Pennsylvania 2015 Assembly Overview
The family together and apart

North American Mennonites keenly interested in genealogy and family names love to play “the Mennonite game” by asking new acquaintances, “Do you know...?” until they find a relative in common. But as Mennonites and Brethren in Christ from 77 countries gathered in Pennsylvania 21-26 July 2015 to celebrate “walking with God” at Mennonite World Conference’s once-every-six-year assembly, the Mennonite game wasn’t only about bloodlines. From every corner of the globe, it didn’t take long before we could find a connection: Mennonite Central Committee service workers, missionary prayer lists, participants in the International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP) or Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN) exchanges and denominational bodies provided fertile ground for finding “relatives.”

Where our faith in Jesus Christ is the binding agent, everyone is family, especially in the Anabaptist Mennonite clan.

Our sense of kinship grew with every encounter at PA 2015: we sang in each other’s languages, built a house, canned vegetables, stitched quilts and comforters, were inked with henna designs, played football—together.

When language divided, smiles filled the silence until a new friend arrived to bridge the linguistic gulf. This issue of Courier/Correo/Courrier celebrates PA 2015. I hope you recognize family in the photos and articles here. You can reflect on texts from the evening plenaries and highlights of the joint morning plenaries (pg 6-23) where bold, fresh, Young Anabaptist voices responded with challenging words to the seasoned wisdom of experienced leaders who spoke first.

You’ll meet Nelson Krabill (pg 40) and Rebecca Osio (pg 26-27), Mennonite World Conference’s newly commissioned president for the next six years and vice president for the next three. You’ll learn what church leaders from around the globe are “taking home” with them (pg 24-25). You’ll taste the energy and enthusiasm of the Global Youth Summit (GYS), a gathering for ages 18+ that preceded the main event, and meet former YAB committee members (pg 30-33).

But walking with God/caminemos con Dios/en marche avec Dieu is not always easy. Hundreds of brothers and sisters from the Global South desired to come but were denied visas to visit the United States. We grieve separation with them.

Conflict divides people—even nonviolent Mennonites—in our churches at both the congregational and conference level. Various Mennonite denominations are struggling with unity. We long to fellowship amid diversity.

Our churches in some areas of the world face persecution; martyrdom is not only a Mennonite characteristic of the past. Youth at GYS—some having made their own sacrifices for their convictions—wrote notes of encouragement to Sang-Min Kim, the first Anabaptist conscientious objector imprisoned in South Korea. We inspire each other through prayer and support.

The path God takes us on may not be smooth, but God comes alongside as the thorn remover (see pg 11). The Bible is our guide as the living word of God. And the church is our family, our companion, our family, on the journey.

“How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” (Psalm 133). We spoke that verse to each other often at PA 2015. Now, separated in body, the differences in our theology and practice may tempt us to feel to our selves. In the years that lead us to our next gathering in Indonesia in 2021, may we remember that we are family. Let us live into that blessed unity through the Spirit of Christ.

Karl Braun is editor for Mennonite World Conference

Changes at Courier/Correo/ Courier

Devin Manuallo-Thomas, who has guided Courier/Correo/Courrier for two years, has relinquished his role as editor. He will be adding doctoral studies to his work as a professor at Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, USA. It is my privilege to step into this service to the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ world from my home in Winnipeg, Canada, where I participate in the Mennonite Brethren denomination. I was blessed to be able to meet some of you at Assembly and I anticipate continuing to grow my family through MWC.

Another change to Courier/Correo/Courrier affects the schedule. This Assembly edition is a double issue; however, it initiates a printing timeline of only two issues per year, in April and October. Mennonite World Conference will continue to provide news and information through the website (mwc-cmm.org) and electronic newsletter released monthly (see “Publication sign up” under “Get involved” at mwc-cmm.org).

Event bags were sewn by local volunteers—including groups of Amish—at Mennonite Central Committee’s Ephrata Material Resources Center from donated fabric and discarded neckties. Matching the dimensions of the school kits sent overseas, the bags could be donated to MCC after the Assembly.
Most often filled with a cacophony of livestock and crowd noise, the large auditorium of the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, was awash in songs of praise and worship and proclamation of the Word of God, 21-25 July 2015, during the 16th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference.

Choir director Marcy Hostetler led the international music ensemble. Over 16 games, 269 soccer players participated in the first Anabaptist World Cup. Meals were eaten on compostable plates and flatware. Reusable metal water bottles kept voices lubricated as conversations flowed. 180 workshops and meetings explored topics from theology to activism. Afternoon was time for workshops or work, like serving at MCC’s canner or MDS’s house build.
Walking with God

César García

César Garcia spoke on Tuesday evening, 21 July 2015, at Assembly 16. He is general secretary of Mennonite World Conference. He lives in Bogotá, Colombia.


I was 17 years old when an army captain asked me, “What would you do if our battalion was attacked tonight? What would you do if someone came and shot you?”

“I would pray,” I responded.

At that instant, I felt a sharp pain on my head. The captain had hit me with a lyre striker. A lyre is a musical instrument made of metal that produces sounds with a fiberglass striker. The pain was very intense.

The captain asked me again, “What will you do if someone attacks you?” I said, “I am not going to defend myself.”

“Why do you want to be a Christian? Aren’t you going to defend your country?” My answer was: “I follow Christ because I have found life in Him.”

Why was I responding like that? I was just 17, and at that time, I was full of doubts. In fact, I was experiencing a spiritual crisis to the point of almost losing my faith. I had left my church, I did not have Anabaptist convictions. Military service was compulsory in Colombia, and my Christian convictions weren’t strong enough that I was willing to go to jail for them.

Walking a path of learning

I think the reason I had the courage to respond that way can be found in Luke 24, where a story is told of two disciples who are on the road to Emmaus after the death and resurrection of Christ. “Walking” in the Gospel of Luke has a very special meaning; it is about a way of life or conduct. In this Gospel, walking is related to discipleship.

In Luke, many lessons are learned while walking. Here, the two disciples are talking and they don’t agree. Jesus comes up in the middle of the discussion and asks them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” In the original language, verse 15 conveys the idea that there was a strong difference of opinion between the two disciples.

Walking despite disagreement

Is walking together possible if we are in disagreement? Is it possible to live in a community as diverse as ours?

When we observe the map of the Mennonite World Conference, we immediately realize that the Anabaptist movement is scattered around the world. Is walking together possible within our global community when we have so many cultural, theological and ecclesiastical differences?

Luke, the two disciples that had left Jerusalem were in strong disagreement. They had likely reached the point of asking themselves whether it was worth continuing together. But that was not the way that Jesus wanted his disciples to leave Jerusalem.

Leaving Jerusalem, facing our mission and our call, cannot be carried out if we are divided. Jesus wanted his disciples to leave Jerusalem filled with the Spirit to give testimony. This is probably why the two disciples had to return to Jerusalem.

“If you want to get there quickly, walk alone; if you want to go far, walk with others,” states a well-known African saying. This is what the disciples discovered on their way to Emmaus. It is at the end of the journey in community, after walking together despite their differences, in the moment of celebrating communion that the disciples’ eyes were opened and their understanding of Christ was clarified (Luke 24:30-31). As a result, they returned to Jerusalem in unity.

Walking in different ways

The theme of our assembly, “Walking with God,” reflects various lessons we can learn from this passage. In each language, a different idea is expressed in reference to what it means to walk with God.

In English, walking refers to a constant action. It is a continuous, endless process, and thus calls for our whole life. When walking with God, we need to constantly ask ourselves, “What are we leaving behind? What do we need to take along on this journey?”

In Spanish, caminemos is an invitation. It is an invitation to abandon our fears, to open our hearts to become vulnerable. This journey requires patience: we need to wait for those who aren’t as fast and are tired. If we act with individualism and independence and consider that we don’t need any help, we will be strongly tempted to go separate ways. However, the invitation to walk together is still open.

In French, en marche, implies becoming completely involved in walking. There certainly will be tensions with other walkers that will cause many confused feelings. But, if we walk totally committed to God and others, the tensions or problems that may arise will lead us to be transformed.

If we don’t walk totally committed, those same tensions or problems will lead us to fragmentation.

The next part of the phrase, “with God/ con Dios/avec Dieu,” refers to communion with God. It is impossible to walk together if we aren’t walking with God.

Those disciples on the road to Emmaus were walking together despite their differences because God was at the centre of their walk. They discovered that unity wasn’t something that was miraculously achieved in the end; it is something that is built along the way. This unity leads to a transformation that can only be found in community.

Every day during this Assembly, we will reflect on the various moments we experience as we walk with God.

As the disciples surely experienced on the road to Emmaus, there will be moments of doubt and moments when we are sure we are on the right track.

“Unity wasn’t something that was miraculously achieved in the end; it is something that is built along the way.”

There will be moments of conflict and of reconciliation.

There will be moments when we want to walk alone in autonomy, but there will be times when we recognize our need to walk in community.

There will be moments when we need help and moments when we are ready to help.

This is the life of discipleship. We are in the midst of a process; we haven’t reached our goal yet, but are moving forward.

This passage helps me to understand why I responded to the captain the way I did. Beside me, there were four other soldiers who were also Christians. They weren’t Mennonites or Anabaptists. But when the captain asked them the same questions, they responded that they were just obeying Jesus and weren’t willing to kill to defend themselves.

Some of these friends were on the floor in pain because of the blows. Therefore, I was able to respond the way I did because I had found a new community there. Four friends with whom I was ready to walk amid suffering, violence and persecution. Four friends to whom I could say, “Let’s walk with God” despite our differences. And tonight I would like to say to you, “Let’s walk with God,” let’s walk during this week and during the years to come.

Assembly opened with a welcome from local indigenous people and a parade of banners from member conferences and associated ministries. Below, Barry Lee and Joann McLaughlin play a traditional song.
The Holy Spirit’s mercy irons us in our trials

Yukari Kaga
Yukari Kaga of Japan spoke on Wednesday evening, 22 July 2015, at Assembly 16. Yukari pastors several small Mennonite congregations in Hokkaido. She is chief director of the Peace Mission Center and serves at the Mennonite Education and Research Center in Japan.

1 Peter 1:3-9

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Peter 1:3). Peter begins this letter with praise to God. This praising to God is a celebration of worship. This expression of blessing to God is found very often as doxologies, especially in psalms. So probably, the early churches in Asia Minor must have easily understood that Peter started this letter with worship. But this sounds a little strange to me.

Thinking of the background of this letter, the Christians of the churches in Asia Minor were in the midst of a risky situation. They had a severe possibility of losing their lives under their circumstance of worldwide persecution. Peter wrote this letter to Christians in such cruel situations. But simply, I have a question: how can we praise the Lord in a painful situation? How could Peter do that? How could the early church people understand this letter?

When circumstances threaten
It is sure that Peter wrote this letter to Christians. Peter definitely trusted these churches and greatly respected these church people. He must have known well about their deep predicament with tears and crying. Probably his letter must have reminded themselves as God’s chosen people “to be sprinkled with his blood” (1:2). So Peter must have known that his readers knew the meaning of blood in the imminent reality, because there were so many people dying. And still, even now, we know so many people dying.

When we face an unchangeable reality and are defeated under the circumstance, we have a struggle. We hold our faith tightly, and are defeated under the circumstance, when we face an unchangeable reality. This happen to all of us, especially when we spend unstable time in a severe circumstance. This is the work of Holy Spirit. This Comforter irons our shrunk heart with a moderate temperature. It has neither a high temperature nor a low temperature, but exactly the right temperature. This is the work of Holy Spirit. This Comforter irons our shrunk heart with exactly the right temperature again and again for our heating and for our regeneration.

God has done this to us and is doing this even now. And this God raised Jesus from the dead.

There were so many people dying behind this passage in 1 Peter. And now, we still have so many people dying in this world. But this is the work of the God’s great power. (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

The light of our living hope

But this God raised Jesus from the dead in the midst of people’s dying. Jesus died like any other person but his dying has swallowed death in his victory (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). This is the work of the God’s great power. And God works this power for all of us to shield our faith from the danger and restore our conviction in God’s great mercy.

Sometimes, we say we have faith. But faith is not something we have had within us from the beginning, nor something born inside of ourselves. Rather, faith is something to bring into the midst of our lives from outside of ourselves.

God definitely makes us grasp the conviction that we all have been regenerated by believing that Christ Jesus was raised. In God’s ultimate power, we can stand up again in a living hope through the resurrection. And in this living hope, there is a life which gives a true life.

The Our God wipes away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 7:17).

Peter could praise God. We seem to hear his strong, praising voice, singing with tears. Even if God challenges us, we praise God.

Of course, we may stumble over many trials and sometimes may fall. But our faith never disappears because of the God’s shield. Nothing can conquer God’s shield. Our God wipes away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 7:17). Again, we seem to hear joyful voices from this letter. And now, we also lift our voices together. Praising and singing, we follow our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, O Lord, Have mercy on this world, With your steadfast love and your abundant mercy. Restore to us the joy of your salvation and sustain in us a willing spirit. Let us walk again in your living hope from here to follow as a disciple of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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Peter wants to tell people about this joy so they can be saved in the light of this living hope. He knows well how wretched he used to be. Through Christ’s blood, Peter found what he had never known before.

Through the resurrection, Peter found himself regenerated in the light of the living hope. He found this; the only thing to do is to live in the light of this living hope. This is our Christian hope in the salvation to be revealed in the last time.

So Peter could praise God. We seem to hear his strong, praising voice, singing with tears. Even if God challenges us, we praise God.

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Clockwise from top: SaeJin Lee led the congregation in “The God of Glory”/Chulikasso Wangiye from South Korea. Dan Arnold played classical Indian music on his sitar at the Global Church Village stage. The Gamelan ensemble from Conrad Grebel University College in Canada played traditional Balinese instruments. A local man played harp.
Walking in Doubt and Conviction

Morning Presentations

Faith & Life Commission

God walks with us
Acts 12:6-17
Hebrews 11:1; 12:12-15

Tom: We walk with God in doubt and conviction. After all, “faith is the reality of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

Rebecca: Among the Luo of Kenya kaawa —doubt—is used in a situation where the end result is not certain. Doubt is shaped by context. In my country, walking through forests and thickets is full of uncertainties and dangers: attacks from social misfits and criminals, wild animals or thorny shrubs. Under such circumstances, one would doubt safe arrival at one’s destination. In this setting, even the less dangerous situations to allow the sojourner time to doubt and conviction. Jakol kudho is a truthful witness to a God who intervenes in difficult situations to allow the sojourner time to doubt and conviction. Despite our wishes and clever attempts, it is impossible that travellers succeed in escape thorns. Doubt is a key to deepen our conviction in our walk with God. Faith is like walking with doubt and conviction. Despite our wishes and clever attempts, it is impossible that travellers succeed in escape thorns. Doubt is a key to deepen our conviction in our walk with God. Faith is like walking with doubt and conviction.

Doubt sharpens our convictions

The weight of doubt and conviction is not always similar. Especially living in such a postmodern age, where everything has the right to be on the table, where everything is correct and everyone is a thorn remover, it is common to find young people in my church, in your church, in her church, in his church, in their church who are living in doubt and conviction. We can get an answer for our doubt or we can learn to live with our doubt in our walk with God. With the help of the faith community, doubt will sharpen our relationship with him with each other before the Lord Jesus that he may be able to surpass our doubt. As we strengthen our relationship with him with the help of the faith community, doubt will sharpen our convictions.

Tom: In the Global North doubt is unavoidable, and often a necessary and good thing. Hebrews 11 is realistic about faith: faith is the assurance of things we cannot see (11:1). But Hebrews also insists that there is someone with us—our jakol kudho, Jesus the pioneer of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), leading the way. The Bible may not always be a clear map, but it is a truthful witness to a God who walks in solidarity with us in the darkest of times, reminding us that we are not the first for whom faith is a struggle. As much as the church often puts our faith to the test, it is also God’s gift for giving strength and depth to our convictions. They are the body of Christ, the body of the thorn remover. They—you—are God walking with us in doubt and conviction. Thanks be to God.

Young Anabaptists (YABs)

Can we get an answer for our doubt or we can learn to live with our doubt in our walk with God. With the help of the community of faith and our allegiance with Christ, doubt helps us seek understanding and deepen our faith.

Let’s share our doubts, whether abundance or lack and instability become reason for doubt. Let’s share our conviction with each other before the Lord Jesus that we can be able to surpass our doubt. As we strengthen our relationship with him with the help of the faith community, doubt will sharpen our convictions.

Walking in doubt and conviction is like riding a bicycle: one pedal is doubt and the other one is conviction. Without both, the journey faith can’t be possible.

Faith & Life Commission

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Walking in Conflict and Reconciliation

Nzuzi Mukawa

Nzuzi Mukawa of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mission Thursday evening, 23 July 2015 at Assembly 16. Nzuzi is the team leader for Africa, represented by South Africa. He is both a professor of missions and an associate pastor of a Mennonite Brethren congregation in DR Congo.

1 Samuel 25:1-44

12

October 2015

T
donday, world security is threatened by international, intertribal and even interreligious conflicts. Sometimes, security forces have conflicts with the very people they are supposed to protect. Terrorism has created a climate of insecurity on the international level. Countries are torn apart by wars. Political-religious movements such as Al-Qaeda, Islamic State and Boko Haram spill blood in the name of religion. Opinions and philosophies divide people and create divided households.

Conflict undermines the basic social units of a strong and balanced society. It can cause divorce. It sends children into the street. It creates enmities within families and dissolves businesses, sending staff into unemployment.

Since its very beginning, the church has not been spared conflict, internally or externally. At the external level, the church has been and continues to be the victim of persecution. Internally, the church has always had to confront controversies and hierarchical conflicts. For example, the Anabaptists left the Protestant reform movement in the 16th century due to a conflict.

Nabu is a very wealthy man who lacks spiritual values and strength of character (v.23). Nabu’s hard-heartedness is accompanied by spiritual weakness.

When David learns that Nabu’s sheep are being stolen, he decides to ask Nabu for help for his group who is in the wilderness. In his message to Nabu, David shows kindness, gentleness and humility. Militarily, he is higher than Nabu, but he uses a peaceful voice, appearing to Nabu’s sense of gratitude at a time of joy and festivities.

He reminds Nabu that David’s group protected Nabu’s sheep in the wilderness. In spite of David’s effort to approach Nabu with an attitude to promote peace, Nabu responds to David’s kindness with harshness, to his courtesy with contempt, to his confidence with disdain and hatred (v. 10-11). Nabu’s malice in the face of David’s kindness leads to conflict (v.13) because David becomes angry and returns Nabu’s violence with violence.

We learn from these first 13 verses what are the primary factors promoting conflict in this story:
- Nabu’s hardness and malice are in opposition to the good faith and culture of peace shown by David (v.6-8). They invite the sides to war when they refuse to share what they have with those in need, but also to refuse to recognize and thank those who have helped to protect his property. This is what makes David so angry that he decides to teach this man a lesson.
- Nabu’s selfishness leads him not only to refuse to share what he has with those in need, but also to refuse to recognize and thank those who have helped to protect his property. This is what makes David so angry that he decides to teach this man a lesson.
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From conflict to reconciliation (v.14-35)

The second section of our story begins another sequence of events. The principal actors are Nabal’s servant, Abigail and David.

Nabal’s reaction does not leave his team indifferent. Nabal’s servants disapprove of the way he acts and expect reprisals from David and his servants. A prudent man, who sees danger and hides (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12), one servant helps his mistress to understand the situation. He proposes a way to get around their master, whose character could not allow him to accept reconciliation that brings peace (v.17). Abigail listens well. Her approach to the situation demonstrates courage, tact and humility (v.18-20). Her peaceful strategy is built around a team working for peace (v.19). She faces up to conflict with a peaceful plan (v.20), all the while managing to avoid obstacles to peace (v.19). She asks for forgiveness without embarrassment, and offers to meet needs and calm spirits.

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From conflict to reconciliation (v.14-35)

The second section of our story begins another sequence of events. The principal actors are Nabal’s servant, Abigail and David.

Nabal’s reaction does not leave his team indifferent. Nabal’s servants disapprove of the way he acts and expect reprisals from David and his servants. A prudent man, who sees danger and hides (Proverbs 22:3; 27:12), one servant helps his mistress to understand the situation. He proposes a way to get around their master, whose character could not allow him to accept reconciliation that brings peace (v.17). Abigail listens well. Her approach to the situation demonstrates courage, tact and humility (v.18-20). Her peaceful strategy is built around a team working for peace (v.19). She faces up to conflict with a peaceful plan (v.20), all the while managing to avoid obstacles to peace (v.19). She asks for forgiveness without embarrassment, and offers to meet needs and calm spirits.

Abigail’s message to Nabal, David shows kindness, gentleness and humility. Militarily, he is higher than Nabal, but he uses a peaceful voice, appearing to Nabal’s sense of gratitude at a time of joy and festivities.

He reminds Nabal that David’s group protected Nabal’s sheep in the wilderness. In spite of David’s effort to approach Nabal with an attitude to promote peace, Nabal responds to David’s kindness with harshness, to his courtesy with contempt, to his confidence with disdain and hatred (v.10-11). Nabal’s malice in the face of David’s kindness leads to conflict (v.13) because David becomes angry and returns Nabal’s violence with violence.

We learn from these first 13 verses what are the primary factors promoting conflict in this story:
- Nabal’s hardness and malice are in opposition to the good faith and culture of peace shown by David (v.6-8).
- Nabal’s selfishness leads him not only to refuse to share what he has with those in need, but also to refuse to recognize and thank those who have helped to protect his property. This is what makes David so angry that he decides to teach this man a lesson.
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Conflict resolution in the church

• Prioritize healing and reconciliation: In case of aggression, self-defense is permitted, but not the use of violence. Following the example of Jesus, who did not use weapons but healed those threatened, the church must walk in the steps of the master. The church must demonstrate the attitude of their enemies as illustrated in the parable of the good Samaritan, and practice nonviolence as the door to reconciliation.
• Promoting justice is an important way to reduce ethnic and religious conflicts in the world. To undo the wounds, the church must become deeply involved in standing up to injustice, to ethnocentrism, to racism and to oppression. It must get involved in reconciliation and identify itself with the oppressed, working for justice for them.
• Develop an inclusive church: The church cannot be a site for ethnic divisions and racial discrimination; rather it must be a setting where all are invited and taken into fellowship. Leaders must not be selected on criteria that favour ethnicity or race over spiritual gifts and passion. The church must not have an ethnic agenda. It is an entity of “unity in diversity” where all members are one in Christ as taught in Ephesians 4:3-6. The church must not have an ethnic agenda. It is an entity of “unity in diversity” where all members are one in Christ as taught in Ephesians 4:3-6.
• Guide our approach to politics and patriotism: The church should align itself with Christian principles: Political opinions must not be molded by ethnic, tribal or racial prejudices but by the Christian principles. Christians who are politicians must deal consistently with everyone based on political or religious ideology. Politicians must avoid ethnic favouritism and religious fanaticism, which often encourage hatred.
• Practice love and forgive enemies: Praying for enemies is one of the signs of obedience and submission to Jesus Christ. We must love other people because they are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 9:6). James 3:17 states Forgiveness is often very difficult to give, especially when we are victims of injustice, hatred and oppression. But we must be willing to obey the Word of God.

Conflict resolution in the church

The walk toward reconciliation requires the church to obey spiritual principles and to defend them to the world through the way it lives. It must display transparency by relying on biblical teachings. The church must continue to count on God’s help so that it can resolve conflicts more effectively. It must avoid lack of respect for its own legal and juridical texts.

• The church must avoid victimization. In its prophetic role, it must be watchful and active to:
  — Always pull itself back to God’s will, commandments and precepts, and tell the truth.
  — Discover the true nature of the problems in the church and in the world by deeply studying the causes, motives, sources and origins both near and far, in order to propose solutions without taking sides.
  — Look for peaceful solutions and stand up to the sinful politics of exclusion and marginalization. The church must prioritize political systems which promote unity and reconciliation.

The reconciliation of people with creation

We must be people who take care of creation, because reconciliation also includes creation. Human life and creation are linked together because the earth takes care of us (Genesis 2:19-20); the earth suffers with us because of humanity’s sins which have caused heavy consequences (Hosea 4:3). God’s redemption is also creation (Psalm 96:10-13); everything was reconciled at the cross (Colossians 1:15-16), and the good news includes 2:28. The church is a new ethnic group in which there is mutual protection and security for all:
• Guide our approach to politics and patriotism: The church should align itself with Christian principles: Political opinions must not be molded by ethnic, tribal or racial prejudices but by the Christian principles. Christians who are politicians must deal consistently with everyone based on political or religious ideology. Politicians must avoid ethnic favouritism and religious fanaticism, which often encourage hatred.
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I n the beginning, man was alone. Even through God created all animals and brought them to man to be named, man was alone. And it didn’t suit him at all. God could see that, and so he whis- pered a deep, deep sleep unto man and while he slept, God took his rib and from it created the other part of man: woman. From that very early day on, humanity was community.

From the day we are born, we are part of a community. Whether it be a family, tribe, orphanage or school, we are never alone. The community feeds us, cleans us, teaches us right from wrong, raises us. It makes us stronger than we are, because in it we are more than just one person. We are many. It makes us weaker than we are, because we have to bend our will to the rules of the community, give up our autonomy.

Within a community, we cannot stand alone. The interest of the group will collide with that of the individual. And that will cause friction and pain and frustration. But we have no other way. To be human is to be part of a community. We cannot survive on our own.

Still, we crave autonomy, every one of us. Growing up, we test the rules and boundaries. You try it in small toddlers, pushing the “no!” just a bit further to see where it will go. You can see it in rebellious young adults designing their own way in life, making their own choices.

And yes, autonomy literally means making your own rules. But the modern interpretation lies more in the way of carving your own way in life, making your own choices.

Struggling against community
But autonomy is no party. In fact, it is a constant struggle. And so it has always been, even in Old Testament times, as in the well-known story of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.

Even before he is born, Jacob is in community. And as an only child he doesn’t do too well. He and his twin brother Esau fight so fiercely inside the womb that their mother Rebecca wonders why she is still alive. When he is born, he is still grabbing his older brother by the heel.

In Jacob’s book, Jacob comes first. Always. No rules but his own. And he bends community around it.

Easily, with nothing more than a hot meal, he severs his brother Esau out of his birthright. Next, Jacob deceives his father. Isaac, blind from old age, lies on his deathbed, waiting for Esau to turn up to give him his blessing. Jacob comes in, pretending to be his older brother Jacob or his actions are simply cunning or patriarchal blessing.

Jacob now has everything that should rightfully be Esau’s. He has won all, and at the same time, he lost all. For he cannot stay in the community he so despised. He has to flee for his life.

Living by your own set of rules and living in a community do not go well together.

Calling his own shots
In fleeing the scene of the crime, Jacob leaves everything. But before he enters the great unknown, he has a dream. In that dream, God promises to go with Jacob wherever he may go. He promises to protect Jacob, to be with him all the way. God will not leave Jacob until God has fulfilled God’s promise.

Typically, Jacob is not sure. He calls the place Beth-el, the house of God, and he realizes that God is with him. Jacob immediately starts negotiating, offering up rules and living in a community do not go well together.

And so, Jacob takes a bold decision: he offers up all to Esau, of his own free will. In doing so, he tries to make amends for what he has done. He acknowledges his wrong-doing, and the consequences his choices had on Esau’s life.

In offering up everything his autonomy has gained him, Jacob in fact offers himself to Esau.

And so, we enter that epic scene, where Jacob brings his wives and children, all he owns, to the other side of the river and then returns. Now, he is totally and alone. He has nothing left. Not even autonomy.

And then somebody comes and wrestles him. All night long. Somebody. Nobody. No name. No identification, except the ominous Why do you ask me for my name? (32:29). Is it God himself? One of his messengers? Or do we have to understand this all in a more metaphorical way? Is Jacob in fact wrestling himself?

Maybe. After all, the life of Jacob is one big struggle with the people around him and their rules and expectations, with himself and his own choices, his own way through life. Maybe in the end, he does wrestle God. Or himself. Or another metaphorical person. It does not matter.

What matters is that he comes out winning. With a new blessing. With a new name. No longer Jacob: “heelgrabber,” but Israel: “wrestles with God.”

Jacob no longer seeks to enrich himself by grabbing the heel of others, causing them to fall and fail. Instead, he struggles for the rest of his life, every day anew. With the people around him, with God, and far... with himself.

And you know what? Most of the time, he comes out winning. Slightly limping, but winning nevertheless. And as he crosses the river, a new dawn rises. A patriarch is born.

What a story.

A lesson in consequences
But the truly amazing thing about the story of Jacob is that it doesn’t explicitly condemn Jacob or his actions. There is not one point where the story, or even God himself explicitly disapproves of what Jacob does. You can feel it is not all good and beautiful, but the story itself keeps quiet about it. It just shows the consequences, shows you the effect of Jacob’s actions: he has to flee and leave everything behind. He lives in constant fear, of Esau, of Laban, of Esau again. He has to start all over again, many times.

The story tells you all that. But the story never tells you that Jacob did wrong.

You can feel it. You can read it between the lines, but it is all in your imagination, really. The story never says so.

And that’s what makes it such an intriguing story. Jacob is no holy, immanently good or pious wonder of a human being. He makes a great example because he is not exemplary at all. He is just like any of us. And so in our heads and hearts, we easily fill in the blanks. We feel how utterly wrong some of his decisions are as if they are our own. We shiver, thinking of the consequenc- es. We wait, anxiously, for the story to go sour.
And it never does. Despite living by his own rules and never quite recognizing the rights of other people, there is no judgment for Jacob except that which he issues himself. Fundamentally, that is what this story is all about. Autonomy. Living by your own rules. Making your own law.

For autonomy doesn’t just mean you make your own choices and live by your own rules. It means you have to judge yourself too. There is no one else. Not even God, according to this story. You have to figure it out by yourself. God merely walks with you, whatever the outcome. It is Jacob who makes demands and utters conditions, not God.

And that is an Old Testament lesson for all of us modern people, craving autonomy. Autonomy comes with the acknowledgment that the people around you (your community) limit your freedom to make your own decisions, your own rules. Autonomy in this modern sense is not about making your own rules no matter what, but about realizing, accepting and acknowledging the other people in your life. It is about willing to respecting these, because together you form a community.

So the question is: are we capable, am I capable of sculpting my own life within these boundaries? Can I live my life free and independently (autonomously) within community? Am I mature enough to acknowledge the fact that I am not totally in charge of my own life? Can I accept that I am bound by the people I love, by the community around me, and by God who walks with me wherever I go?

Or, in a broader sense, will it be possible for various churches to keep their autonomy within the wider Anabaptist community? Are we prepared to wrestle?

The story of Jacob teaches us that it is not wrong to follow your own way through life. It is not wrong to try to test your own strength and to strive for autonomy. It is not about being wrong or being right. It is about making your own choices, and at the same time acknowledging those of the community around you. It is about recognizing the hurt and pain and frustration on both sides. It is about taking responsibility. For your actions, for those of the community. For yourself. And, if necessary, making amends.

That kind of autonomy, the grown-up, modern kind, doesn’t come easily. Growing up is not easy. To keep some sense of autonomy within community is like constantly wrestling with people and God and most of all yourself.

And even if you win, it leaves you slightly limping.

The community of faith is shared lives of people freed in Christ Jesus and joined together to serve one another through love. This freedom is not only for serving one another, but also to serve and do good to people outside the community of faith, and even to those who hate us. This is the divine royal lifestyle we are called to live out both individually and jointly: our walking in autonomy and community.

The challenge is to stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free (Galatians 5:1). This global community today is richer by our diversity and uniqueness.

Let us accept, appreciate, enjoy and cherish one another’s uniqueness, diversity, gifts and services in our community.

Through love, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us endeavour to develop in ourselves and in our communities the lifestyle that reflects the godly life in Christ Jesus our Lord, bringing praises to our heavenly Father (Gal. 6:16).

Through love, bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). Let us mutually share gifts and talents with one another in the worldwide community of faith, showing our love for one another.

Through love let us do good to all (Gal. 6:10). This royal law of twin commands is the only remedy to Churches’ internal maladies and the only Christian fortification against external hatred and persecutions.

Let us resolve in our hearts and minds that we will practice this law of loving and serving in our individual and joint lives, no matter what the cost.

We are mandated to be prepared to face persecution and terrorism. Therefore, I urge the local churches, conferences and Mennonite World Conference to develop practical guidelines for ways to lovingly and peacefully relate, individually and jointly, with friends and with persecutors and terrorists.

The freedom in Jesus Christ invites us to demonstrate in our personal and community lives the character of God in Jesus Christ, and to share our lives with one another in loving service.

This is a freedom that reaches out to our neighbours and even to those who hate and mean to harm us. This is our ‘Walking with God in Autonomy and Community.’
Walking in Receiving and Giving

Bruxy Cavey

Bruxy Cavey of Canada spoke on Saturday evening, 25 July 2015 at Assembly 16. Bruxy is the teaching pastor of The Meeting House, one of Canada’s largest and most innovative churches. A member of the Brethren in Christ, Bruxy is an author and speaks extensively around the world.

Galatians 5:22-23

We are a peace church because we are first and foremost a Jesus church and Jesus leads us in the way of peace. We care about justice because we care about Jesus and he cares about justice. We care about reconciliation and we care about the Word of God in print because we want to get to know the Word of God in person.

Love is the fruit of the Spirit

I want to talk to you about love as reflected in the fruit of the Spirit and other passages of the New Testament. The Spirit’s work in us is the work of love. To the extent that we work against love, we are working against the work of the Spirit in us, and to the extent that we recognize and identify love, we are moving in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

Most scholars agree that when Galatians 5 lists the fruit of the Spirit, it doesn’t just start with love. Love is the fruit of the Spirit and what follows are eight descriptions of what love is like. Similar to 1 Corinthians 13, this is a representative list. The fruit of the Spirit is love, and you’ll begin to recognize it when you see joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness, gentleness and self-control.

I have over the years become increasingly convinced of love’s centrality in our worship of God and how he calls us to worship him by loving one another. It has become increasingly important to me to identify that and to call myself to that kind of love as a form of worship.

It seemed to me, growing up, that my priority was to get my relationship with God right. I would do that by spending increased time focusing on my vertical relationship. When I finally got that right, there would be overflow on the people around me. I would love others well, but I needed to first come back and make sure I was in the name of the love God that’s all we focus on.

And not just violent behaviour. We could focus on God so much that we ignore those around us.

How could you argue with more time with God? More time in meditation, more time in prayer, more time in personal study; it just seems so holy. But Jesus says, I won’t let you get away with that. You’re going to love God and you’re going to love your neighbour as yourself and if you don’t do the one, you’re a liar about the other.

Beyond the ethic of a rock

My daughters attended a day camp that included children with mental disabilities. When I dropped off my girls in the morning and picked them up in the afternoon, I used this summer camp experience to reinforce what it means to love in the way Jesus says to love.

I told my daughters, “I want you to go there and initiate love. Love is not just doing good things, love takes the initiative to do good things to others.”

I tried to explain this to them in a way they could understand. They said, “Oh yeah, we’re polite.” It’s more than being polite, I told them. It’s not just about being nice. Love goes beyond that.

They said, “Well, we won’t say anything bad.” It’s not about not being bad; it’s about doing good. It’s about seeing the person sitting on the outside by themselves and initiating kindness to them. It’s agape, a Greek word meaning the choice to relate to someone as valuable.

I think that’s why kindness is in the fruit of the Spirit, not niceness. Niceness is not doing rude things, but kindness initiates. I gave them an illustration. When we got out of the car, there was a big rock. “Is that rock loving anyone?” I asked them. “No, rocks don’t love,” they answered. “But it is doing anything wrong to anyone?” I persisted. They got it. The rock isn’t being rude or unfriendly, it’s not hurting anyone’s feelings. It’s just sitting there. Rocks don’t do anything bad; they just don’t do anything good.

That summer we decided on our Cavey family motto: “Rock on.” Go beyond the ethic of a rock. This is the love we see in the fruit of the Spirit.

This is what Anabaptists has been teaching me in the last few years.

A new commandment

It’s not enough to just not be bad; to love is to prioritize the care of those around us. This becomes our worship to God so much so that in the New Testament, we find the apostles do a fascinating thing. Remember the bidirectional spirituality?

Just before Galatians 5 lists the fruit of the Spirit, the apostle Paul writes: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment” (5:14). A single commandment. And then he lists the second commandment: love your neighbour as yourself.

“Rock on!”

Fulfilling the bidirectional royal law

And Jesus leads us in the bidirectional law. What makes them think they had to edit Jesus? When Jesus said these words, he was speaking to one who was not yet a disciple, someone who needed the challenge to come to God first.

Then to his disciples, to those who have said, “I love God and I am willing to give up whatever it takes to follow him.” Jesus says, Now here’s how you will do that. Your life will be about loving others as you love

Bruxy Cavey

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Walking in Receiving and Giving
**The church must be about holistic mission**

Matthew 15:32  
Luke 10:2  
Matthew 28:19-20

This is a feeling of uneaseness regarding “mission” within the churches in the Western world. What should we do: evangelism or service? Yet, the world still asks us that we give the reason for the hope that abides in us. As the church of God, we have no other reason that the one given to us by Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels give testimony that Jesus went from village to village proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ verbal proclamation of the good news was always matched with care for people’s moral and physical needs. There is no good reason for the mission of the church to be carried out differently, because Jesus is the head of the church. Evangelization and service are both part of the church work of salvation.

Jesus began his proclamation saying, “Repent!”—change allegiance and totally return to God as the centre of all our values. Even today, Jesus’ church needs a change of mind, so that we may see this world as Jesus saw it.

In the image of the compassionate God who sent him, Jesus fed the hungry (Matthew 15:32) and he proclaimed the good news to the crowds, made disciples and entrusted them with a mission: “The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few, therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2).

**Giving and receiving in the mission of the global church: A concrete action**

Matthew 10:7-8  
Matthew 25:34-40

Mission is holistic; evangelization is comprehensive. The Good News must be proclaimed and regarded by all areas. God’s Kingdom will not be complete until each aspect of human suffering is healed, reconciled and transformed. The Kingdom of God is here and now: providing a spiritual, material, social, economic response to the world (Mark 1:15). The call is based in action: from “church theology to road theology.” Our practice must embody the teachings of Jesus: a life of ethics-practice that includes a renewal of the mind (Isaiah). Matthew 10:7-8 is a key text: give without receiving anything in return. Are we transformed by our own need? Does our mission become incarnate or do we receive anything in return. Are we mission in terms of plans, budgets and numbers, but by an openness to the context of each place and person. Often money isn’t even necessary where the Holy Spirit works through us. Perhaps the only thing we have to do is just be able to listen. By listening we are helping others, and at the same time, ourselves. We are transformed while offering the gospel of peace. It bears witness in a radical way, based on receptiveness, as when Jesus asked: What do you want me do for you?
What I found at PA 2015
will take home with me
by Phyllis Pellman Good

Indonesia

Paulus Hartono
Being a part of the throngs at PA 2015 made Paulus Hartono of Indonesia reflect on his early life and how he sees it is that he found his way to this place.

Now a Mennonite pastor and highly active in peace work in Solo (Surakarta) Central Java, Indonesia, with Mennonite Diakonia Service, Hartono grew up in a Buddhist family.

“In elementary school, I learned about Islam. My friends went to the mosque, so I went, too, and eventually I became an imam. I realized now that I was feeling the call to be a pastor, but I didn’t know Jesus.” When he became a Christian and was baptized in 1984, “I took the name ‘Paulus.’

Commitment to peace
From the beginning of his life as a pastor, Hartono’s commitment has been clear. “We started our congregation in 1994 with 40 members and the vision of being a peace church.

Several North American Mennonite agencies gave him inspiration for putting his vision into practice, including Mennonite Diakonia Service and service and development work. And at the Assembly, “I was influenced by Eastern Mennonite Missions’ culture of witness and peace.

“From the beginning, I’ve known that Hartono has decided to do things differently. He’s been a leader in the church in Solo and has helped shape the church’s approach to peace and reconciliation.

Hartono’s commitment has been clear. “We are working with Papua in peaceful ways. We’re trauma healing. He has asked our help in the gospel from our lives.”

Barbara Hege-Galle
Barbara Hege-Galle of amham (Alliance of Mennonites in Europe and North America) attended the Assembly in 1984 in Strasbourg, France, where she led the children’s program. But she was so tied up with her work that she got only a small taste of the adult part of the global event.

“I decided to go to the next Assembly in 1989 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, so I could participate—and after that, I knew it would not be the last MWC Assembly for me!” Since then, Hege-Galle has been part of MWC in many ways: as a member of the General Council, of the Deacons Commission, of the coordinating committee of the Service Network, and now as a member of the Missions Commission.

In her day job, Hege-Galle is the executive director of Christliche Dienst, the Mennonite Volunteer Service program sponsored by the Mennonite churches in Germany. And she is on the leadership team of the Iamamal Mennonite Church, where she is ordained as a lay preacher.

Writing the gospel with our lives
"Now in 2015, we have two Mennonite churches in Solo, with a total of 400 members. Our Mennonite churches are actively helping to bring reconciliation between Muslims and Christians.

We have many relationships with our Muslim neighbours, including a radical Muslim group who are participating in a special class we’re offering on conflict transformation and disaster relief.

“The President of Indonesia is right now seeking reconciliation with Papua, a part of our country where the Mennonites have a program for conflict transformation and trauma healing. He has asked our help in working with Papua in peaceful ways.

“I believe that the church must make relationships with Muslims so they can read the gospel from our lives.”


“Walking here with many pastors and in this atmosphere of spirituality has given me much courage.” Hartono reflected quietly.

Germany

Barbara Hege-Galle
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A view beyond congregations
Why does she not want to miss a MWC Assembly? “Because this global get-together gives us a view beyond the little space of a Mennonite congregation. This gathering motivates me.

‘I got really inspired to focus on our Anabaptist specifics this time. Not because of any of our particular traditions, but because of what we believe. We have a strong sense of space in Jesus. If Jesus gives people like Paulus Hartono strength and courage, we can each do more than just be part of a quiet, peaceful congregation.

In my work, I now have partners in other countries—and I meet them here. We in Germany are working with these sister and brothers as an assign 18-20-year-olds to service projects in their countries.”

Communal spirituality
What will Hege-Galle take home with her from PA 2015? “When I have a sermon to give, my experiences here will be part of it in some way. I’m not sure how yet. We have teachings on our congregation, and this will be part of them, too. One of our leaders is very deeply committed to practicing and teaching meditating. So we focus on what God is telling you. But some say that’s too individualistic an approach, that we need something more communal.

‘Here at PA 2015, I’m beginning to glimpse some of what we might need. It’s just not at this point, and not fully formed. I like this emphasis on meditation, but it’s not the only way of spirituality. I was reminded of that here.”

Zimbabwe

Mthokozisi Ncube and Morgen Moyo
Two Brethren in Christ high school administrators from Zimbabwe were two of PA 2015’s first-time MWC Assembly-goers at PA 2015.

Mthokozisi Ncube, from the Eiliphileni Bible School, came for “fellowship and to learn what others are doing. I’m not only Zimbabwean,” he commented. “I’m an Anabaptist and part of an international family. I wanted to sit down with my brothers and sisters and learn about their experiences and how God is working in their lives.”

“The Friendship Groups [which met every day to discuss the morning worship service] are a good way to learn to know people. We’ve made friends. We’ve exchanged email addresses. We’re hoping to extend this fellowship.

“I’ve been encouraged to become more involved in mission, and to be at peace with myself and my family, the world I live with. That’s what I’m taking home.

“Oh, and I’ve been reminded that doubt is not always negative. It’s helpful.”

[Working in doubt and conviction was the theme on 22 July 2015.]

Interacting and learning
Morgen Moyo is the principal of Mthbikezi High School. He’s been deeply blessed by the singing at PA 2015. “I’ve had a desire to find out how other people worship. I want to learn from them. I’ve had that opportunity here in our Friendship Group. I’m Interacting and learning.”

Said Ncube. “And I have really appreciated the young people’s style of worship during the morning and evening worship services. We will take that home idea.

Oneness of spirit
“I discovered something else. When we walked the streets in Harare, no one greeted us. But whenever we walked into the dining area at PA 2015, people always looked up, smiled and welcomed us. Always. I never felt different. There is a oneness here.”

“In fact, one thing I haven’t liked is walking into the restaurants here at the Farm Bowl Complex and seeing myself in the big mirrors. Then I see that I am different. I hadn’t felt it otherwise!”

Celebrate differences
Moyo has a suggestion for future Assembly-goers. “Why not offer food from different cultures throughout the week? On Africa Day, we have African food. And people can bring it. It might be hard to do, but why not?!?

“There’s been lots of good planning and organization for this event. We especially like the lack of emphasis on glamour.”

But then the world’s inequities surfaces for Ncube as he thought of returning to the realities of home. “Of course, emails often don’t hit the right people. The (material)Grace gets through. Out in the countryside, it’s hard to get messages. We hope our new friendships and connections endure anyway.”

United States

Todd Friesen
Todd Friesen is pastor of East Chestnut Street Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA.

“A month after PA 2015, he reflected on the experience of attending the Assembly for a full week. What would our churches – and our youth – be like without these glimpses of the global body of Christ, and the experience of being part of something much larger than just our local congregation?

“A week like this breaks our provincialism and our sense of American exceptionalism. This event is kind of an immunization against those attitudes, although we’re still susceptible to them.”

Impact on youth
“We can’t minimize the huge formational impact these Assemblies have on young people. I attended the Assembly in Strasbourg in 1984 as a 20-year-old. The singing and worship left a major impression on me. I am so grateful that our congregation made the investment to have our youth group participate in PA 2015. It was such a positive experience for them.”

A brush with eternal realities
“I love how we traveled from continent to continent through the morning and evening worship services. Heaven will be more rich and more diverse than we imagine. We got brushed by eternal realities through this experience with the global church.

“For those of us who went to Kansas City [site of the 2015 Mennonite Church USA Assembly], too, why did PA 2015 feel so different? At PA 2015, the focus was not on worship, our shared stories, fellowship, and service. We were there simply to be together around our centre in Christ. And I learned that in the middle of our的巨大, it’s probably best to start by worshiping God together, serving others and telling our stories rather than focusing on our differences or debating the things we disagree about.”

Ongoing echoes in the mind
“The voices of the young speakers in the morning worship services will stay with me. I’ve heard new and rich insights into particular passages of Scripture. “We were blessed to welcome international guests into our congregation on Sunday, the final day of PA 2015. Then we all – including those who hadn’t attended Assembly Gathered – could experience that we’ve been blessed with precious insights to share and serious blind spots to overcome.”

An enduring gift
“My fellowship with these global believers has made them my spiritual and emotional conversation partners, even though I’m not talking to them. I often have a sense of what they think, of what they would say or do, and I can draw upon that. Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference. Photos by Merle Good. Photo of Paulus Hartono by Marilyn High.
“Nothing that I am doing am I doing by myself”

Rebecca Osiro of Kenya - new vice president of Mennonite World Conference

by Phyllis Pellman Good

Rebecca Osiro of Nairobi, Kenya, steps into her new role as vice president of Mennonite World Conference (MWC), with a life of experiences that has tested her faith and taught her wisdom.

Rebecca was the first woman to be ordained in the Kenya Mennonite Church (in August 2008), but her interest in the church stretches back to her childhood.

Her father was a Mennonite church leader, and Rebecca remembers helping to carry food to fellowship events and going along, comforting, singing and making strong tea.

“The simplicity of visiting, of listening, of being welcomed and open drew people to our church. And it drew me. When I was in my third and fourth years of high school, I’d spend Saturday afternoons doing evangelism out in the open and fellowshipping with all who came.

Rebecca’s mother made a special point of introducing her to the Bible and the songs of the church. Why she got that kind of attention from her mother still mystifies Rebecca. “I was her third daughter, and not the last of her 10 children. But she told me she gave me to God as her title before I was born. When I learned to read, she gave me a Bible. She’d tell me a Bible story as we worked together, or she’d suggest a passage or verse for me to read. Then she’d come up with a hymn that fit. In that way, she integrated me—and my siblings—into the church.”

Rebecca may have had strong coaching from both parents, but when she was ready to get married, she insisted on independence. “Matchmaking was the order of the day, often by an aunt. But I chose my own spouse. His church and mine often competed informally in singing and fundraising!”

Rebecca and Joash J. Osiro were married in 1981. They are the parents of five grown children. Joash is a bishop in the Kenya Mennonite Church (KMC).

To be ordained, or not?

Rebecca did not crusade to be ordained. “But the matter of women’s ordination had been on her mind for quite a while. “As I was growing up, I saw women standing strong. They would say to my dad, ‘We need a church.’ A church would begin, and soon it was time for a leader, so they’d look for a man. They’d ordain someone who didn’t have a vision—and the church would die!”

“When I was still in high school, I’d ask my dad, ‘What does the Mennonite church say about women being pastors?’

“My dad always supported the ordination of women and was the first bishop in Kenya to ordain a woman (in 1984), which created controversy. Fortunately he lived to see me be ordained when I was 40 years old. I was so blessed to have his support.

“At one point, I thought maybe the idea of ordaining me should just be dropped because of all the stir it was creating. I didn’t feel the need of it strongly, but I knew it was important for other women who were also leaders to have their authority recognized.”

Today Rebecca pastors the Eastleigh Fellowship in Nairobi. “We have 40–70 attendees at our weekly services in a space owned by the KMC, which we may use from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm on Sundays. The neighbourhood is lower-middle-class, international and becoming somewhat gentriﬁed. A strong majority are Muslim radicals. “Our attendees are indigenous, and many work for the local merchants who often won’t let them have off to attend church functions.”

Solidarity through choir practice

Eastleigh Fellowship had prepared to send part of their group to PA 2015 as members of the KMC Choir, which was scheduled to perform at the event. But when only five from the entire choir were granted visas (including Rebecca and her son, but not her daughter), there was great disappointment.

“We had been meeting in our home to practice the music because we didn’t have access to our church’s space outside of our worship hours. People would come straight from work, and some would spend the night with us because they had no other place to stay.

“Some women from our church were locked out of their homes by their husbands because choir practice ran late into the evening. But they wanted to participate because it’s only through singing that they get to express their solidarity with each other. ‘So when we got the word that most of their visas had been denied, I ﬁrst thought I should stay home to stand with them. But then I realized that when I had the opportunity, I should go.’

Work for peace

To contribute to the family’s livelihood, Rebecca lectures twice a week about Islam in a Jesuit seminary. She has an MA in Islamic Studies from Kenya’s St. Paul’s University and has participated in research related to the Sharia Debates organized by Bayeux University.

Rebecca lectured twice a week about Islam in a Jesuit Seminary. She has an MA in Islamic Studies from Kenya’s St. Paul’s University and has participated in research related to the Sharia Debates organized by Bayeux University.

Servant leadership means waiting in line to register, for meals— an opportunity for fellowship, to reconnect with old friends and meet new ones.

“We find strength beyond class, beyond status. MWC gives me courage. I feel I’m in the right place. Here at the Assembly, I see MWC leaders, pastors and other church leaders standing and waiting in line to get their meals along with everyone else. I am so touched. In many other settings, they’d be brought their food rather than needing to wait in a queue.”

“When I go home and see women living in paper houses, often over sewage, and they make me strong tea (probably having borrowed money to buy the tea), I am deeply moved.

“Sometimes I feel weak. Am I really on the right track? But nothing that I am doing am I doing by myself.

“I remember my mother saying, ‘Love your enemies.’ I think that is something God is doing inside me. I am not perfect. I do get irritated.

“But I ﬁnd that with time, people who have said hard things, who have been against things in the church that seem important, those harsh differences often are taken care of—or at least no longer seem to stand between us.”

This woman has much to bring to the leadership of Mennonite World Conference.

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference.
More united than ever before

by Phyllis Pellman Good

Alfred Neufeld, chair of MWC’s Faith and Life Commission, reflects on the state of the global Mennonite faith community

“I am encouraged. The sponsoring of identity, this is a similar agenda as during the period of the Nazis, who offered to help bring Mennonites out of Russia.** Clearly, these early “global” gatherings of Mennonites included a measure of honesty about the issues besetting them.

Reasons for hope from the past

So why does Neufeld think the global Mennonite family has grown in numbers, strength, and support of each other?

“Definitely [through] the grace of God, the leadership of Jesus and the miraculous glue of the Holy Spirit present in all of our churches.”

And, he adds, there might be at least three additional secrets:

1. “All along the way, God gave us very integrating and gifted leaders.
2. “Missions, and the growth of the young churches in the Global South.
3. “Christ-centred fellowship has helped us to focus on our common ground, to strengthen our shared convictions and to be gracious and patient with each other.”

Some advice for churches in the Global South

This theologian/historian/philosopher from the Global South has a few suggestions for his sisters and brothers from the Southern Hemisphere about their role and place in the global faith family.

1. “The churches of the North need our support and understanding. But not our arrogance.
2. “This is not the moment for the churches of the South to make points against the churches of the North.
3. “Missions is a two-way road, with our churches in the Global South.

What priorities determine where our money goes?

“Some want all our donations to go to missions and church planting work. How much, or what percent of the whole for particular projects?

“Some with mission interests sometimes ask if it’s appropriate for services agencies and networks or our churches to accept this ‘easy’ money when missions don’t get that kind of funding.

“As a church, we renounced state sponsorship 500 years ago. That was at the heart of Anabaptism. How do we manage this today?

“In my reading of the MWC Proceedings from the early gatherings, I’m reminded that this is a similar agenda as during the period of the Nazis, who offered to help bring Mennonites out of Russia.**

Current struggles in the global family

And yet, Neufeld notes reasons to stay watchful, and in meaningful support of each other throughout our global fellowship.

“These are the things I hear stirring that need attention:

1. “The new cruel actions of Islamic terrorism are a critical test for the quality of Mennonite peace convictions based on the gospel.

Who should our leaders be and who will shape our theology?

“In Paraguay, Germany, and parts of Canada (the places in the world that I know best) 60 percent of our young people are getting their theological inspiration from the Global South.

“Three motivated young people aren’t looking for cheap, right-wing stuff. They want strong, hard, biblical wisdom. But they’re listening to voices who are strongly opposed to women in leadership and who say that the spiritual ethic of nonresistance is a compromised way to live.

“Not only do I see this as seriously confusing to our young people, it may also undercut our women pastors in countries where they don’t have a lot of institutional support.

“These threats to our Anabaptist identity markers call for very wise and strategic care.”

Perspectives

Alfred Neufeld’s Observations about Mennonite Structure and Behaviour

1. “It might be one of the present-day miracles of the grace of God that our global, but very pluralistic, community has been able to find ways of staying united for such a long time. Our theology and our structure do not help. We have no global centre of church authority, since each national church is autonomous. We have no historic or present-day unified Confession of Faith.
2. “There were times in the past when older people and ‘elders’ held strong authority and were considered bearers of identity. Today, we all are aware that if we are not able to articulate our theology and identity in a relevant way for the emerging and digitalized generation, there will be no future for Mennonite World Conference.” Nor for its member churches.
3. “Whenever persecution and marginalization have ended, Mennonites have identified quite strongly with their surrounding national culture. Separation from the world immediately becomes a complicated topic.”

Alfred Neufeld (l) shares a laugh with Rainer Burkhart of Germany at MWC meetings in Ethiopia in 2010.

Anabaptist churches around the globe walk with God together in worship on 24 January 2016.

Neufeld’s Laboratory

While taking a sabbatical in the part of the world where the earliest MWC Assemblies were held, Neufeld is systematically studying and writing about these elements for each of the first 10 MWC Assemblies:

1. The world situation at the time.
2. Life in the whole Mennonite family at the time.
3. The overall Assembly program for that particular event.
4. The flavour of theology and spirituality, the conflicts, and any outcomes from the event.
5. Profiles of 10 leaders involved with each Assembly.

Resource material is available at: www.mwc-cmm.org/whfs

Invite your congregation to participate!

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor for Mennonite World Conference.

Phyllis Pellman Good
Anabaptist Youth from around the world learn and fellowship together at summit by Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

...the three-day Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Global Youth Summit (GYS) at Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. USA, concluded Sunday, 19 July 2015, with a strong desire to impact the world by sharing their gifts.

Under the theme “Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts,” 42 delegates and more than 400 participants discussed what they wanted to offer the global church. For three days, they gave gifts of time, leadership, service, empathy, creativity, knowledge, education, and the ability to accept different opinions and use technology, among many others. They also spent considerable time discussing how they could use their gifts for the kingdom of God.

“GYS delegates are already doing good for the kingdom of God. For three days, they came together and discussed how they could use their gifts for the global church, many activities offered participants opportunity to learn more about their Anabaptist roots and the global church,” said Lani Prunés, North American representative to the YABs committee.

“We do this by giving participants a lot of opportunities to hear and discuss how we live out our faith in the world.”

Workshop subjects ranged from interfaith and cross-cultural engagement, using social media without sacrificing authentic relationships and exchange programs, to case studies on living out peace and justice in different parts of the world.

Concerts, sports and games, a collaborative art project, drumming and dance showcases, and movie nights enhanced the cross-cultural experience.

The Young Anabaptists hosted a booth at the Global Church Village where they provided Assembly Gathered participants with more information about the GYS experience.

Elina Ciptadi-Perkins is a copywriter and communications consultant. She is an Indonesian Mennonite who lives in Singapore with her family.

The Global Youth Summit is characterized by occasions to share perspectives from a variety of different Anabaptist traditions around the world.

A time to reconnect with Anabaptist teachings

While delegates focused on discerning how to use their gifts for the global church, many activities offered participants opportunity to learn more about their Anabaptist roots and the global church.

“We want GYS to be a place where participants grow in spirituality, especially in their understanding of Anabaptist teachings and the global church,” said Lani Prunés, North American representative to the YABs committee.

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Elina Ciptadi-Perkins is a copywriter and communications consultant. She is an Indonesian Mennonite who lives in Singapore with her family.

The best thing about the GYS was the meeting different people from around the globe and learning as a group, where we could learn more than what we could as individuals. From what I learned about the theme “Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts,” I will work with young people in my home church so they realize that they have unique gifts and they can use them to build the kingdom of God by sharing what they have with the entire community.

GYS highlights

Kenya

Wycliff Ochieng Otieno
GYS Delegate

The best thing about the GYS were the conversations at the dining hall, where it was possible to join whichever table and meet people from various countries and backgrounds. Sometimes these conversations turned from superficial getting to know each other to deep and open discussions on topics like divorce, homosexuality, remarriage, woman pastors and problems in our churches. Although we did not always agree, there was always a sense of respect and understanding.

I bring home a sense of shared problems, the feeling of not being the only young Mennonite in the world and optimism that there is a bright future for Mennonite churches all over the world.

GYS resulted in broadening my understanding of others and their convictions. I learned more in three days than I sometimes do during a month of my normal Dutch life. I already look forward to the next conference in six years!

Costa Rica

Marisabel Castillo
GYS Participant

The best thing about GYS for me was worshipping God together in different languages but one mind and one God, just as Jesus called us in Luke 10:27 to love him with all our hearts, soul, strength and mind. Another important thing was to learn that as we get together and respond to God’s love, we can start seeing how much, not how little, we can do in our church and community.

Puerto Rico

Kelvin Jimenez
GYS Participant

During GYS, I learned one specific workshop in which we were sharing our challenges that our respective countries face. It was very impactful to understand how diverse our settings and struggles are. Yet, we all seek guidance and wisdom from the same source, our God. We all base our hopes in Jesus and his message so that we can be light in the midst of darkness, community in the midst of segregation and love in the midst of the suffering of our world.

The Netherlands

Jantine Huissman
GYS Delegate

My most memorable aspect of the GYS were the conversations at the dining hall, where it was possible to join whichever table and meet people from various countries and backgrounds. Sometimes these conversations turned from superficial getting to know each other to deep and open discussions on topics like divorce, homosexuality, remarriage, woman pastors and problems in our churches. Although we did not always agree, there was always a sense of respect and understanding.

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Indonesia

Nita Purwadiningsih
GYS Delegate

We not only had a great fellowship during the event, but I learned to have a sense of belonging to the global family through praying for other continents and supporting conscientious objects in South Korea. GYS was a reminder for me that we need to take care of one another, and at a time when we can’t reach out to them directly, prayers will reach them.

Coming from the host country of the next Assembly, what do you want to say about Indonesia 2021? Indonesia is a culturally rich archipelago with three Mennonite conferences, each distinctive in their way of worshipping God. At Indonesia 2021, you will see God’s beautiful works through nature and culture and the Anabaptist community in Indonesia will also be blessed by learning from you.

Compiled by Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

GYS Sends a strong call to impact the world by sharing gifts

by Elina Ciptadi-Perkins
Young Anabaptists: the present church

YA Bs take the stage at PA 2015 and set plans for their future

by Phyllis Pellman Good

They have a relatively short history, but their voices at PA 2015 were arresting and incisive. In fact, the Young Anabaptists’ presentations throughout the morning worship at the Assembly caused some of the most spirited conversation at the Farm Show Complex (FSC) and were shared and discussed extensively on social media and beyond.

Known as YA Bs, these representatives of young people in Mennonite World Conference (MWC) member churches told the truth in unmistakable clear language. They asked strong questions. They were inspirational in their convictions.

This was not by chance. The members of the YA Bs Committee, who provide leadership for YA Bs activities and their mission, are a disciplined, seasoned group. Average age: 28½.

The YA Bs started in 2003 just before the MWC Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. More than 220 young people (ages 18-30+) from 28 countries gathered for the first Global Youth Summit (GYS), designed for fellowship and networking.

The get-together was so satisfying and so stretching for those who came that the young leaders asked that a second GYS be planted.

Elina Ciptadi-Perkins of Indonesia says, “While we were together in Bulawayo, we called for ongoing representation within MWC. We wanted to create a leadership group of five young people to initiate and implement our presence, with one representative each from Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America.”

Ciptadi-Perkins, a delegate in 2003 from the GKMI national mennonite conference in Indonesia, was appointed leader of the group, known then as the Amigos.

The third GYS, which more than 400 attended, was held at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, USA, 17-19 July 2015, just before the MWC Assembly in Harrisburg. Following the events, Ciptadi-Perkins, still a strong advocate for the YA Bs, reflected with two current members of the YA Bs leadership committee, Rodrigo Pedroza of Mexico and Marc Pasqués of Spain and Australia, about the YA Bs today.

“We came more prepared than ever to the 2015 GYS. We had surveyed young adults in our individual countries. Their requests and wishes guided our worship, our seminars, our games and our down time while we were together,” says Pedroza.

But the YA Bs also came prepared to the Assembly which followed at the FSC. “In Zimbabwe in 2003, we young people were given a verse to read in the main sessions. In the past, people saw us young as ‘creative’ and ‘full of energy.’ Maybe they could do some music.” But here at PA 2015, YA Bs had a key part in every single morning of the Assembly,” says Ciptadi-Perkins.

“People now see we have the gift of discernment and critical thinking. We want to want to work together with our older sisters and brothers. Now it’s becoming a dialogue,” she says.

In some countries, YA Bs carry major church responsibilities. “Half of the ministers in Mexico are young people,” says Pedroza, chair of the YA Bs Committee and one of the morning speakers at PA 2015. “The Mennonite churches in Mexico have abandoned bureaucracy, so young people are quite involved.”

“In my country, Anabaptism’s ideals have been lost generation by generation. Our older leaders haven’t been teaching it, favouring instead a charismatic approach and Pentecostalism,” says Pedroza. “We’re helping to put Anabaptism into practice and discovering its freshness.”

Marc Pasqués was first invited to be a YA Bs delegate at the second GYS held in Paraguay in 2009. “Marc’s national church conference was affirmed as a member of MWC just before the Assembly in Paraguay,” remembers Ciptadi-Perkins. “In addition to Marc’s evident skills, we invited him as encouragement to his conference to immediately be connected to the global church.”

The YA Bs Committee includes one representative from each of the five continents, plus the MWC staff mentor. Members who completed a term at PA 2015 are Rodrigo Pedroza, Mexico; Tístig Tesfaye Gelagel, Ethiopia; Sumana Basumata, India; Marc Pasqués, Spain/Australia; Lani Prunés, US; and Ayub Omondi, Kenya, as mentor.

YA Bs leaders have had unusual vision from the group’s very beginning. “Our first team planted the seeds about how we young people could contribute to MWC,” says Ciptadi-Perkins.

“Our second team met with different official groups within MWC, explained who we are and what our gifts are, and asked for greater collaboration. This was our penetration stage. We wanted to go beyond token participation.”

“Since Paraguay, we’ve been putting together our blueprint,” says Ciptadi-Perkins. “We’ve always had a strong desire to network and fellowship. Many of us had email, but back then, not many in the Global South had regular access. This past reality is changing now.”

Pedroza continues, “Now we are threading those deep interests through the projects we are creating since they are a key part of our blueprint.”

“Our projects are for the people we represent, but also for younger people who want to be connected. In smaller churches around the world, the distinctions aren’t as important,” says Tesfaye Gelagel. “We are designing specific activities for them to do, while at the same time, exposing them to each other’s worlds. And through it all we will be the great reminder: ‘You belong to a bigger family. You are not alone.’”

“We’re preparing teaching materials for the book of Acts. It will be a Bible study that examines the text. But it will also weave in an explanation of Anabaptism. And it will show how to integrate Anabaptist understanding of the Bible into one’s culture.”

The YA Bs Committee has also been giving careful attention to its own growth as leaders. Ciptadi-Perkins says, “When we began, we needed a lot of ‘envisioning.’ We didn’t have experience being part of multicultural groups and settings. We had tensions that could have been avoided had we been forewarned. Some MWC leaders helped us, but none was specifically assigned to give us this kind of guidance.”

“So after the GYS in Paraguay, we decided to bring two members from the previous committee to the new team to talk about personal communication styles, and to help us understand each other better so we could avoid wasting time and energy in conflict.”

“We also named a mentor from an earlier YA Bs Committee who would give us tools for organizing ourselves and our work. We have learned that the mentor role is very important.”

“We do not want to be the future of the church anymore,” says Pedroza emphatically. “We want to be the present church. They finally believe in us. They trust us. We need to use this opportunity to be listened to wisely.”

“We need to continue to be respectful of each other. We are different. We think differently. But we need each other. For example, we must keep our peace convictions alive, especially when we’re at home and not together.”

“My prayer,” says Ciptadi-Perkins, “is that young people don’t become complacent. Things could now seem easy since we were taken seriously at PA 2015. I hope this doesn’t become ‘expected without work and effort.’”

Phyllis Pellman Good is a writer and editor from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA.
Learning and loving the global Anabaptist family

The South Central Kansas tour was cancelled due to insufficient participation; however organizers went the extra mile to accommodate Rosamary Slater from Saskatchewan. As she engaged the region’s variety of Anabaptists groups past and present, she received “royal treatment” on this “experience of a lifetime.”

From the Netherlands, Pieter Post, theologian and pastor, and Paul Steerenberg, sociologist and social worker, connected with San Antonio Mennonite Church and DOOR (Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection). “We were outstandingly informed [on migrant issues],” says Post, who was impressed with the warmth and dedication of volunteers. “We are grateful to have chosen this [Assembly Scattered] program. It keeps us busy reflecting on what the power of faith and the meaning of the church can be,” says Post.

The visitors weren’t the only students. “During my ministry when planting a new church in Bogotá,” commented César García, MWC general secretary, “I dream of the day my local congregation would mature enough to become self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating... Some time later I heard that, in addition to reflecting the three ‘selves,’ a church reaches maturity when it is also ‘self-theologizing,’ i.e. able to make its own theology.”

“However,” he added, “it took me many years to discover what is obvious in the process of development of every living organism. True maturity is not reached when one is independent in all areas of life, but when one is capable of giving and receiving, of sharing with others what one has, as well as appreciating what others can bring to the table... in other words, when a person is interdependent.”

The General Council meeting included around 120 representatives from MWC member churches around the world. About half of their time together involved sharing stories and reflecting together on themes of unity and diversity. Alfred Neufeld of Paraguay examined lessons from four historical areas of conflict: the ethnic versus the missionary church; martial; the emerging versus the “departing” generation; and revival pietism versus enlightenment liberalism. Fernando Erens of Germany reflected on the difference between “cheap” and “costly” unity. “It is not we who create unity,” he insisted, “but unity is created by participating in God’s relation of love.” The challenge, he added, is to determine the limits of diversity. The only basis for divisions, he suggested, is whenever the lordship of Christ is questioned. On most other matters, he urged forbearance of differences.

The MWC Executive Committee beginning in 2015 (from left): Agus Setianto (Indonesia), César García (general secretary, Colombia), Paul Phinehas (India), Lisa Carr Pries (Canada), Rainer Burkart (Germany), Iris de Leon Hernandez (Dominican Republic), Paul Peterschmitt (France), Sandra Campos (Costa Rica), Steven Mang’ana (Tanzania), Thuma Hamakang’andu (Zambia), Nelson Kraybill (president, USA), Dario Ramirez (Paraguay), Ernst Bergen (treasurer, Paraguay). Missing from photo: Rebecca Osiro (vice-president, Kenya).

The Lancastrian Mennonite Conference churches of Eyerland, New Danielle and Willow Street welcomed guests from France, Switzerland and Taiwan. They toured guest to historical sites in Lancaster County (home of the oldest Mennonite congregations in North America), Amish farms, and shared their discipleship, outreach, ecumenical activities and worship—the church visits include prayer, singing, Bible reading, fellowship and sharing. The Lancaster Mennonite Conference hosted international guests in their home settings, “saying Assembly Scattered is a little bit closer,” says Prince of Peace member Jeff Chisholm.

The Rodiger family from Bern, Switzerland, visited the Prince of Peace Mennonite Church in Anchorage. They reconnected with pastor John Thacker who stayed with the Rodigers some years earlier while on sabbatical. This visit to Prince of Peace (located in their worship space, a Catholic retreat centre on a hillside) “helped connect us to the greater Mennonite church” and brought Assembly “a little bit closer,” says Prince of Peace member Jeff Chisholm.

The highlight was meeting fellow believers from many parts of the world—Brazil, Columbia, Manitoba: “hearing their joys, their difficulties... what it means to follow Jesus in their home settings,” says Assembly Scattered host Peter Clement. Assembly Scattered at PA 2015 connected visitors and hosts in five locations: Alaska, the Eastern USA and Texas. It provided opportunity for Assembly participants to visit Mennonite World Conference churches and ministries in the host country before or after PA 2015 to strengthen and develop new friendships among Anabaptists from all over the globe.

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Changes in MWC communication team

Bogotá, Colombia – The Mennonite World Conference communication team is changing with new appointments and transitions in three staff positions.

In mid-July 2015, Karla Braun of Canada began a half-time position as editor and writer. She serves as editor of Courier/Correo/ Courier and also as writer and editor of other MWC media.

Braun has been associate editor of the Amorofonline Brethren Herald based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada for the past seven years. Her educational background includes an undergraduate degree in English with a concentration in linguistics as well as selected graduate courses in theological studies.

Braun succeeds Devin Manzullo-Thomes of the USA, who has served as MWC editor and writer since January 2013. He has been appointed to a full-time role at Messiah College, a Brethren in Christ-affiliated school in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, and will begin his studies in September.

On 1 September 2015, Kristina Toews of Colombia will assume the responsibilities of chief communications officer, a role that includes overseeing MWC’s communications strategy and coordinating all print and electronic communications.

She will succeed Ron Rempel of Canada, who is retiring after serving in this position since January 2012. Toews, originally from Abbotsford, British Columbia, has lived in Bogotá, Colombia, and has served as MWC’s web communications worker since February 2013. In this position, she has initiated and led MWC’s growing social media strategy through platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Toews also holds an undergraduate degree in Biblical Studies.

Karla Braun
editor and writer

Replacing Toews in managing MWC’s web and social media presence is Aarón González of Costa Rica. He served most recently on the MWC Assembly staff in Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, in his new position, González will work from the MWC office in Bogotá.

González has served in his home congregation of Buenas Nuevas Mennonite Church in Costa Rica, and with Mennonite Central Committee and MWC in the YAMEN! Program in Cambodia.

“Communication and community are related words not only in their common root but in the impact that they have in the human being,” commented MWC general secretary César García.

Without communication there is no possibility of sharing our joys and sorrows, finding hope in the midst of suffering, or building a global community.

This is why communication is more than just a career or a department in an institution, it is a ministry. It is a very important service for our Anabaptist global family of faith.”

García added, “I want to express my gratitude to Devin and Ron for the ministry that they developed in MWC. Communications have been crucial during the last years in our global family. Under Ron’s leadership, MWC communications advanced into new stages and reached the maturity that we need in order to keep growing and facilitating good means of communication among our members. We pray for God’s guidance and blessings for these leaders and the new stages that they have started in their lives.”

Aarón González
web and social media manager

Anabaptist Shelf, publishing and promoting the Global History series, helping with social media and marketing, raising funds for both the core and Assembly budgets and advising on overall strategy. During some of those years, Phyllis also served on the General Council and the Executive Committee.

Eleanor Miller was recognized for 25 years of service. She served as a volunteer in the MWC Strasbourg office from 1990-1997, assisting in the planning of Executive Committee and General Council meetings and also the 1997 Assembly in France. From 1997-2015, she served as administrative assistant and was also a member of the communication team until 2014. In addition, from 2003 to 2015 she was responsible for collecting all national church information and statistics for the MWC global census of Anabaptists.

“Transitions are a very important part of living organisms,” commented MWC general secretary César García.

“Our human body, for example, needs regular cell death in order to keep healthy. In the same way, a MWC constitution provides specific terms for some leadership positions in order to help our global body stay healthy and renewed by an Anabaptist and new vision. It is a blessing when leaders fulfill a stage in their service and are ready to move to new positions of service. This is a reason why we supported as chair of the Peace Commission. Joji and his husband Dann, originally from Canada, are peace building missionaries in the Philippines. She succeeds Paulina Widjaja of Indonesia as chair.

Newly appointed as secretary of the Peace Commission is Andrew Suderman. Andrew and his wife Karen, originally from Canada, are providing leadership to an Anabaptist Network and Resource Centre in South Africa. He succeeds Robert J. Suderman as secretary of the commission. Stanley Green of the United States was appointed as chair of the Mission Commission. Green is executive director of Mennonite Mission Network, the mission agency of Mennonite Church USA. He succeeds Richard Showalter of the United States as chair. Rafael Zaracho of Paraguay continues as secretary of the commission.

Siaka Traoré of Burkina Faso was appointed as chair of the Deacons Commission. Traoré is president of Église Évangélique Mennonite du Burkina Faso. He succeeds Cynthia Peacock of India as chair. Kent Sherrill of the Netherlands continues as secretary of the commission. Alfred Neufeld of Paraguay continues as chair of the Advocacy and Life Commission, and John Ruth of the United States as secretary.

I want to express my gratitude for the years of service that Paulus, Richard, and Cynthia did in a voluntary way as commission chairs and for the excellent work that Robert developed as Peace Commission secretary,” noted César García. “These leaders contributed to the good health of our MWC body. They did so during their stage of service and during this time of transition. It is my prayer that the new leaders of our commissions will be encouraged and inspired by their presence in our global ministries.”

Karla Braun
editor and writer

Kristina Toews
chief communications officer

Aarón González
chief communications officer

Starting 21 June, MWC announced changes in the leadership of three of its commissions.

Leadership changes announced for three MWC commissions

Bogotá, Colombia – In meetings prior to the 21-26 July Assembly, Mennonite World Conference announced changes in the leadership of three of its commissions.

Transitions are a very important part of living organisms,” commented MWC general secretary César García.

“Our human body, for example, needs regular cell death in order to keep healthy. In the same way, a MWC constitution provides specific terms for some leadership positions in order to help our global body stay healthy and renewed by an Anabaptist and new vision. It is a blessing when leaders fulfill a stage in their service and are ready to move to new positions of service. This is a reason why we supported as chair of the Peace Commission. Joji and his husband Dann, originally from Canada, are peace building missionaries in the Philippines. She succeeds Paulina Widjaja of Indonesia as chair.

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Mission Commission: (l to r) Hermann Woelke (Uruguay), Rafael Zaracho (Paraguay), Agis Mayanto, vice-chair (Indonesia), Stijn Green, chair (USA), Rebekka Demena (Ethiopia), Anídi Santos (Indonesia), Barbara Hege-Galla (Germany), John Fumaña, vice-chair (DR Congo), [missing] Philip Okoye (Kenya).
Assembly 17 will be held in Indonesia in 2021

Artists who walk with God through gifts of painting and sculpture shared their work in an exhibit.

Volunteers translated news stories posted on pa2015.mwc-cmm.org into all three official MWC languages while interpreters relayed all the plenary sessions into Spanish, French and English and sign language.

Selamat datang!
Welcome!
Bienvenidos!
Bienvenue!
A Vision for Reconciliation
Introducing the new Mennonite World Conference president

Former Courier editor Devin Manzullo-Thomas asks new Mennonite World Conference president J. Nelson Kraybill about his call to Christian ministry, his roles in his home country and around the globe and his vision for the reconciling work of MWC.

How did you become interested in the life of the church?
Growing up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, my family was deeply involved in the mission of the church at the local level. Both of my parents gave tirelessly to the congregation, serving in many roles, from Sunday school teachers to janitors. My uncle Nevin served as a missionary in present-day Tanzania. The stories he told when he came home on furlough were my introduction to the global church. That sparked my interest in the worldwide body of Christ.

Can you describe your call to ministry?
My primary call is to pastoral ministry. But over the years, I have combined pastoral ministry with work in theological education and academia. It has been a rewarding journey!

In what roles have you served over the years?
My studies took me to Goshen College, a Mennonite college in Indiana; Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey; and Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. Over the course of my ministry, I taught Bible at Summit Hills Mennonite Academy in San Juan, Puerto Rico, offered conflict mediation seminars while serving at the London (England) Mennonite Centre, and served as president of Anabaptist-Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana. I also pastored a small congregation in Vermont.

What is your current ministry?
After retiring from the seminary presidency, I returned to full-time pastoral ministry, unexpectedly, with my home church, Prairie Street Mennonite, a multi-racial congregation in the heart of Elkhart. The experience has been so life giving for me: shepherding, nurturing, and learning from one sustained community. I’m very glad to be serving in this role with these people.

How have you been involved in MWC up to this point?
In 2003, Mennonite Church USA asked me to serve as the North American representative to the MWC committee tasked with producing what became our seven Shared Convictions. I went to Zimbabwe to work with a group of scholars and pastors on reading and analyzing 34 confessional statements from various MWC constituencies. We distilled the core ideas that form our identity as a global faith family.

How did you come to be MWC president?
A few years ago, the search committee tasked with finding a successor for Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe called me to ask if I would allow my name to be considered for the role. At first, I resisted. As we had done before, my wife Ellen and I called together a group of Christians who knew us and knew our hearts for both the local and global church. We asked them to pray with us and help us to discern. Ultimately, they urged me to let my name stand, sensing that this new direction was God’s will.

Day-to-day, what does the MWC president do?
My role is not management, it’s governance. (We have a very capable chief executive officer in our general secretary, César García.) I’m strictly a volunteer who has the privilege of moderating the MWC Executive Committee and General Council, two groups that help us do the work of the global church. I’ll meet with the other MWC officers—the vice-president and the treasurer—to do business: monthly (via Skype), face-to-face two or three times per year. Perhaps the best part of my role is my opportunity to visit MWC member churches around the world! My intention is to spend time visiting local churches in various countries, learning to know the leaders and hear their stories. Ultimately, I see my role with MWC as pastor, encourager: someone with ears and eyes open to the global church, and someone who helps foster the vision.

And what is your vision for MWC?
The core of our ministry is reconciliation. I want for myself and for the church to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. I want us to know the power of his resurrection, and to know that the energy for our global gatherings emanates from that core reality. But that reconciliation with God through Christ is only one part of the reconciliation equation. Mission is reconciling work that includes both the dimension of calling individuals to faith—to salvation, repentance, forgiveness, and regeneration by the power of the Holy Spirit—and the dimension of nurturing and repairing relationships between people in the church, outside the church and within the global ecology. The biblical vision of God is to unite all things in Christ. As Anabaptists, we need to hold together individual conversion and peace and justice work. If we lose one aspect or the other, we lose all reason for our existence.