoren, Nigeria)

has survived to this day. “We recognized that we would be killing other brothers in the church,” said Marcos Orozco. “We were clear that we couldn’t do this.” African and Asian associates testified to the reality of ancestor worship in their contexts as an influence in their reliance on Old Testament passages addressing similar practices.

Yet, the particular dynamics of each conference’s context do not fully explain why so many of the significant differences emerging in the GAP data fall along divide between the Global North and the Global South.

The destructive socio-economic and political implications of this divide are writ large in our world, and, at times, they are reflected within the church. In this sense, the data from the GAP survey is a call to repentance. But it is equally an invitation to wonder and praise for the different ways the gospel is inculturated in each context. And at its core, it is a unique opportunity for greater unity within Mennonite World Conference.

Research Associates repeatedly affirmed their appreciation for the sense of unity they gained through their participation in the GAP. Regina Mondez of the Integrated Mennonite Churches of the Philippines reflected, “I appreciate that despite different languages and cultures, the numbers communicate [a unity] across culture in ways that words could not.”

Marcos Orozco agreed, summarizing the GAP’s six-point purpose statement in one succinct sentence. “We need to learn from the experiences of other brothers and sisters in the global church family, recognizing that we each have strengths and weaknesses that we need to reinforce and improve.”



Elizabeth Miller is project and communications manager at the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. She lives in Goshen, Indiana, USA, and is a member of a Mennonite Church USA congregation.

How do our member churches express the MWC Shared Convictions in beautiful, local variety throughout our global body?

While the feature article in this issue of CCC examines patterns and trends of Anabaptist Mennonite convictions expressed in churches around the world, in this column, church leaders from different regions offer their particular perspectives on how the MWC Shared Convictions take shape and meaning in their contexts.

Turn to page 10–11 for a poster of all seven Shared Convictions.

Mexico

Our mission and Shared Convictions

As a worldwide community of faith and life, we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

—MWC Shared Conviction #7

by Carlos Martínez García

As Anabaptist-Mennonite Christians, our mission is closely linked to the identity we have recognized and confessed. For this reason, *What We Believe Together: Exploring the Shared Convictions of Anabaptist related Churches*, comprises what is needed to communicate to faith communities who we are and the work the Lord has entrusted us to carry out.

Social, economic and cultural injustice has increased in Mexico. Violence causes casualties every day. To witness to Jesus in this context requires clarity as to who we are, by whom and to what we have been called. I feel that *What We Believe Together*, clearly responds to these questions, especially point seven: “As a worldwide community of faith and life, we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God’s grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.”

In my church in Mexico (Conferencia de Iglesias Evangélicas Anabautistas Menonitas de México – CIEAMM), we believe that each local congregation and each faith community is the seed and fruit of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. In line with this conviction, we seek to understand and live out the gospel of peace, justice and reconciliation proclaimed

by Jesus in a holistic (comprehensive) way. Thus, when he went through cities, towns and villages proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, he healed every disease and sickness (Matthew 9:35).

Likewise, we must be agents of holistic healing in each area of our community and social life. Our mission must be embodied in the world, just like Jesus; and he reminds us every day that, as the Father sent him, he is sending us (John 20:21).

In CIEAMM, we are aware that every local church is strengthened by the Holy Spirit, a truth that is well grounded in *What We Believe Together*. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ calling us and strengthening us for the *compassionate mission*. Jesus Christ felt the pain, suffering and conditions experienced by people as his own, and felt compassion for them. Compassion is not about feeling momentary pain; it means identifying with the person who is in distress, and be moved to action and service to ease the pain that deeply hurts human beings.

Jesus was compassionate and his deep identification with those who suffered led him to action (Matthew 9:36, Matthew 14:14, Mark 6:34, Matthew 15:32–37, Luke 7:12–15). If we say that we follow Jesus, then we must be compassionate, as he was.

We have promoted the printed book as well as the digital version of *What We Believe Together* in the CIEAMM. The volume has been studied in different ways in each church

affiliated to CIEAMM. In some cases, each chapter became a Sunday school lesson; in others, each one of the seven Convictions was presented as a sermon theme; and we have also encouraged study groups. Our aim is to give a copy of *What We Believe Together* to every new church member as a study guide.

There is little printed and digital material on Anabaptist identity and mission available in Spanish. This is why *What We Believe Together* is appreciated by CIEAMM as a good summary of the distinctive beliefs of the global family which we are a part of, especially because most of our church members are people with low and medium schooling, with little reading habits and systematic studies.

It has been enriching and a blessing for the members of CIEAMM to know that they are a part of a global community, whose identity is centered on Christ, made up by “saints from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). This identity principle is central to building reconciling communities and seeking to put into practice the gospel of peace taught by Jesus Christ.

The vision of the church communities which make up CIEAMM is “to be a church family whose authority lies in the Word of God, which forms disciples for holistic growth as they follow the example of Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit to be embodied in our reality.”

Our mission is to “serve and reflect the gospel of peace through Jesus’ model.” *What We Believe Together* was the biblical-theological basis on which we developed what we confess as the vision and mission of CIEAMM. For the people of CIEAMM, this document has been a tool for thought and action as Anabaptists in the Mexican social, economic and religious context.

Carlos Martínez García is a journalist and pastor in Mexico. He is moderator of the Conferencia de Iglesias Evangélicas Anabautistas Menonitas de México (CIEAMM).

Switzerland

How can we get answers from the Bible for 21st century questions?

As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience.

—MWC Shared Conviction #4

by Emanuel Neufeld

How can we get answers from the Bible for 21st century questions? That's a real challenge! Parts of the Bible's message are very clear and timeless valid. But because our world has changed dramatically, some 21st-century questions require us to re-evaluate other parts. Yet how can we know when we should hang on to previous convictions or whether it's time to open up for new insights and ways?

In our local church, we wanted to find answers to this question in the years 2010–2012, concerning the topic of sex and marriage, focusing on questions around premarital sex. It's not the only ethical question, and, of course, not the most important! But it is one that concerns all generations, if not directly, then in the broader (church) family.

Our starting point each time is the Bible, which “we accept as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance.”

Studying the Bible together

We knew that attitudes and opinions were very diverse. So should everybody just do what he or she wants? Or is there any orientation from the Bible? Some people from the older generation hoped that this process would tell the younger generation clearly what is right. Others – so-called “burned children,” who had experienced strict church discipline exercised on them or somebody in their peer group in the past – were worried these stories would be repeated. So this process had to be started very carefully.

We were very pleased to see 100 people from different generations join the process, trusting the guidance of the Holy Spirit on our common journey.

We took several important steps:

1. A period with Bible study – personal and in small groups. Helpful also was a chapter from Tim Geddert's book *All Right Now*: “God speaks through the Bible – why do we hear God differently?”
2. On the first evening we spoke about hopes and fears, cultural changes, hermeneutics and we shared our planned steps. Our goal was that, at the end of this process, we could discern together what we keep as binding, and what should be open to individual freedom.
3. For two following evenings we invited an external speaker who helped us to get a better understanding of biblical foundations about sex and marriage and what this could mean for our way of living. The main outcome was that sexuality should be imbedded in a loving and life-long relationship characterised by unity, exclusiveness and stability.
4. The fourth evening was a real highlight, because it was time to find out, where we stand after all that has been heard and said. What's important for us? What aspects of sexuality and marriage are open to personal interpretation and what should the community address (it's not solely a private affair)?

To find that out, we drew a line and asked everybody place themselves on this line according to his or her point of view. Our body language expressed whether we would face people we don't agree with, or turn away from them. We encouraged people to give

short statements, like “I'm standing here, because...” Most people were facing the others – despite the different opinions.

It was a wide spectrum – yet we all found ourselves under the cross on the wall.

United despite differences

In the following weeks, we recorded important insights, which again were discussed with elders and preachers who didn't share the same opinion on every point, but were united to present and discuss that with the congregation.

A clear majority agreed and accepted the document as a guide. It's not a document of doctrine. There are no quick answers to the question, “How far a loving couple may go,” rather, it presents insights of the whole process we went through as local church.

Sometimes leaders from other churches ask us for that paper, but we have reservations about sharing it because the process is so very important. Every local church should go through this process by itself. Just adapting results from others without a process will not be helpful.

Looking back, there is much reason to be thankful, but we don't want to keep quiet about painful experiences; this way of transformation in church life was difficult. We failed to live our verbalized claims. People got hurt and some tension still exists. That keeps us humble, for it's easier to talk about the bright side than the darker side of life. But both belong to our common experience and journey as local church. As the first words of the Shared Convictions say, “By the grace of God.....” we walk forward, focusing on the great vision of *shalom*.

With this experiences from the past, we approach a new challenge now, to speak about money, wealth and giving. I'm sure we will be challenged by other ethical questions in the coming years. Our starting point each time is the Bible, which “we accept as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance.”

And that means being lifelong learners, not having all instant answers, but seeking them together.



Emanuel Neufeld is pastor of Evangelische Mennonitengemeinde Schänzli, Muttenz, Switzerland.



Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists

By the grace of God, we seek to live and proclaim the good news in Jesus Christ. As part of the one body of Christ at all times and the following to be central to our belief and practice:

1

God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.

3

As a church, we are a community of those whom God's Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith and follow Christ in life.

2

Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world and offers eternal life.

4

As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience.



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5 of reconciliation places, we hold

5

The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need.

6

We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord's Supper and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.

7

As a worldwide community of faith and life, we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In these convictions, we draw inspiration from Anabaptist forebears of the 16th century, who modelled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ. We seek to walk in his name by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we confidently await Christ's return and the final fulfillment of God's kingdom.

Adopted by Mennonite World Conference, General Council, 15 March 2006

Indonesia

Holistic care in Semarang

As a worldwide community of faith and life, we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

—MWC Shared Conviction #7

by Lydia C. Adi

In the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, Indonesia, the Mennonite church responds to the needs of the community across religions and class with holistic care, supported by local government institutions and religious institutions.

The church witnesses to God's love and grace by welcoming its Muslim brothers and sisters and people from various religions. "They are not enemies; they are those who need God's love and help, just as we all do," says Victor Purnomo. He is a pastor of Jemaat Kristen Indonesia Injil Kerajaan (Gospel of the Kingdom Church, Indonesian [Mennonite] Christian Fellowship). "Without the walls of hatred or anger, the church is able to work creatively to reach the needs of the city and ultimately the hearts of its people."

Churches like JKI Injil Kerajaan build their ministry on good relations with the local citizens. Reaching out to the levels in society with the most need, the church has found this population quick to respond openly and gratefully.

Holistic care

The church's holistic care includes offering academic scholarships for children through Sekolah Terang Bangsa (Light of the Nations School), the church-run elementary, junior high, senior high school. This ministry has opened up the hearts of many parents: "If you can love the children, the parents will be very proud because their children are being cared for and valued," says pastor Victor.

The church also reaches out to its neighbours through social ministries like disaster relief. "The church needs to be the most sensitive to the needs of its city. We provide the answer for them," says Victor. "When there is a fire, we are the first to provide food. That really touches them. At the point they have nothing, there is the church responding."

This also builds relationship with the government. The officials have specifically



Photo: Life TV Indonesia

Jemaat Kristen Indonesia Injil Kerajaan churches share God's love in outdoor markets in Indonesian cities.

asked for assistance because of the available facilities. During recent floods, churches sent volunteers on rafts filled with food and supplies. People across different religions have said, "The church is amazing. Our own people do not even care this much for us, yet the church is the first to help."

Healing prayer

Other social ministries occur in the open-air markets where rice, vegetables, cooking oil, clothing and other supplies are sold below the normal price. Here, the church shares the gospel and offers prayer for healing.

Not planned to be a crusade, these events focus more on sharing godly values. Participants from the church sing secular songs with positive value or national pride, as well as Christian songs that do not explicitly name Christ. There is a time of prayer for the sick, when at last the people find out that it is the Lord Jesus who healed them. In their time of need, they do not mind who does the healing as long as they are healed. Thousands have committed their lives to Christ through these events in the market.

The church openly supports social ministries like food distribution during the evenings of Ramadan (Muslim month of fasting). Feeding more than a thousand people each day for four weeks a year, the satellite church in Permata Hijau (Green Diamond area of Semarang) has opened up its doors for gatherings, games, prizes and stories from God's Word. The sick

are healed and miracles bring people to Christ. Supporters, seeing the effect and fruit of the ministry, willingly provide funding and provisions from their own businesses.

Respectful reputation

In Pondok Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), the church volunteers come wearing religious head coverings as guests who respect their neighbours in faith. They share about values like having vision, love and forgiveness.

In turn, Islamic boarding schools have asked to attend the church Christmas gatherings. After praying according to their own faith tradition, these Muslims sit to listen to the Christmas programs. Students mentioned that their Christian friends are good, not forcing them into Christianity, but giving good values that they can learn from. This has piqued their interest. When schools join events located at the church, we freely share Jesus.

Even police officers have openly supported the church. When religious extremists threatened the church in Semarang, the police were the first to notify the church leaders and send help. When churches like JKI Injil Kerajaan were accused of "Christianization," the church responded that they are helping society in poverty. They maintained peaceful communication. Others reported that the church does not force itself on others. The police then defended the church.

Strong networks and relationships between the church and other institutions are essential.

The church must be more than an organization that leads services among the Christian community. Its potential includes building bridges for those in the city to know Christ through holistic service. The great commission (Matthew 28:18–20) is to share the gospel to all the world with the great commandment in mind, that we would love God and our fellow people (Matthew 22:35–40). It is not a matter of debating which commandment is the most essential, but allowing them to walk hand in hand.



Lydia C. Adi serves as the international relations representative for the Jemaat Kristen Indonesia Synod. She holds master's degrees in cross-cultural studies (Fuller Theological Seminary, USA) and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (Biola University, USA). Together with her husband Anton

K. Sidharta, network pastor at JKI Maranatha in Ungaran, they have founded the Unlimited Fire JKI Youth Network and have bridged relations with churches across denominations and countries. Anton and Lydia live in Ungaran, Indonesia with their son, Caleb.

Zimbabwe

Songs of the Trinity and *shalom*

The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need.

—MWC Shared Conviction #5

by Bekitemba Dube

We share the beliefs and practices of the global Anabaptist family as Brethren in Christ Church Zimbabwe.

The songs we sing display our belief, thoughts and our kind of theology. Most services, be they in rural or urban congregations, will sing number 75 in our Zulu hymnal *Amagama okuhlabelela*: “*Sinomhlobo onguJesu unothando*” (Jesus is a loving friend).

A snap survey during the months of May and June 2016 showed that it was the song that was not only selected at district council meetings, but most congregants mentioned it as the song that featured in congregational music in many services that period. This song is sung even at funeral vigils. This song expresses our belief in Jesus.

Attributes of Jesus featured in this song link directly to God.

He is not like other friends; he does not harbour disappointment; he is truly helpful. He is coming again to choose his own.

Jesus never disappoints. He is coming again to take his own because of his unfailing love.

Those who are seeking are called upon to come to Jesus as he will separate them from their sins.

The last stanza calls upon the believers to walk in Jesus’ love with the promise of victory.

Hymn number 4 in the Zulu hymnal (right) is commonly used in Brethren in Christ Churches. This is another song we sing that says what we believe about God.

We believe in *shalom*

Our belief in *shalom* is one continued aspect of our identity with the worldwide Anabaptist family. Belief in *shalom* is expressed at different levels.

The first level that comes to one’s mind is the absence of war and conflict at community and national level. Zimbabwe has seen such times.

The late Bishop Steven Ndlovu was head of denominations during the disturbances in Matabeleland in the 1980s. He mobilised the national heads of denominations to meet Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe in a move that led to the cessation of the bloody conflict between the Nkomo-sympathetic dissidents and the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwe defence forces. (The story is recorded in *The Gender of Piety* by Wendy Urban-Mead.)

The church leadership did not take sides in the conflict, but spoke out in favour of the Lord’s *shalom*.

Mrs. Madlela expressed *shalom* at an individual level. She miraculously escaped a fire in her house. When she saw the arsonist in the hands of the police, she said, “My son, why do you attempt to kill me when I did not do you any wrong. I hold no grudge against you. All I pray is that the Lord touches your heart and you come to his saving power.”

Our hymns in the Brethren in Christ Church affirm belief in the Trinitarian God.



Photo: Monica Figueroa

A choir from Zimbabwe raises praises on the Global Church Village stage at Pennsylvania 2015.

These are sung with a fervency of affirmation. When we sing, we affirm what we believe together as Anabaptists so we can follow Jesus to express *shalom*.

Bekithemba Dube is a lecturer at Ekuphileni Bible Institute at Mtshabezi Mission, one of the largest Brethren in Christ mission stations in Zimbabwe. He has worked as a teacher; lecturer in a Government Teachers’ College; coordinator of HIV/AIDS programme for BICC in Zimbabwe; and for many years he was an interpreter of conference sermons in English or Ndebele. He and his wife have one adult son who teaches in one of the mission schools.

Zulu *Woza Thixo Wethu*

Woza Thixo wethu
Onga mandla ethu usizise;
Baba obusayo
Wena onqobayo,
Wena osizayo,
Usibheke.

JesuMbusu wethu
Nqobizithazethu,
Uzahlule;
Vez’ amandla akho
Ukuhleng’ abakho
Inhliziyo yabo
Ime kuwe.

Moya oyingcwele
Woza usihole,
Sibusise;
Uzihlanzisise
'Zinhliziyo zethu;
Ube phezu kwethu
Silungise.

Nkulunkulu wedwa,
Abathathu 'Munye,
Mananjalo!
Ubukhosi bonke
Naw’ amandla onke,
Nal’ udumolonke,
Kungo kwakho.

English *Come to us*

Come to us our God who art our strength,
Come help us now.
Father who art our ruler,
You who art conqueror,
You who art our helper,
Cast your eyes upon us.

Jesus our ruler, defeat our enemies;
Conquer them all, display your power,
The redemption of all thine own,
Their heart stand firm in you.

Holy Spirit, come and lead us through,
Come bless us all,
Cleanse our heart,
Descend upon us.
Make us righteous.

God the three in one.
Stand firm for ever.
Thine is the kingdom,
The power and the glory.

Canada

Centring Jesus amid changing times

Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world, and offers eternal life.

—MWC Shared Conviction #2

by Palmer Becker

The church in North America is experiencing rapid change. Many are saying that the changes are as great as those experienced in the Great Reformation of the 16th century. Traditional beliefs are being questioned. Former structures are no longer working. New forms of church are emerging.

In times of change, basic convictions provide courage, stability and a basis for new directions. The seven Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists help to provide that kind of foundation.

Jesus is Lord

In some of our churches, there is a new emphasis – central to the new reformation – on Jesus as Lord. Just as our Anabaptist forebears rediscovered a living Jesus after he had for centuries been enshrined in mystery and ritual, so there is today a stronger emphasis on following a living Jesus in everyday life. Often Jesus as Lord is emphasized even more than is Jesus as Saviour; it is from following other lords that we need to be saved!

The statement, “Jesus is the Son of God” in Shared Conviction # 2 is often misunderstood, especially by my Muslim friends. There are approximately 13,000 persons of this faith in the Canadian community where I live. They tend to understand Son of God in terms of biology and procreation rather than in terms of closeness of relationship. I prefer to say “Jesus, the Messiah, is the best way to understand God.” My Muslim friends can understand and affirm Jesus as a human who was filled with the Spirit of God. That can lead to dialogue concerning how we open our lives to a nurturing, empowering, revealing God through Jesus Christ.

Jesus is peace

We have many divisions and disagreements here in North America that can be traced to different approaches to interpreting

Scripture. Some members and churches have a rather literal and flat approach to the Bible. They tend to accept teachings of the Old Testament and the Epistles as equal to the teachings of Jesus. Shared Conviction #4 is helpful in encouraging us to interpret the Scriptures in the light of Jesus Christ.

We are distressed by the gun culture that has emerged in the United States and how it is leading to violence. Shared Conviction #5, which emphasizes peace-making, justice and the sharing of resources, needs continual emphasis. During the Vietnam War, the Western District of the General Conference Mennonite Church (USA) conducted pre-draft boot camps which all 17-year-old young men in the area were asked to attend. These sessions clearly taught causes of conflict and the biblical basis for peace. Most participants chose alternatives to war.

We need new and creative ways today to teach each other and our young people the ways of peace.

Jesus is teacher

A continuing question in North America and likely around the world is, “How can we strengthen our unique Anabaptist understandings of the Christian faith while also stressing unity with other Christian groups? How can we become stronger in our faith without becoming competitive and critical toward Christians of other persuasions or people of other faiths?”

Parallel to MWC’s Shared Convictions are three concise core values: “Jesus is the Centre of our Faith,” “Community is the Centre of our Life,” and “Reconciliation is the Centre of our Work.”

These three core values, which were foundational to the Anabaptist movement and the early church, have come to renewed prominence through the booklet, *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* published by Mennonite Mission Network in 2008 and now translated into more than 20 languages.

Mennonite Church USA has used the three core values as a basis for its

long-term purposeful plan. Numerous congregations have used them in their brochures to state their identity. Pastors have preached sermons on the themes and study groups have found the booklet to be helpful to explain what it means to be Christian.

There is today a stronger emphasis on following a living Jesus in everyday life.

Dann Pantoja of PeaceBuilders Community Inc. in the Philippines reports, “We have adopted it as our worldview.” After a workshop in Thailand, participants said, “Now we finally know what it means to be a Mennonite Christian!”

As we teach the Shared Convictions and the three core values, I believe it is imperative to admit that none of us has the whole truth. We need to learn from each other. As we deepen our understandings together, we all become stronger.

The Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists state clearly what we believe. These beliefs help to determine our feelings toward God, each other and the whole earth. These feelings in turn help to direct our actions.

The first Christians and the early Anabaptists lived their beliefs with courage even if it meant persecution and death. May these convictions also help to fill us with the love and courage we need to live according to Jesus in these changing times.



Palmer Becker has spent a lifetime serving the church as a pastor, church planter, missionary, conference executive and educator. He is author of *What is an Anabaptist Christian?* and *Anabaptist Essentials...Ten signs of a Unique Christian Faith* (forthcoming). Palmer and his wife Ardys live in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. They are the parents of four grown children.

Joyous hope and faith

Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa

by Karla Braun

“In the traditional African religious experience, the expression of faith was never understood in universal terms,” writes Alemu Checole, assisted by Samuel Asefa, in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, in the Global Mennonite History series. “Beliefs and practices varied from one locality to another, from one tribe to another. Religious expression was always understood to be a Luo, Maasai, Turkana, or Zanaki expression of faith.

“African Christians accepted Christianity, however, because they saw in it a new way of life, one which was profoundly better than their traditional existence. For example, their hope for eternal life, assurance of the forgiveness of sins, peace and reconciliation with God and humanity assured them of security. The new Covenant sealed by the blood of Christ united them in a new universal community of faith.”

Elam and Elizabeth Stauffer and John and Ruth Moseman were among the first Mennonite missionaries to enter Tanzania (then called Tanganyika) to plant churches in the region in the 1930s. Zedekiah Kisare, a young African Christian, was their interpreter at their Sunday services.

Mission stations were established in Bukiroba, Mugango, Bumangi and Nyabasi among local tribes in the area.

In addition to sharing the gospel and starting churches, a school was established at each mission station, several hospitals and local clinics were established and the missionaries started a girls home.

In 1942, a revival began. Sparked by an African evangelist, revival swept through the region. “On the whole, this wave of revival in east Africa touched people from every walk of life,” write Checole and Asefa. “It brought unity between missionaries and Africans and created sympathy and understanding between the two races.”

As countries of east Africa moved toward independence from colonial rule, however; there was a transition for the missionaries as Africans moved into leadership within an African framework.

In 1948, the Mennonite missionaries in Tanzania discussed building an indigenous



Did you know?

- Kenya has more than 40 million people.
- Kenya's population reports as 80% Christian, 7% Muslim, 13% African religions and other smaller groups like Hindus.
- Tanzania has more than 50 million people.
- Some 70% of Tanzania's inhabitants are rural.

African Mennonite Church with an organizational structure built on three ministry offices: bishop, pastor, deacon.

In 1950, men who had served as lay preachers for more than 15 years were ordained; given authority to baptize, administer the Lord's Supper and perform weddings. Ezekiel Muganda, Andrea Mabebe, Zedekiah Kisare and Nashon Kawira Nyambok were ordained as pastors.

The choir of Eastleigh Mennonite Church from Kenya in 2015 at Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA (above), and at the MWC General Council meetings in 1981 (inset).

“The sense of oneness in the Spirit, the joy and appreciation at finding national pastors, aroused great interest in the work of evangelism,” write Checole and Asefa. Despite many hardships evangelists faced as they moved from place to place, their ministries produced the fruit of converts.

When Tanzania gained independence in 1961, church leaders had to wrestle with questions of nationalism. Churches saw the importance of inculcating the value of responsibilities of leadership in their youth. The Tanganyikan Mennonite Church Youth League was organized in with Daniel Matoka assisting Shemaya Magati with leadership. Youth activities included cleaning the church, receiving offerings, helping with Sunday school programs, singing and gardening.

In 1964, the Tanzanian Mennonite Church chose its first national bishop, Zedekiah

Kisare of the Luo tribe. Tensions from Bantu tribes stirred, but their candidate Ezekiel Muganda made peace instead of challenging leadership, and Kisare was ordained in 1967 just as socialism was proclaimed in the country.

The political boundary between Kenya and Tanzania divides tribal areas. In 1942, Ogwada Okach and Nikanor Dhaje felt compelled to cross in to Kenya to proclaim the gospel. They were the first Mennonite



Photo: Dave Kroeker, Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Frank Epp of the Canadian Mennonite interviews bishop Zedekiah Kisare at the 1967 Mennonite World Conference Assembly in the Netherlands.

evangelists from Tanzania to travel into Kenya to witness and nurture Christian groups emerging at Bande, Nyangwaye and other places. From the beginning, the Kenyan Mennonite Church has been “a grassroots movement of the rural poor,” writes Philip E. Okeyo in *Forward in Faith*.

Kenya became an independent state in 1963. In 1965, the government of Kenya recognized the fourth petition to recognize the Mennonites as a church body. However, the Kenya Mennonite Church remained part of the Tanzanian church until 1977 when Bishop Kisare worked with pastors to set their own structure for Kenya.

In 1980, Eastleigh Fellowship Centre was opened in Nairobi. This community centre with a library, classrooms and sports spaces provides “a Christian witness and presence, offering an opportunity for conversation and sharing between various religious communities, providing constructive recreation and help for low-income families and students, thus improving the quality of their lives,” write Checole and Asefa. Though the Kenyan Mennonite churches have seen conflict within themselves, this centre has given them a reputation for peace and relations with Muslims.

Over in Tanzania, Mennonite convictions of non-resistance were tested by the 1978 war with Uganda. Some church members joined the military to fight, but others like Christopher Ndege stood firm on religious convictions of non-resistance despite a court challenge.

Around this time, the church, which had expanded, elected pastor Hezekiah N. Saria, to serve as bishop over the second

Learn more about Mennonite churches in Africa

- *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, 3rd ed. Global Mennonite History Series 1. Lapp, John A. and C. Arnold Snyder, gen. eds. Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2006.
- *Forward in Faith: History of the Kenya Mennonite Church, A Seventy-Year Journey, 1942–2012*. Ojwang, Francis S. ed. Nairobi: Kenya Mennonite Church, 2015.
- “Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania.” Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Stauffer, Elam W. and Mahlon M. Hess. 1987. Web. gameo.org
- “Kenya Mennonite Church.” Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Hess, Mahlon M. 1987. Web. gameo.org

diocese. Under his leadership, tensions arose between regions and tribes. There was “a kind of stagnation in church growth” and a “spiritual malnutrition,” Checole and Asefa write. Now, new leadership “is trying to bring peace and reconciliation to the KMT.”

As for Kenya, despite growing pains, “a church which began in a village in a single ethnic community has now crossed over to other tribes, such as the Kikuyu, Luhya, Mijikenda, Nandi, Maasai, Somali, and others, even in Uganda” writes Okeyo in *Forward in Faith*.

“The gospel transcends all cultures and should challenge every cultural heritage. Because of the marvelous work of Jesus Christ, millions of Christians in Africa live in joyous hope and faith. Through Jesus the powers of death are defeated; victory is made certain because Jesus is Lord. The gospel is the Good News for the whole person.” write Checole and Asefa.

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

Mennonite national churches in Kenya

Brethren in Christ Church Kenya Conference

Members	4,900
Congregations	25
Headquarters	Nakuru
Presiding officer	Samuel Muriithi (bishop)

Christian Believers Fellowship (Beachy Amish Church)

Members	693
Congregations	16
Headquarters	Kisumu
Presiding officer	Marlin Stoltzfus (senior bishop)

Christian Church International

Members	19,640
Congregations	320
Headquarters	Madaraka, Thika, Central
Presiding officer	Joseph Mburu Kamiri (bishop)

Church of God in Christ, Mennonite

Members	139
Congregations	9

**Kenya Mennonite Church*

Members	11,800
Congregations	142
Headquarters	Nango
Presiding officer	Philip E. Okeyo (bishop moderator)

Mennonite national churches in Tanzania

**Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania*

Members	65,456
Congregations	400
Headquarters	Musoma
Presiding officer	Steven Watson Mang'ana (bishop)

* indicates membership with MWC

Source: MWC World Directory 2015

“My cry is heard”

Psalms 40:1–10, Genesis 11:1–9, Acts 2:1–18



MWC World Fellowship Sunday is your opportunity to help the people in your congregation become aware of what it means to belong to a global Anabaptist faith community. It is our

annual celebration of worshipping in spirit with Anabaptist brothers and sisters around the world.

European member churches provided worship resource materials for January 2017: the prayers, songs, sermon ideas, stories and even recipes are a window into these Anabaptist churches today.

Encourage your congregation to celebrate World Fellowship Sunday with the global Anabaptist family in January.

mwc-cmm.org/wfs

Why Anabaptist?



Why am I an Anabaptist? While I live and worship in an interdenominational setting, I love the fact that Anabaptism challenges me to be a radical follower of Jesus Christ: to serve, not to be served; to seek reconciliation, not retaliation; to love; and to witness.
—Elizabeth Kunjam, India



I'm an Anabaptist because it is a Church committed to peacemaking, love and dialogue. And also because it is a church proud of its history, but that doesn't close itself with traditions because of its radical nature.
—Marc Pasqués, Spain

Indonesia 2021: a multi-generational, worldwide event with diverse people



Febri Cahya Kirstiani
Sinode Jemaat Kristen (JKI)
Keluarga Kerajaan Salatiga,
Indonesia

MWC Assembly 2015 was “heaven on earth”: standing among thousand people from all over the world with so many differences, culture, language, ages but singing together in unity worshipping and praising God.

I am so excited to welcome everyone to my country for the MWC Assembly in 2021. I can't wait to be reunited with my friends from all over the world and am so excited to meet and connect with new friends.



Anita Purwidaningsih
Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) or
Union of Muria Christian Churches, Demak,
Central Java, Indonesia

At Global Youth Summit 2015 (GYS), as I listened to delegates' stories, I thought about about what we – part of global community – could give. That really opened my eyes and my mind; the world is complex, but we're connected. We should take care of and pray for one another.

Indonesia 2021 Assembly is not only a conference for the elder generations, but also an introduction to the global faith family for the younger generations, so they may grow-up in the strong community of Anabaptist values applied to life. I hope it is a multi-generational, worldwide event with thousands of diverse people.

Renewal 2027: “Transformed by the Word: Reading the Bible in Anabaptist perspectives”



Renewal
Renovación
Renouveau

Sunday, 12 February 2017
9:30–16:30
Haus Sankt Ulrich, Kappelberg 1, 86159
Augsburg, Germany

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

A day-long public conference on the theme “Transformed by the Word: Reading the Bible in Anabaptist perspectives” will launch the project on 12 February 2017

in Augsburg, Germany. The gathering, which occurs some 500 years after Luther's famous appeal to *sola scriptura* launched the Reformation, will explore how Anabaptist-Mennonites around the world have engaged Scripture in the past...and how Scripture continues to be relevant in our global community today.

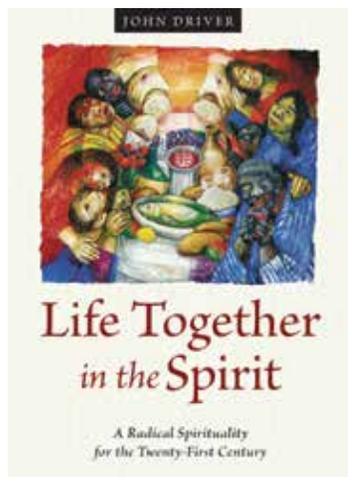
Anabaptist-Mennonite speakers from five continents and several ecumenical guests will reflect on the theme, with opportunities for all participants to join in worship, singing and discussion. The gathering takes place in connection with meetings of the MWC Executive Committee and Commissions.

This is the first in a series of annual regional events that will culminate at MWC Assembly 18 in 2027.

For more information, go to mwc-cmm.org/renewal2027

Featured book

Global Anabaptist Mennonite Shelf of Literature



Life Together in the Spirit: A Radical Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century

John Driver

Plough Publishing House, USA

In *Life Together*, professor and missionary in Latin America John Driver shows that the spirituality of Jesus' disciples and the early Christian church encompasses every dimension of life. Grounded in the example of Jesus himself, Anabaptists believe spirituality finds expression in the visible witness of the church community, and in the daily lives of those who seek to embody Christ's presence in the world by serving others.

This MWC-edited and translated version of Driver's original Spanish text includes responses from Anabaptist church leaders and scholars around the world.

At Assembly 16 in Harrisburg, Pa., USA, *Life Together in the Spirit* was introduced as the latest addition to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Shelf of Literature

These are books MWC selects to help member churches nurture a common Christian faith.

See mwc-cmm.org/literature for the full list.

MWC's Regional Representatives

These part-time volunteers are responsible to develop and support relationships with MWC member, associate-member and potential-member churches, local congregations and MWC-related agencies and partners.

ASIA



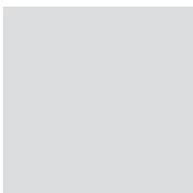
Northeast Asia (Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong)

◀ **Kyong Jung Kim** from South Korea



South Asia (India, Nepal)

◀ **Cynthia Peacock** from India



Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Australia, Myanmar, Philippines, Vietnam)
Vacant

AFRICA



Central West Africa (DRC, Angola, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Ghana)

◀ **Francisca Ibanda** from Democratic Republic of Congo



East Africa (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya)

◀ **Tesfatsion Dalellew** from Ethiopia



Southern Africa (South Africa, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe)

◀ **Barbara Nkala** from Zimbabwe

EUROPE



(France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland)

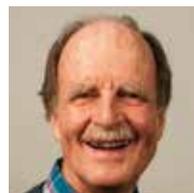
◀ **Henk Stenvers** from Netherlands

LATIN AMERICA



Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama)

◀ **Willi Hugo Perez** from Guatemala



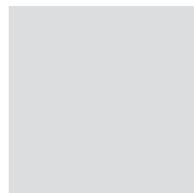
Andean Region (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela)

◀ **Pablo Stucky** from Colombia



Southern Cone (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay)

▲ **Peter and Gladys Siemens** from Brazil



Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Trinidad)
Vacant

NORTH AMERICA



(Canada, USA)

◀ **Lynn Roth** from USA [part-time staff]

MWC financial update

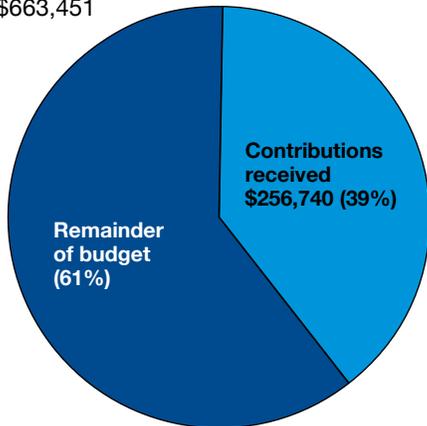
We are grateful for the steady flow of contributions in support of Mennonite World Conference, whether from our national member churches, local congregations, or individuals. We are somewhat surprised that giving is slower this year than average, resulting in being behind budget at the end of August. Contributions from individuals and from congregations are lagging the most compared to normal trends. It is a challenge for us to anticipate how much we will receive when so many of the contributions are received in December.

Please consider how you might continue to support MWC's ministry and presence now, especially in these years between global Assemblies.

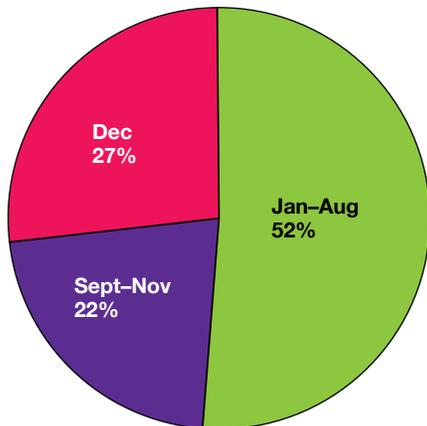
See mwc-cmm.org/donate

Contributions received as percent of budget as of 31 August 2016

Total 2016 budget
\$663,451



Average donations by month



—Len Rempel, chief operating officer

Courier/Correo/Courrier survey 2016 responses

Thank you to everyone who filled out the reader survey in the April 2016 issue of CCC.

Nearly all respondents (95%) reported that they “still feel connected to the global family.”

Though some preferred to receive the magazine more frequently (10% bimonthly, 33% quarterly), more than half of respondents (57%) agreed that “twice a year is perfect,” and three quarters of our readers (79%) said 20 pages is “just the right size.”

Almost half of our respondents also connect with MWC through the website (42%) and three-quarters through our monthly e-newsletters (72%). Website engagement is highest among our French readers (87%). English readers subscribe to the e-newsletter Info in the greatest numbers (78%). No Spanish reader reported following MWC on Twitter, but almost half (47%) are fans on Facebook.

Many of our respondents say the sections currently found in CCC contain “a good balance” (60%). Readers also expressed a desire to see more “Inspiration & Reflection” (12%) and “Profiles” (16%) articles.

What our readers said

- “I appreciate the MWC picture of the dove and the world with rainbow “peace is gospel” in many languages; it is displayed in my living room!”
- “This is a good magazine that encourages me in my Christian life and connects me to other believers around the world.”
- “Keep it up so that fellowship “scattered” is ongoing among us.”
- “I hope it keeps coming either way!”
- “I am always grateful to learn about my brothers and sisters in the Mennonite world. Thank you.”

Give a gift to MWC

Your prayers and financial gifts are deeply appreciated. Your contributions are important. They will:

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

Go to www.mwc-cmm.org and click the “Get involved” tab for prayer requests and on the “Donate” table for multiple ways to give online.

Or mail your gift to Mennonite World Conference at one of the addresses below:

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



MWC staff, Executive Committee members and Young Anabaptists (YABs) are avid readers of *Courier*.

Photos: Life TV Indonesia



MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

MWC Info

A monthly email newsletter with links to articles on the MWC website.

- English
- Spanish
- French

Courier

Magazine published twice a year (April and October)

- English
- Spanish
- French
- Electronic Version (pdf)
- Print Version
- Mailing delays? Consider the benefits of electronic subscription. Check this box to receive your *Courier/Correo/Courrier* subscription via email only.

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Complete this form and send to:

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Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1 Canada

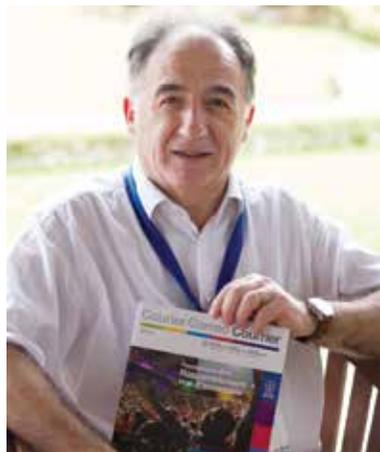


Photo: Life TV Indonesia

The miracle of unity



How can unity between different nations or communities be achieved? Many methods have been sought since the Tower of Babel times. In that Bible story, the people attempt to achieve unity by having a common vision and a call to work toward the same goal; and as we well know, the endeavour fails.

Having a common narrative is another strategy to create unity. A unified story describing a common and inspiring origin can prove to be a cohesive element. However, it is very difficult to find a stimulating narrative involving various peoples or different cultures.

Another alternative – sometimes attempted in politics and in religion – is to eliminate all differences and promote a single way of viewing life, thus destroying diversity. History has shown us many

times the failure this alternative represents.

An option sometimes preached in church circles is to establish a list of beliefs that must be sustained by a group of people in order to clearly determine who belongs in or who is outside of that group. Unfortunately, creeds and confessions of faith have sometimes been used in this sense.

When we consider the outcome of the Global Anabaptist Profile research (GAP), we can ask ourselves the same question: What can facilitate the unity between groups of such diversity within Mennonite World Conference (MWC)?

Over several years, MWC member churches were involved in a research process seeking to reveal who we are as Anabaptists today. In the present issue of *Courier*, we can see some conclusions indicated by this survey. As one of the articles suggests, such diversity within our global family becomes a unique opportunity for greater unity.

And yet, what makes that unity possible?

It isn't the text of our Shared Convictions, which emerged in recent years as an expression of our experience of following Jesus in each context. MWC member churches walked in unity without this text for more than 75 years.

Neither is it a question of a common history. Although as Anabaptist churches we identify with the Radical Reformation of the 16th century, clearly, the complexity of the origins of our faith is as amazing as our present diversity.

According to the Scriptures, there is only one possible explanation. The unity of our global community has not been the result of human effort or something that we are able to produce. It is a gift of God that we can enjoy today through the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. True communion is made possible not by institutional laws and formalities, but by the work of Christ on the cross, where God created a new people including many cultures, races, tribes, and languages.

Today, it is possible to sit down at the same communion table and appreciate the beauty of our diversity only if we do so around the Lamb of God, who is the center of our faith and the foundation of our unity.

Come and celebrate with us the miracle of unity and the beauty of our diversity!

César García, MWC general secretary, works out of the head office in Bogotá, Colombia.