

Courier Correo Courier

October 2014
Volume 29, Number 5



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

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

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

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Cover Photo:

Members of the Habecker Mennonite Church (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA) work in their Asian garden. The Habecker church is an intercultural, multi-voiced congregation with a sizeable portion of its membership from the Karen ethnic group. Originally from Burma, these Karen members migrated to the USA as refugees from the country's decades-long civil war. According to Karen Sensenig, pastor of the Habecker church, elements of Karen culture now infuse the congregation's ministries. For instance, a Karen choir of teenagers opens the service each Sunday with enthusiastic Burmese songs. And an Asian garden – now in its fourth year – engages members from different cultures in rewarding, hands-on work.

Several Karen young people from the Habecker church will attend Pennsylvania 2015, the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly, to be held 21-26 July 2015 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA. For the complete story of how the congregation creatively raised funds to attend the Assembly, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org. Photo by Jonathan Charles

From the Editor's Desk



“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:2-6, NIV)

As I write this editorial, we're literally counting the days until the opening of registration for the next Mennonite World Conference Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015. (And by the time you read this, registration will be open!) This global gathering will occur on 21-26 July 2015 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA. Excitement is building for this event – and not just among MWC leaders and staff members. All around the world, people are looking forward to getting together with their Anabaptist sisters and brothers from different countries and church communities. Pennsylvania 2015 promises to be an opportunity for us to fulfill the words of the Apostle Paul to “keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

In anticipation of this global gathering in North America, this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier* tackles the thorny subjects of diversity and unity. As Anabaptists from different cultural, economic and political contexts, we reflect the diversity of our varied communities. Yet we are united by a shared faith. In light of this reality, how do we deal with our diversity? And how do we express our unity? More specifically, how does diversity challenge us – to rethink our own commitments and to consider our relationship with believers of different persuasions? Furthermore, how can we express our unity – and how can our unity shape our witness in the world?

In this issue's “Inspiration and Reflection” section, Fernando Enns and Janet Plenert each tackle these questions in separate articles. Their reflections provides us with much to think about as we prepare to come together as a faith family in July 2015.

To further prepare for the next MWC Assembly, which will be held in North America for the first time in 25 years, this issue features a country profile of Canada. Written by Royden Loewen, the article provides a succinct yet nuanced portrait of Canadian Anabaptism – its history and its present realities, its contemporary diversity and the challenges it faces.

This issue includes other articles as well. In the “Perspectives” section, writers from around the globe reflect on the concept of power in church leadership from their varied cultural contexts. And in the “Resources” section, we preview the theme and focus of the upcoming World Fellowship Sunday, to be held in January 2015.

As we prepare to gather at Pennsylvania 2015, let us value anew our worldwide family of faith. Let us celebrate our diversity, even as we recognize its challenges. Let us witness to our unity, never downplaying the God-given cultural differences that enrich our global fellowship. Ultimately, let us live in a way that embodies the truth of our faith: one Lord, one faith, one baptism – and one God, “who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:5-6).

Devin Manzullo-Thomas is editor for Mennonite World Conference.

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Power

in Church Leadership

Exploring our shared commitment to doing church together

As a global communion of Anabaptist-related churches, we share a common commitment to doing church together. We also acknowledge that the church needs leaders who take responsibility for guiding and shepherding the flock. Yet we know that in our diverse contexts of church leadership, power gets exercised in many different ways. In this issue of *Courier / Correo / Courier*, writers from across our fellowship discuss the different ways in which Anabaptists approach issues of power in church leadership – the struggles and challenges, as well as the blessings and benefits.

Not So with Us

By Kyong-Jung Kim

Less than two decades ago, Anabaptism emerged into Christian life in South Korea. In 1996, a group of like-minded Christians – sharing an emergent vision of Anabaptism – broke a long-term linkage with their mother churches, which were mostly Protestant. Having spent much time in intense Bible study and having done substantial research on church history and theology, they discovered what they wanted was to start a new church founded on the New Testament.

Breaking with the mainline churches was one thing; starting a new church was quite another. Anabaptism's reputation was still negative at that time, and so embracing its vision was like going against the tide of mainstream tradition. Even more counter-culturally, their goal was to go all the way back to the beginning of the first-century church!

Since that time, the Anabaptist network in South Korea has grown gradually, as people are drawn to the fresh idea of what it means to be church.

Some may ask: why did these like-minded individuals have to leave their home churches and start a new church movement? While many issues caused the separation, one of the key issues – perhaps the most crucial factor – was their understanding of the very nature of church. For them, the church was not an institutionalized denomination which itself creates an inevitably unequal power structure. Instead, they envisioned the church as the body of Christ, in which power is equitably shared among sisters and brothers.

Power is something that human beings naturally desire. Throughout history, nobody has been free from the lure of power; even Jesus was tempted by Satan

to use his power. Those within the church have likewise not been exempted; in fact, many church leaders are tempted to exercise their authority to rule over others.

This is exactly what happened to Jesus' disciples 2,000 years ago. They argued about who was the greatest among them. And two of them, James and John, more specifically requested special seats for themselves – one at the left and one at the right hand of Jesus in his glory (Mark 10:37). Even their mother wanted Jesus to give them power: "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom" (Matthew 20:21). Such requests troubled

“Too few people recognize the corrupting influence of power, and too few realize how such power can be misused by so-called ‘leaders’ within the church.”

the other disciples and compeled them to act indignantly toward James and John. No wonder they argued about this issue!

Ultimately, Jesus called them together and said: "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:42-45).

It is embarrassing to see that Christians at times seek power and fame to maintain the status quo. I say this not because

I am better than others, but because I too am tempted by my inner self to seek worldly power, unless I am controlled by the Spirit of God. Unfortunately, too few people recognize the corrupting influence of power, and too few realize how such power can be misused by so-called "leaders" within the church.

One likes to be called "leader." We all have a tendency to ask for such a title – and for the power and fame that accompany it. But what we are trying to get is not the kind of power that the world teaches. Instead, we seek the power we receive from God when we are in weakness yet made alive by God's empowering Spirit. This is the power to be a servant, not a leader. This is the power to be humble, not to control. This is the power to love our enemies, not to kill them. This is the power to lay down even our lives for others, just as our Lord came to give his life as a ransom for many.

Let us not fall into the devil's trap, in which we become convinced that we are receiving a reward from God just because we happen to be in a greater position. The cost of discipleship carries no such reward. Instead, it offers a cup and a cross: "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These belong to those for whom they have been prepared" (Mark 10:40).

May God grant us the power to free ourselves from worldly expectations, and to rely on his power even in our weakness.



Kyong-Jung Kim serves as the MWC Northeast Asia Regional Representative. Since 2004 he has served as director of the Korea Anabaptist Center, a ministry of the Anabaptist churches of South Korea.

A Blessing or a Curse?

by Doris Dube

My earliest recollection of power in church leadership was observing the awe with which my pastor was held. At the beginning of a church service he and some others in leadership would not be visible in the auditorium; they would be in a backroom somewhere. Singing would start and then these leaders would file in, clutching their Bibles and hymnals under their armpits. At the end of the song the room would be quiet and expectant.

Without conscious teaching on the matter, I somehow formed the opinion that a pastor was a holy man – closer to God than the rest of us. I noticed that even off the pulpit, if he expressed an opinion it was accepted without discussion or dispute. I listened to the adults around me and noted how they often quoted, “The pastor said...” It was as though the pastor was the final authority. I too learned to revere him and all the other pastors I knew.

As I grew older and started reading the Bible on my own, I discovered a new intimacy with my creator. My understanding of God’s relationship to humanity underwent a massive shift – and as a result, so did my understanding of church leaders. Although I still esteem pastors as my spiritual leaders, I also realize that they are human and liable to all human weaknesses and faults, just like the rest of us.

In my Christian walk I have worshiped God under the authority of many leaders. In the hierarchy structure of my church, *Ibandla Labazalwane KuKristu eZimbabwe* (Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe), these leaders would include bishops, overseers, pastors and deacons. For this reason I have experienced as many leadership styles as the number of leaders who have ministered to me. From where I stand as a lay person, all leaders have power, and that power in leadership can either be positive or negative. The leaders – all of whom are fallible human beings – set the tone among those they lead by the way they wield their power.

One positive use of power is obedience. Sometimes this exercise of power may mean leaving the known comfort zones by venturing into unknown new ground. For example, in the late 1960s, I was part of the Brethren in Christ youth group that used to meet at a rented women’s club in one of Bulawayo’s townships called Mpopoma. The group was started by Mr. Khono Ndlovu

and Mrs. Abbie Dube (who for 13 years had served first as Sunday school teacher and later as superintendent). These two leaders sensed a gap between the children’s Sunday school age group and the young people of the church. The young people were now ready to explore a wider variety of topics than what was being addressed in Sunday school and they did not quite benefit fully from the predominantly adult-dominated worship services. To meet this need, the two leaders decided to create a forum for young people to meet, play games, sing and study the Bible together.

Their vision spread to other Brethren in Christ congregations countrywide. Today, we have a recognized arm of the church in the Youths. Many from that pioneer group

“From where I stand as a lay person, all leaders have power, and that power can be positive or negative. The leaders set the tone among those they lead by the way they wield their power.”

of young people are still in active church ministries. By obeying God’s call, these two leaders demonstrated positive power in leadership.

Another positive use of power is in preparing for succession. Since I started having more interest in my church life, I have witnessed several leadership transitions in the offices of bishops, overseers and pastors. When the leader in the office grooms other potential leaders, the transition is smooth and effective. There would be several eligible candidates from which to choose when the right time comes. When this does not happen, it hurts the church. Every Moses should have a Joshua or two.

By contrast, leaders who do not prepare for succession weaken the church. For instance, when a pastor remains in one congregation for several terms, he may be wielding a negative form of power. His decision represents a loss to the larger church body. If he has special gifts, they are only enjoyed by his congregation. Yet if he stepped down or moved on to another position, he would edify the body.

Another area of potential leadership weakness which sometimes causes strife is

in failing to recognize the gifts of others and failing to use them to build the body of the church. This year, one of our leaders, Mrs. Nellie Mlotshwa, celebrated her eightieth birthday. Her family threw a party for her, and many people belonging to the Brethren in Christ Church attended. At the party, speaker after speaker shared about how she had ministered to them and helped them discover their own potential. Leaders who have this gift and use it are truly blessed. The Lord’s work is so broad that all may have a slice.

Sometimes issues of power in leadership do not manifest themselves as openly as do other simple matters of church life. They just defy discussion. The church in Zimbabwe, for instance, is rich with powerful women that God is using in amazing ways. In their own forums they are able to feed and grow the body of the church while very little attention is drawn to them. Some of these women are very gifted. Others have exceptional leadership qualities and are ably caring for their flocks.

Even so, the Zimbabwe Brethren in Christ Church does not yet have any ordained women ministers. At times, questions have been raised about this situation. The general answer is that the women have not presented themselves or requested ordination. On the other hand, gifted men with leadership qualities find themselves asked to pastor congregations; eventually, they are licensed or ordained. In this situation one wonders who wields the power over whom?

Leadership is power. Power is addictive. Once gained, power is a special gift to be shared meaningfully or relinquished humbly. Leaders are still strengthening or weakening the church by the way they lead. Some are daring to implement difficult decisions in order to heal or keep the church body healthy. Others take risks in making wise but unpopular decisions that lead to isolation or walking alone. Blessed are the leaders who recognize the source of their power and can balance their stand before God and humanity. Those are indeed powerful men and women.



Doris Dube is an author, teacher, former MWC regional editor for Africa, contributor to the Africa volume of the Global Mennonite History Series and member of *Ibandla Labazalwane KuKristu eZimbabwe* (Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe).

Beyond Domination and Control

by Drew G. I. Hart

Periodically, my shoulder is tapped to provide insight for local leaders, churches and Christian organizations about how to be more faithful in becoming a diverse and reconciled body as God intends. A few years ago, I would have responded by focusing my energies on reaffirming the scriptural vision of the New Testament Christian community, in which every barrier has been broken down, first among Jews and Gentiles, and therefore among every social barrier that exists, including our current racial divisions. I might have started by pointing out how Paul confronted Peter on this issue, or how Scripture portrays the radical implications of the Church as an ethnically diverse new society in which the old relational identities and networks are reconfigured because of the work of Jesus, and that the wall that divided us has been torn down, in and through God in Jesus Christ.

Theologically, I still believe this to be the case. Yet that application seems to miss some of the specific historical and current forces at work in most American Churches – and these forces are very rarely addressed.

Is it possible that our primary problem isn't merely about cultural and ethnic division and difference in the United States? Is it possible that the real issue revolves around how power has been deployed historically among Christians in the church and within the larger society?

In North America, the church has never thoroughly repented of (or turned away from) the racial domination that formed its practices and theology since the seventeenth century. Certainly slavery has been formally abolished, and as a practice thereafter has received a devastating stigma and a negative response from mainstream society at the very mention of the word. It takes no courage to look back at American (Christian) slave history from 1619-1865 A.D., while denouncing it as inconsistent with the way of Jesus.

However, within most Christian communities, it continues to take significant conviction for those that gather under the Lordship of Jesus in the United States to speak patiently and truthfully in vulnerable conversation concerning the practices of white dominance. To the present day these practices have continued to be employed in and by the church, scandalizing its witness in the world. Slavery is gone, but the logics of racial reasoning that produced white

dominance and control within Christian gatherings (and beyond its walls) have remained intact.

We must ask why the North American church – including Anabaptism – has lacked the ability to understand the fact that racism is significantly a theology and discipleship concern, troubled by its deployment of power in the church and unconsciously justified through a racial gaze.

Many Christian gatherings would love to have “diverse” communities, manifesting the reconciliation that God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. However, few churches have been willing to let go of the protected and concentrated power and control that run their communities.

“The time has come to recalibrate our theology and practices so that we can more faithfully embody the way of Jesus in a racialized society.”

Essentially, when “diverse” people enter into these “welcoming” communities, they must convert theologically, culturally and socially to the set standards. As is often said, “The White way is the right way.” These standards are not pure Christian values untouched by societal and cultural norms. Nonetheless, they are often utilized and justified as such.

Instead of practicing *kenosis* (Philemon 2:5-11), a self-emptying of power and entering into mutual vulnerability with racialized and oppressed Christians, in which an intimate encounter of mutual transformation can occur, the dominating and controlling group postures over others in dominance. The temptation has always been to error on holding the necessary power and control over racial minorities, which negates the possibility of the authentic reconciliation so often desired. Reconciliation is more than diverse bodies sharing space every Sunday morning. Where domination and “lording over” continues, no reconciliation has happened. When racial minorities that have historically been crushed and excluded by the practices of power within the church are not given a seat at the table, and when decision-making power is not vulnerably shared, no authentic reconciliation can

happen. When the voice of the least powerful is not given priority, and the local body's ears are not attuned to privileging their voice, the Kingdom of God is not reigning fully amongst us.

To not account for the power dynamics at work in the racialization of our American Anabaptist communities is to misdiagnose why we fail to move beyond a gridlocked pattern of racial conformity in our society, with no witness to our yielding to God's power in the midst of our human weakness in this area. In our American Anabaptist communities, we need to move beyond domination and control toward self-emptying solidarity and mutuality.

The time has come to recalibrate our theology and practices so that we can more faithfully embody the way of Jesus in a racialized society. Our Anabaptist congregations are probably more prone than most to understand that we should not dominate or “lord over” others. Yet we need to actualize this theology in response to our white-dominated and -controlled churches and denominations.

What would be the result of Anabaptist bookshelves and pulpits not being dominated by white authors and speakers, but fully embracing and wrestling with the entire gifting of the church, especially those that have been historically dominated and excluded? How might our churches make visible God's reign before a watching world if it were to creatively follow the lead of non-white prophetic Christian movements comprised of the vulnerable and defenseless of our day?

Could it be that our communal worship might be enriched by our daily solidarity and life together with people that have been systematically excluded racially? How might contemporary Anabaptism, which began in the sixteenth century as a visible gathering of disciples committed to following Jesus concretely as a predominately economically oppressed group, get renewed through a renouncing of white dominance, control and “lording over” others? How might it enter into vulnerable solidarity and mutuality with racially oppressed people? How might it seek the shalom and well being of those within and beyond our Christian communities?



Drew G. I. Hart (drewghart.com) is a self-identified black Anabaptist, MennoNerds blogger and former pastor at Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church (Pennsylvania, USA). He is also a doctoral student whose research focuses on black theology and Anabaptism.

The challenge of diversity

A call to discernment and transformation



by Fernando Enns

Today, our community of Anabaptist-related churches spans the globe, incorporating people from many different cultural, ethnic and political backgrounds. We are, without a doubt, a diverse community. Whenever we gather, we enjoy this diversity and feel enriched.

Still, at times questions arise and we find ourselves irritated. Diversity is also a challenge! Are there limits to this diversity within our global Anabaptist family?

In order to reflect on this challenge, it is necessary to first clarify our identity. This poses a challenge in itself! If we are to explain who we are, we usually tell our story. What are the “shoulders we stand on”? Even those Mennonite communities who do not trace back their genealogy to the European Anabaptists of the sixteenth century will refer to that particular history, because at some point they have adopted that story as part of their own identity. And even if we might relate to this history in a critical way, we still use it as a reference point in order to explain who we are and to seek orientation in today’s questions of identity and diversity.

Early Anabaptism: Born in diversity

Anabaptism has never been totally homogeneous. Diversity has been a challenge within the Anabaptist movement from its very beginnings in the Reformation era. This movement did not start with a single understanding of a new face of the church, but rather developed different ideas in the many struggles in various contexts of Europe. Slowly, unifying principles emerged and provided opportunities to strengthen each other over against the dominant church of the Middle Ages.

While sharing the key insight of Reformers like Luther, Calvin and Zwingli – the conviction that we are saved by grace through faith alone – these Anabaptists embraced a more radical understanding of the church as a nonconformist faith-community of committed believers. The most obvious expression of that conviction was the believer’s baptism – a radical act based on an individual confession of faith, and made out of free choice. This emerging community rejected any state or church authority to prescribe a certain interpretation of faith. Instead, they opted for a non-hierarchical and non-credal model of “priesthood of all believers.”

As the movement grew, it became obvious that only a congregational structure of the church would be appropriate. Without the top-down leadership of priests and bishops, the congregation would engage

MWC leaders from different nations and cultures spend time in prayer, Bible study and corporate discernment during the recent MWC Executive Committee meetings in Bogotá, Colombia. Photo by Wilhelm Unger

in joint Bible reading and the sharing of insights as a means to discern the will of God. How to follow Christ – as most clearly expressed in the Sermon of the Mount – became the primary concern.

Claiming this freedom of conscience and of faith obviously posed a threat to the existing powers of church and state. Many of the first- and second-generation Anabaptists paid with their lives.

A history of discord and schism

All of this is part of our common story as Anabaptists. It shapes our identity as individuals and as congregations in different contexts, as well as our way of being church together.

Yet even as the early Anabaptist movement knit together individuals and groups with varied yet complimentary ideas about how to practice Christian faith, disagreement occurred. Our story is also marked by discord and schism – difficult parts of our story to which we still need to relate. In retrospect, we might observe that such discord is quite contradictory to the faith claims made by our early brothers and sisters.

For example, disputes about the appropriate amount of water to be used for baptism or the kind of music to be played in the worship service became reason enough to go separate ways and to condemn each other. Patriarchal behavior, the misuse of uncontrolled power and the victimization of individuals and the stigmatization of whole groups as “heretics” are all as much part of our story as they are for other churches.

The inability to live up to the precious theological insights of the earliest Anabaptists can be quite disillusioning. While we continue to claim, as did our founders, that the congregational model with believers’ baptism at the centre provides the highest possible degree of diversity within church – since it puts so much trust and respect in the individual – it seems that we have continuously failed to prove its legitimacy and practicability.

Diversity in contemporary Anabaptism

Yet another identity marker of all churches of the Reformation is our common conviction that the church is *semper reformanda*, always to be reformed. We claim the liberty and the responsibility to renew the church in every generation, if that seems necessary and appropriate to new insights.

Today, we find ourselves in the global community of Anabaptist-related churches, the Mennonite World Conference. It is here that we have learned to respect and value diversity. Different cultural expressions, manifold ethnic identities, contextual biblical readings and theologies and differing authentic ways of celebrating God’s love all constitute the richness of that community. We have learned to receive this diversity as a gift from God, since we understand now more than ever that diversity and unity are not contradictory but complementary dimensions of that one creative movement of God. MWC is first of all that space wherein we give thanks and enjoy that richness together.

However, there is a risk that this celebration of diversity can become quite superficial if we take a tourist-like approach – a “cheap unity.” As long as the diversity in the global family does not challenge the powers in the local church, it will be quite easy to accept all kinds of opinions.

Are we ready to allow others within the global family to challenge our traditional way of believing? Are we ready to really tolerate (i.e., to bear with) the other? Would we really change a certain opinion or behavior, if the other feels offended by it?

I envision MWC also as a space wherein we discern together the limits of our diversity, a space in which we hold each

other accountable. That work might at times be difficult, frustrating, even painful. Still, if we are not ready for that challenge, we will miss the key to a true community of faith in Christ: a “costly unity.”

Practicing diversity

Of course, such sentiments – though profound – must also be practical. How do we navigate the complexities of diversity today? In other words, what does it look like to practice this process of mutual

“The worshipping community remains to be the ultimate space for mutual accountability. Mennonite World Conference has the potential to grow into such a community.”

discernment about the limits of our diversity? How do we hold one another accountable?

To answer such questions, it might be helpful to state two interrelated questions.

What are the unity-threatening issues?

How do we determine those issues on which we must stand united? For the prophets of the Old Testament, the limit of diversity was reached when a conviction or behavior led to blasphemy. Whenever someone questioned the uniqueness and unity of the One God – the God who liberated the people of Israel from bondage and slavery – the prophets called for a clear and unambiguous confession. The same is true for the New Testament accounts: whenever the Lordship of Christ was questioned, tolerance no longer seemed to be an option.

In theological terms, this approach is called *status confessionis*, a situation when the confession to Christ itself is endangered. This was the case when the German Christians of the early twentieth century gave into the absolute authority claim of the Nazi regime, even in church affairs. In opposition, the emerging Confessing Church issued the Theological Declaration of Barmen (1934), in which they condemned the German Christians’ acquiescence to Nazi ideology and confessed the inalienable lordship of Christ as the sole head of the church.

How do we deal with these unity-threatening issues?

Today, Mennonites are well known and respected as one of the historic peace churches. In facing challenges of diversity within the church, this nonviolent approach to conflict resolution has been a leading principle from the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement. Yet we certainly cannot claim to be experts in mediation when it comes to internal conflicts. Still, I want to believe in the wisdom and potential of that identity marker. If we hold on to that key conviction that Jesus called all his disciples to be peacemakers and to seek first for the righteousness of the kingdom, then this characteristic of being a church of just peace has to inform our methodology of going about our own differences.

Primary questions to be asked in a conflict would then be:

- Is the topic at stake really a question of *status confessionis*, or can we tolerate (bear with) the fact that the other also claims to be in line with what Scripture tells them?
- What is the perspective of the most vulnerable or discriminated ones in this matter?
- Are we victimizing anyone in the conflict and, if so, how can we cease such victimization?
- Are we inappropriately presenting ourselves as victims in this conflict and, if so, how can we take a more appropriate route?
- Are we paying respect to the fact that everyone involved is and remains indestructibly created in the image of God, even if our opinions or behaviors differ?

I want to believe that the church of just peace implies a profoundly humble approach: always to differentiate the absolute truth, which is only in God, from all our approximations to that truth. If we add that humbleness to our ambitious way of being a church of just peace, not only can the credibility of our peace witness grow, but we will also discover anew Christ’s ability to tolerate (bear) our diversities.

The worshipping community, gathered in God’s name, remains to be the ultimate space for mutual accountability. MWC has the potential to grow into such a community.



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Pennsylvania 2015 at a glance

Registration opens on August 20, 2014

Assembly Scattered

before and after Assembly Gathered various locations in North America

Global Youth Summit

17-19 July 2015

Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, PA

Theme: Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts

Assembly Gathered

21-26 July 2015

Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA

Theme: Walking with God



Photos by Merle Good

Program Highlights

In the morning, an international choir will lead singing and small groups will gather for conversation around the morning's themes and prayer.

In the afternoon, participants will choose between workshops, service projects, historical and cultural tours, outings for hiking and shopping, or sports—even a Mennonite World Cup! The Global Church Village will be open every afternoon, featuring church and cultural exhibits, global music, and art exhibits.

Evening worship will include singing, speakers, prayer, and time to listen, share gifts, and encourage one another.

Children & Youth

After morning singing, children ages 4-11 will enjoy a multicultural program and lunch, rejoining adults for dinner and evening worship. Youth age 12-17 will have their own morning program after singing as well as late night events for youth staying at Messiah College.

Registration

Registration: US \$75-465 plus meal plans and transportation (discounts for volunteers and families)

Lodging: US \$25-159/night

Visas

If you need a visa to enter the United States, *please register early*. To get a visa, you will need a letter of support from your home congregation and you will receive additional instructions from MWC about the visa process.

Travel

The closest and recommended airport is Harrisburg International Airport (MDT) but shuttle buses will run from Philadelphia (PHL) and Baltimore Washington (BWI) to Harrisburg at major arrival times. An excellent train system connects Harrisburg to Philadelphia and New York City.

Tours

On July 20, one-day tours will be offered to New York City, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and several Anabaptist communities.

Global Youth Summit

The GYS theme is "Called to Share: My Gifts, Our Gifts." Worship services, workshops, sports and more will add to the fun!

Registration fees: US \$265 (global North) and US \$57 (global South), including housing and food.

Assembly Scattered

Assembly Scattered will take place before and after Assembly Gathered. Visit local congregations in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Miami, Alaska, and more. Participants are responsible for arranging their own travel and will pay costs for food and lodging.

Want more information?



www.mwc-cmm.org/

Have questions? Contact us!

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Pennsylvania
2015

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Mennonite World Conference
 A Community of Anabaptist related Churches

Congreso Mundial Menonita
 Una Comunidad de Iglesias Anabautistas

Conférence Mennonite Mondiale
 Une Communauté d'Églises Anabaptistes

News Briefs



In Bogotá, Colombia, church members march for the right to claim conscientious objector status in the midst of their nation's mandatory military service requirement. Photo by *Justapaz*

Colombian peace group lends support to South Korean conscientious objector

Bogotá, Colombia – For Jenny Neme, director of Colombian Mennonite organization *Justapaz* (Just Peace), recent support for South Korean conscientious objector Sang-Min Lee was a natural occurrence. It sprung, she said, out of an attempt to “seek solidarity and mutual support, based in the prophetic role of the churches to engage in political advocacy in the spaces where we met . . . to encourage churches to seek the possibility of political advocacy in many different situations.”

Justapaz has worked with themes of conscientious objection (CO) for almost 25 years, encouraging and supporting young men from around the country that choose to object to Colombia's obligatory military service because of their faith. *Justapaz* also advocates for

the inclusion of the CO right in Colombia's legal system. The organization uses workshops, theological training and alliance building to promote nonviolent peacebuilding as an alternative to military service.

It wasn't until the March 2014 meeting of the Mennonite World Conference Peace Commission in Holland, however, that Neme first heard about the case of Sang-Min Lee, a 27-year-old member of the Grace and Peace Mennonite Church in Seoul, South Korea. Lee is the first Mennonite in South Korea to declare himself a CO, and is currently serving a jail sentence of 18 months. Over 92 percent of the imprisoned COs worldwide are in South Korea.

Since hearing Lee's story, Neme and *Justapaz* have shared this CO's testimony with Colombian Mennonites. Many individuals and churches have committed to sending him letters of encouragement and prayer. According to Neme, part of this response comes from shared experiences. “This is something that can happen

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Pennsylvania 2015 Assembly Update

Kick-off celebrations held a year before 2015 Assembly

Harrisburg and Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, USA – Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in eastern Pennsylvania enthusiastically welcomed Mennonite World Conference leaders on Sunday, 20 July at two kick-off celebrations, exactly one year in advance of the opening of the 21-26 July 2015 MWC Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015.

One event was held in the morning at Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church. The afternoon event took place at Mt. Joy Mennonite Church.

César García, MWC general secretary, introduced the Assembly theme, “Walking with God.” He pointed out that the theme is drawn from the road to Emmaus story, in which the disciples seem to be in a contentious discussion, but they still walk side by side. “Only when they were seated at

the table, communing together, did they discover who Jesus was. When we are together in communion, we see with different eyes. And we discover Jesus in a new way.”

Songwriters Frances Crowhill Miller and Daryl Snider, along with song leader Marcy Hostetler, led the afternoon audience of some 300 in rousing international singing.

Vikal P. Rao of India, a member of the Assembly program committee, gave the audience a glimpse of the Global Church Village. The Village will be a performance area within the Farm Show Complex in Harrisburg, where Pennsylvania 2015 will be held. Joanne Dietzel, a member of Mennonite Church USA, one of the hosting groups, introduced the Prayer Network.

A few days earlier, MWC opened an office in Lancaster County, at the Mennonite Central Committee U.S. headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania.

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MWC leaders participate in an event to mark one year until the next Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015. Left to right: César García, MWC general secretary; Liesa Unger, international events coordinator; and Vikal P. Rao, member of the Assembly 2015 planning committee. Photo by Merle Good

Continued from page i

to us in Colombia as well, that one of our young men could be imprisoned,” she noted. “As well, we are witnesses that when we have needed urgent responses from our brothers and sisters, it has worked.”

As a result of conversations in Holland and the response to Lee’s situation, Justapaz is working with organizations in the USA, Germany and South Korea on a series of workshops on conscientious objection for the MWC Assembly, to be held in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA in July 2015. The workshops will include historical and theological perspectives, as well as a modern-day look at the realities of conscientious objection, with the goal of further worldwide solidarity surrounding an issue with daily impacts for Anabaptists worldwide.

For Neme, conscientious objection “represents a challenge for the [Anabaptist community] worldwide, to return to value the theme – a theme that is very important for our faith tradition.”

– Anna Vogt, *Justapaz*

North American congregation grafts cultures together

Upland, California, USA – Grafting an immigrant congregation onto a deeply rooted Mennonite community is hard work. But Pastor Nehemiah Chigoji – who grew up in Nigeria – believes the merger of two congregations, First Mennonite Upland and *Gereja Kristus Injili* (GKI) Upland, into a new entity, Upland Peace Church, will prove fruitful.

The two congregations, both members of Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA, an MWC member church, had been meeting together for major celebrations for years.

When GKI – a congregation primarily composed of Indonesian immigrants – moved into First Mennonite’s building a few years back, the original plan was to worship in separate rooms. But somehow that didn’t feel right, since they were already in a “courtship,” Chigoji said. So they experimented with a single service with simultaneous interpretation into

Indonesian – and then decided, for the sake of the younger generation, to go English-only.

GKI was “losing their children to American churches because they didn’t want to associate themselves with the Indonesian



Upland Peace Church Pastor Nehemiah Chigoji (center) plays guitar and sings during a worship service. To the right is an anklung, an Indonesian instrument. Photo by Doreen Martens

culture for worship; the experience was not the same for them,” Chigoji recalled. “Coming here, they found this to be a home they can connect to. The kids can remain in the Mennonite church, and the catch will be that the service will be in English.”

In 2013, the congregations agreed to an official merger. With that came the decision to change the church’s name – to ensure everyone felt a sense of belonging. From more than 60 suggestions, they whittled the choice down to Upland Peace Church.

A new constitution and bylaws were finalized in February 2014, marking the birth of a new church.

Upland Peace Church is now a grand melting pot that includes people of Indonesian, Chinese, Mexican, Nigerian, Dutch and Polish heritage.

Chigoji is the sole paid pastor, with GKI leaders Yusak and Rina Kusuma, Mathilda Koeshadi and Slamet Mustangin rounding out the pastoral team.

One tradition the Indonesian group brought to the blend is the habit of eating lunch together after worship, with a rotation of cooks to prepare the food.

Chigoji admits the merger has not come without discomfort and even the loss of a few longtime members.

He’d love to see members of neighbouring churches step up for a few months to help the congregation get on its feet, for instance by bolstering the music ministry. The future path isn’t entirely clear, but reproducing –

for students of the theological training program.

The Evangelical Mennonite Church, a church not officially registered in Vietnam, was meeting 9-11 June 2014 at their church center in Ben Cat town in Binh Duong province, twenty kilometers north of Ho Chi Minh City. Most of the pastors had already arrived for the event.

After all the people had retired for the night on sleeping mats laid out on the floor, police loudspeakers called for the doors to be opened for an “administrative investigation.” A few minutes later, security police broke down the door. Large numbers of uniformed and ununiformed men stormed the building, assaulting students and church leaders. Each of the 76 persons was led by two policemen to waiting trucks to be taken to the local police station where they were all booked.

According to extensive reports by Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang, former president of the church and current head of the church’s training programs, the invading police produced no arrest warrants and gave no reason for the beatings and the arrests. After they hauled the people away, personnel of the various police agencies searched the premises, destroying some property.

Though all church members were eventually released, for several days after the raid gangs continued to attack the building, throwing bricks, stones and rotten eggs.

Religious groups are required to inform local authorities

Continued on page iv

reaching out to the community and forming the faith of the next generation – will be a priority.

– Adapted from a story by Doreen Martens for *Mennonite World Review*

Police attack Mennonite church gathering in Vietnam

Vietnam – Security police assaulted a large group of pastors and theological students gathered in their church center at a provincial town just north of Ho Chi Minh City. The attack occurred on the eve of a renewal conference and graduation ceremonies

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

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

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- Calle 28A No.16-41 Piso 2, Bogotá, Colombia
- 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France



YAMEN! participant Rut Arsari (left) with her host mother, Leticia Stucky. Photo courtesy of Rut Arsari

YAMEN! experience feeds passion for helping children

Bogotá, Colombia – Within days of her arrival in Bogotá on 21 August 2013 for her YAMEN! term, Rut Arsari already knew it would be difficult for her to leave. The wonderful people she would meet and the close relationships she would develop would make it very hard to say goodbye.

In July 2014, Rut, from the congregation *GITJ Kelet*, part of the Mennonite World Conference member church *Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa* in Indonesia, completed her eleven-month term of service in the MWC and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN!) program. She had been serving with the MWC member church *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (Mennonite Church of Colombia).

Each week Rut assisted in three different programs managed by the Teusaquillo Mennonite Church in Bogotá. During the week she assisted at two different food programs for children in the marginalized neighbourhoods of Los Pinos and San Nicolás, which have high numbers of families that have been forcibly displaced by the violence. On Saturdays, Rut worked with a program that provides food for street people in a low-income neighbourhood of Bogotá.

What has impacted Rut most are the relationships she has built with people

through her involvement in these communities and congregations. She attended Teusaquillo Mennonite Church with her host family, Peter and Leticia Stucky. Peter is the head pastor of the congregation. They welcomed Rut like a member of their family, and she felt incredibly blessed to live with them.

Another way the church community greatly impacted her was to see and hear how the members openly share about their faith, struggles and joys. Rut shared that hearing people verbally acknowledge the presence of God in their lives has caused her to be more aware of and to recognize the work of God in her own life in a new way.

For several years Rut has had a passion and a vision for helping children. She dreams of one day opening a home in Indonesia to welcome, care for and love children that do not have family to care for them. For Rut, her assignment in Colombia was the first step of the journey to this dream.

Participating in the YAMEN! program has been and continues to be an incredibly valuable experience for Rut. It has opened her mind to new perspectives, to seeing the world around through the eyes of others, and to a deeper experience with God.

For more, including a complete list of 2013-2014 YAMEN! participants, visit the MWC website at www.mwc-cmm.org

– Kristina Toews. Joint release of MWC and MCC.

“Why are you an Anabaptist?”

Members of the MWC community share their reasons for embracing an Anabaptist identity.

Sandra Campos

Member, MWC Executive Committee
Costa Rica



“I am an Anabaptist because I am following Jesus.”

J. Nelson Kraybill

President-Elect
USA



“I’m an Anabaptist because the Anabaptists think Jesus’ teaching is for us here and now.”

Ayub Omondi

Advisor, Young Anabaptists (YABs)
Kenya



“I am an Anabaptist because of the ‘peace pillar.’”

Tigist Migbar Tesfaye

Member, Young Anabaptists (YABs)
Ethiopia



“I’m an Anabaptist Christian because it is based on Christ and his word.”

Richard Showalter

Chair, Mission Commission
USA



“I am an Anabaptist because those who led me to Jesus and disciplined me were Anabaptists and I am convinced

that Anabaptism is essentially a faithful expression of New Testament Christianity. In short, Peter, Paul and Lydia were ‘Anabaptists’ of the first century.”

Marc Pasqués

Member, Young Anabaptists (YABs)
Spain



“I’m an Anabaptist because it is a Church committed to peacemaking, love and dialogue. And also because it

is a church proud of its history, but that doesn’t close itself with traditions because of its radical nature.”

Iris de León Hartshorn

Member, MWC Executive Committee
USA



“I am an Anabaptist because it reflects my theology: Jesus as our model for life and a strong conviction for peace.”

Janet Plenert

Vice President
Canada



“I’m Anabaptist because I am committed to an upside-down, nonviolent, community-transforming, enemy-

loving, spirit-led, Jesus-following understanding of the gospel!”

Continued from page ii of meetings, and Tran Minh Hoa, current pastor of the congregation that meets at the center, had reported to the local ward the evening before the raid that 29 pastors were coming, and was planning to submit a complete report the following morning of those who had gathered for the conference.

With no resolution at the local level, leaders petitioned higher authorities about the flagrant abuses of their rights under Vietnamese law. They sent a "petition of accusation" signed by 58 church leaders to the Minister of Public Security and to the head of the Peoples'

Investigative Bureau. It details five major charges against local police, including entering without a warrant, arresting and abusing children and using guns to terrorize defenseless students.

The Evangelical Mennonite Church is not an MWC member church. Another Mennonite fellowship in the country, Vietnam Mennonite Church, is a registered church and an MWC member church.

For more on this story, visit the MWC website at mwc-cmm.org

- Adapted from an article by Luke Martin for *Mennonite World Review*

Continued from page i

"We are thankful to MCC that we can have office space to get ready for registration for Assembly, process registrations as they come in, plus continue detailed planning for the week-long event next July," said Liesa Unger of Germany, MWC chief international events officer, who is overseeing the Assembly.

"We are hiring two new staff now, and we will need more as we get closer to the Assembly. I will move to eastern Pennsylvania at the end of April. At that point, many more people will move in and out of the office," she added.

- Phyllis Pellman Good



A design by Liesa Obirek. The design has been printed onto bread cloths that are being sold to raise funds for the upcoming MWC Assembly, Pennsylvania 2015.

and they will be useful as cloths in breadbaskets and as placemats. They're a symbol, too, that within Mennonite World Conference, we all are welcome to sit around the Table," said Giesbrecht on behalf of the group.

Artist Liesa Obirek explains her design (pictured above) as follows: "Micah 4:1-5 welcomes all creatures to the mountain of the Lord. Christians receive this welcome from a Trinitarian God. Hence the three mountains, each with its own particular aspects. . . . The entire piece is in green, the theological color of hope. Mennonite World Conference is, at its best, the church being the church, a gathering of peoples from around the world who become family under the lordship of Jesus. This is indeed a hopeful image."

The young adults have placed an initial order of 300 cloths. They were planning to sell them at the Mennonite Church Canada Assembly in Winnipeg, 3-6 July 2014 and after that, while visiting Mennonite Church Manitoba congregations.

The cloths sell for \$10-\$15 each. All monies raised beyond the cost of the cloths will go to the MWC Assembly and the Global Youth Summit.

For more on these bread cloths and their design, visit the MWC website at mwc-cmm.org

- Phyllis Pellman Good

Prayers



YAMEN! participants for 2014-2015 at their regional orientation in Asia. Photo by Andrea Geiser

- Pray for the young people who finished the 2013-2014 Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network (YAMEN!) program in the middle of July. Pray also for the young people who started the 2014-2015 YAMEN! program in August. We thank God for the voluntary service of these individuals. YAMEN! is a joint program between Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee.

- Continue to pray for Sang-Min Lee, the first Mennonite conscientious objector in South Korea. He is currently serving

an 18-month prison sentence for refusing, on the basis on his faith, to complete his mandatory military service. Pray for peace and joy for Sang-Min. Pray also for the Anabaptist churches in South Korea, which are few, but should come together with a unified voice on peace issues.

- Pray for the Mennonites of Vietnam and their international partners as they determine how to respond to recent attacks on members of the unregistered Mennonite Church of Vietnam. In June, security police assaulted a large group of pastors and theological students gathered in their church centre at a provincial town just north of Ho Chi Minh City. International persons acquainted with the Mennonite churches in Vietnam are considering an appropriate response to express solidarity with their brothers and sisters there.

Young adults offer imaginative support to MWC Assembly

Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada – A group of young adults in Manitoba are producing "bread cloths" and then selling them to raise both money and awareness for the July 2015 Mennonite World Conference Assembly and Global Youth Summit.

"Since we are the host continent for this upcoming Assembly, and for the Global Youth Summit which immediately precedes it, we wanted to put something physical into people's hands and homes so that MWC would be on their radar and in their prayers," explained Kathy Giesbrecht, who works in Leadership Ministries for Mennonite Church Manitoba.

Brainstorming together, the young adult working group decided to invite three artists from Manitoba – Liesa Obirek, Nicole Leax and Kayla Hiebert – to each create a design that will be heat-pressed into the fabric and then reproduced.

"We asked each artist to come up with a design inspired by the MWC Assembly theme, 'Walking with God.' These cloths will be tangible reminders of this upcoming global event,

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The witness of unity

Standing together to transform our communities



by Janet Plenert

In July 2015, Anabaptists from around the world will gather in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA, for the 16th Assembly of Mennonite World Conference. For four days, these pilgrims from diverse communities across the globe will worship together, fellowship together, pray together and play together. The result will be what MWC general secretary César García has called “a foretaste of heaven” – a preview of the promise in Revelation that “a great multitude . . . from every nation, tribe, people and language” will gather before God’s throne in worship and celebration (7:9-10).

For that very reason, I’m anxiously anticipating Pennsylvania 2015. I cannot wait for the chance to join with these Anabaptist pilgrims. I cannot wait to stand united, as one body, unencumbered by divisions. I look forward to our coming together – not just as Mennonites or Mennonite Brethren or Brethren in Christ, not just as Zambians or Colombians or Indonesians, but as brothers and sisters in Christ – servants of the One True God!

The reality of disunity

And yet while Assembly gives us a foretaste of heaven, we live day to day in the reality that our communities here on earth are all too often not places of peace – neither united nor unencumbered by divisions. As I write:

- Sang-Min Lee, a young Mennonite in South Korea, sits in jail where he will spend 18 months because of his refusal to serve his term in the military;
- A mother in Vietnam comforts her child who suffers from cancer – the lingering result of the U.S. military’s use of the “Agent Orange” chemical weapon during the Vietnam War;
- Aboriginal people in Canada weep as they tell their stories of physical and sexual abuse in church-run residential schools during the 100 years that Canadian law forcibly tried to eradicate their traditional culture and language;
- Women in many countries, desperate to support their families, are caught in human trafficking and the sex industry;
- Syrian refugees wait, and wonder, as war and terror define their future.

Members of the MWC Executive and Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committees represent a variety of cultures, theologies and national backgrounds, yet are united in their shared faith commitments. Photo by Merle Good

We live in a harsh and often painful world.

Yet we also live in a world where hope exists, and where tiny lights of justice shine brightly. It was a Colombian Mennonite, speaking at a Colombian ecumenical peace summit in San Andres, who said “the church is the only institution in the world that exists in every *rincon* (corner) of the country.” Because that is true, there is hope!

The hope of unity

The fact of standing together in unified worship and witness is significant as we think about the relevance of our faith in the world today. In 1 Corinthians 1:10-25, Paul was speaking into a context where divisions existed within the church, where people were not coming together as one body. People within the church were appealing either to Paul’s teaching or to Apollos’ teaching, or that of Cephas. They were using the distinctions they had learned from their spiritual teachers as a means of quarrelling and division. They were focused on being right, on promoting and validating the authority of their pastor (or their church)

rather than on the meaning of the cross for the city and world around them. And word of these arguments was spreading.

Paul writes to the Corinthians and he pleads with them in the name of Jesus Christ to “say the same thing,” to be in agreement, to have the same judgment. Why? Why can’t they focus on their differences as Paul’s followers and Apollos’ followers, as Mennonite Brethren and Brethren in Christ, as Congolese and Canadians? After all, they are all following Jesus! Because, Paul says in verse 17, Christ sent us to proclaim the gospel, not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. Paul calls the church, which is already experiencing divisions, to heal itself – to restore itself to completeness and wholeness. The witness of the cross seems to depend on it. The proclaiming of the gospel seems to depend on it. The transformation of the world seems to depend on it.

The proclaiming of the gospel may seem foolish to the world. It is not a message of worldly power. It is not a message of achieving peace or freedom through the use of military might. It is not a message of wealth and power leading to order and control. It is a message of death bringing life. It is a message of the fools shaming the wise, the weak shaming the strong, the lowly and the marginalized bringing down the respected, the Jews and the Gentiles together being saved. It is a message of the marginalized being brought into citizenship.

United by the cross

Ultimately, the gospel is a message that requires those who believe to stand together – in spite of their differences – and to have the “same judgment,” to not be quarreling and in public disagreement. To be divided weakens the proclaiming of the gospel and empties the cross of its power.

I am reminded of a poster that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) produced a number of years ago. It was very simple. It said, “Let the Christians of the world agree to not kill each other.” For hundreds of years, wars have been fought where people calling themselves Christians fought against one another, and killed one another. Political divisions and allegiances were stronger than spiritual ones, and brothers in the faith killed one another. What kind of witness is that in the world? Where is the

power of the cross? There is no redemptive or salvific power of a cross that is carried for the purpose of conquering the world. This is what Paul wanted to avoid – a cross emptied of power. Where would the world be today if Christians had always refused to kill each other? Where would the world be today if Christians had always refused to kill anyone?

For this reason, it is all the more important that MWC exists as a cohesive, unifying presence of our people around the world.

“ Ultimately, the gospel is a message that requires those who believe to stand together – in spite of their differences. To be divided weakens the proclaiming of the gospel and empties the cross of its power.”

Practicing unity in diversity

As we think about Paul’s encouragement to heal and to be in agreement, we need to remember that to heal divisions, we need to understand one another, and thus we need to face one another. While this may be obvious, it is often the case that those who hear of diverse and disagreeable opinions in one part of the church, turn their backs. Instead of going for coffee or drinking mate together, we more often chose to not talk to the other. When a church in one part of the country disagrees with a church in another part of the country, it is easy to just ignore it, because we are busy enough with our own agenda. And the disagreement grows to division. At the very least, and as a starting point, we must look one another in the face if we are to understand each other and begin to heal divisions.

We must also be committed to one another. Like ties that bind a family together, the church must also be bound together with an unwavering commitment to one another. Strong opinions can be – respectfully – expressed. Debates can happen. Questions and concerns can be appropriately raised. But at the root of all of this, commitment to the common witness – the foolishness of the cross – must be our focus. The witness of the

gospel is weakened – and, I believe, the cross is emptied of its power – if we are not committed to one another. This is essential to being a community of God’s people. And it requires patience with one another, longsuffering, hope and gentleness.

If we as a global community of Anabaptist followers of Jesus can heal any differences among us, if we can come together in worship and witness, then we will be an example in the world of the power of the cross, no matter how foolish it appears. If we can stand united as Anabaptist followers of Jesus, then we can begin to more actively participate in the healing of the larger divisions in the Christian church. And I believe the more we can stand together and say the same thing, the brighter the light of the gospel will shine into our world.

What if all the Koreans in both Koreas stood together in refusing to take up military might? What if the Americans Christians had refused to kill and use chemicals in Vietnam? What if Canadian churches would stand united, and give the same message about reconciling with our Aboriginal brothers and sisters? What if all the Christian homes and church buildings in Latin America were peace sanctuaries where everyone was treated with dignity and respect? What if Christians searching for land 500 years ago had refused to steal land rape the earth of its resources? What if?

These questions sound ridiculous – foolish – in today’s complex world. Yet we have been called to proclaim the gospel of Christ crucified – a foolish proclamation. God chose what is foolish to shame the wise, to bring healing and salvation and justice. God chose things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships, so that we may never be tempted to empty the cross of its power.

May God bless us with anger at divisions, injustice and oppression, so that we may be midwives of unity, justice and peace.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that together we can make a difference in this world, transforming it into a world which is ruled by the power of the cross: justice, mercy and the love of God.



Janet Plenert (Canada) is vice president of Mennonite World Conference. This article is adapted from a sermon she delivered at the Joint Anabaptist Worship Service, held in Bogotá, Colombia on 18 May 2014.

United in fellowship

as participants in the Kingdom of God

Preparing for World Fellowship Sunday 2015

What in the world is the Kingdom of God? That's the question being posed to Mennonite World Conference member churches as they prepare to observe World Fellowship Sunday (WFS) in 2015.

Each year, MWC encourages Anabaptist communities around the world to participate in WFS – a global observance marking the anniversary of the first Anabaptist baptisms in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525. WFS provides an opportunity to remember our common roots and celebrate our worldwide *koinonia* (communion).

In 2015, WFS will be held on 18 January. (The observance is always held on the Sunday nearest 21 January, the date on which the first Anabaptist baptisms occurred.) To facilitate this global celebration, MWC provides worship resources and focuses on one of its continental regions. This year, the worship resources focus on the theme “What in the world is the Kingdom of God?” The regional focus is North America.

This regional focus is entirely appropriate, given that the North American Anabaptist community will host MWC's next assembly, Pennsylvania 2015, from 21-26 July 2015, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA. There are nine MWC member churches in North America: Brethren in Christ (Canada and USA), Mennonite Brethren (Canada and USA), Mennonite Church (Canada and USA), Evangelical Mennonite Conference (Canada), Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (Canada and USA) and the Conservative Mennonite Conference (USA). All together, these member churches have about 223,000 baptized members.



In the Anabaptist tradition, the towel and basin are symbols illustrating virtues like servanthood, humility and equality – all qualities central to the Kingdom of God. Photo by Kristina Toews

The worship resources theme – “What in the world is the Kingdom of God?” – is also appropriate. While we are a global fellowship enriched by the diversity of our varied cultural, economic and political contexts, we are also a united family – called by Christ to live according to the values of this Kingdom of God, regardless of the country, language, culture or tribe from which we come. Through prayers, sermon ideas, suggestions for symbolic activities and reflections on biblical texts (Matthew 6:9-13, Matthew 6:28-34), the 2015 WFS worship resources help us to embrace and embody Kingdom ethics in the here and now.

These worship resources are now available on the MWC website (www.mwc-cmm.org). They have also been distributed to the presiding officers of MWC member and associate member churches for circulation among local congregations.

As part of their WFS observation, congregations are encouraged to take a special offering for the global Anabaptist church movement. One way to think about this offering is to invite every member of the congregation to contribute the cost of at least one lunch in their own community.

This gift of “one lunch” per person once a year is something that all MWC members can do. Some people have resources to give much more than this, and should be encouraged to do so. Others with more scarce resources might be encouraged to hear that the Executive Committee of

the Mennonite World Conference, with members from every continent, is confident that most adults all around the world can give the equivalent of one lunch per year for the work of the global church. These donations help to support the networks and resources of our global Anabaptist church family.

According to César García, MWC general secretary, “WFS is our opportunity to remind our people that we belong to each other as sisters and brothers in God's household. . . . We are here to support each other, to uphold those who are suffering and being persecuted, and to learn from each other. Those things happen throughout the year, but too often they are not very visible.” In 2015, join with other MWC member churches around the world in making our *koinonia* (communion) visible by celebrating World Fellowship Sunday.

Canada

Pilgrims, strangers, disciples



by Royden Loewen

Like the Mennonites (and other Anabaptists) of every country around the world, Canadian Mennonites are rooted in their nation and affected by its history. In global terms Canada is a very large country, spreading 7,000 kilometers from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic. It is also one of the wealthiest nations in the world, with a strong public education and health support system. It is mostly English speaking, with a strong historical link to Great Britain, although it has a strong French-speaking section in Quebec. As a historic settler

society – with farmer immigrants especially in Ontario and in western Canada – it also has a long history of encountering Aboriginal peoples, sometimes violently.

Given its bilingual base, Canada has historically tolerated minority cultures and, especially in the last third of the twentieth century, welcomed large numbers of immigrant newcomers from the Global South. Today, only two thirds of Canada's 35 million people still identify as Christian (almost twice as many Catholics as Protestants). Eight million Canadians claim no religion at all; about a million identify as Muslim; another million with India-based faiths (as Hindus and Sikhs); and 300,000 each as Buddhists and Jews.

The Mennonites – who are variously counted as between 127,000 (members

A Brethren in Christ baptism near Houghton, Ontario, in 1903. The Brethren in Christ are one of many Anabaptist groups that call Canada home. Courtesy of Brethren in Christ Historical Library and Archives

of Mennonite churches in 2010) and 175,000 (self-identifying in Canada's 2011 census) – constitute a small minority within Canada. They are also a very diverse group, with more than 20 denominations using the name "Mennonite."

The Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren

The largest two of these groups are the Mennonite Brethren (MB) and Mennonite Church (MC), with approximately 38,000

and 32,000 members respectively. These two are also among the most urbanized of Canadian Mennonites, noted in particular for attracting large groups of non-Mennonite Canadians, as well as Chinese and Hispanic Latin American immigrants.

The history of the MB congregations stems from 1860 in Russia, when they broke from the mainline Mennonites, emphasizing a personal faith and distinguished by immersion baptism. The first MB congregation in Canada was established in 1888 as a mission outpost, but a Canadian MB conference remained small until 1923 when immigrants fleeing Communism in the Soviet Union began arriving in Canada.

The history of the MC congregations is more complex, and consists of the 1999 amalgamation of two denominations popularly referred to as the “General Conference” (GC) and “(Old) Mennonite” (OM) denominations. The OMs formed after the arrival of Mennonites in Upper Canada (later Ontario) from Pennsylvania, first in 1786 but in much larger numbers after 1800.

Although the start of the North American GC in 1860 included an Ontario congregation, a permanent GC presence in Canada began with the founding of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1903, and was further boosted with the immigration of Mennonites from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1940s. Given their diversity, the MC congregations emphasize unity and fellowship within diversity, as well as social justice programs, especially linked to Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).



Ministers and leaders attending a 1917 gathering of Mennonite Brethren in Christ in Kitchener, Ontario. Today, after several mergers and name changes, this group is known as the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada. Courtesy of Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Other Anabaptist-Mennonite groups in Canada

Several medium-sized denominations, with between 4,000 and 6,000 members, emphasize an amalgam of Anabaptism and evangelical Protestantism. The Brethren in Christ Church stems from the late eighteenth-century migrations of Swiss-South German Mennonites from the United States to Upper Canada. The Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) and Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) are both descendant groups of the Dutch-Russian migration of the 1870s, and both shaped by mid-twentieth-century evangelicalism. These groups are noted for both their overseas missions and their support for MCC.

Perhaps surprisingly, 17 Mennonite denominations in Canada – constituting more than 30,000 members – represent “plain” or “old order” groups. These groups rarely seek membership with Mennonite World Conference. They are typically distinguished by simple living, non-conformity and social separation, most apparent in plain clothing, including head coverings for women and long-sleeved, button-up shirts for men. About 20 percent of the most traditionalist of these “plain” people consist of so-called “Horse and Buggy” Mennonites.

Canada is also home to two evangelical conferences (formerly Mennonite Brethren in Christ and Evangelical Mennonite Brethren, now Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada and Fellowship of Evangelical Bible Churches respectively) that have dropped the name Mennonite. Canada also serves as a home for near-Mennonite groups such as the Hutterites and a small number of Amish.

Mennonite institutions in Canada

As for Mennonites elsewhere, the Canadian community is strengthened by a wide range of institutions. In fact, it is quite possible to live in largely Mennonite contexts – especially in rural areas and in cities such as Kitchener-Waterloo (Ontario), Winnipeg (Manitoba), Saskatoon (Saskatchewan) and Abbotsford (British Columbia). Many Mennonite children attend private elementary or high schools. Youth find religious and general university education in numerous Anabaptist-Mennonite post-secondary institutions, most notably Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford



Leaders of Hmong Mennonite Church (Kitchener, Ontario) in 1991, from left to right: Ge Yang, Toua Jang, Lee Xong, Tou Vang. Increased ethnic diversity has been one of several recent developments in the history of Canadian Anabaptists. Photo by Larry Boshart/Courtesy of Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Anabaptists in Canada

A snapshot of Mennonite World Conference member churches

Brethren in Christ (BIC) Canada

Membership	4,080
Congregations	53
Headquarters	Oakville, Ontario
Presiding Officer	Doug Sider

Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches

Membership	37,665
Congregations	260
Headquarters	Winnipeg, Manitoba
Presiding Officer	Paul Loewen

Evangelical Mennonite Conference (Canada)

Membership	6,473
Congregations	62
Headquarters	Steinbach, Manitoba
Presiding Officer	Richard Klassen

Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church

Membership	4,387 (Canada) / 425 (USA)
Congregations	22 (Canada) / 4 (USA)
Headquarters	Winnipeg, Manitoba

Mennonite Church Canada

Membership	32,000
Congregations	227
Headquarters	Winnipeg, Manitoba
Presiding Officer	Hilda Hildebrandt

Source: MWC World Map
www.mwc-cmm.org/maps/world
Accessed August 2014

and Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo. Young families can readily obtain loans from a dozen credit unions with significant Mennonite roots: the largest, with four billion dollars in assets, is the Steinbach Credit Union in Manitoba. Fire insurance is offered by several Mennonite-run companies; Mennonite Aid Union, in operation from 1866 to 2002, has been the most historical. Mennonites have even relied on tour packages, such as the Mennonite Heritage Cruise in past years, to organize their vacations, although “Mennoniting your way” has also been popular.

In several cities, Mennonites can seek genealogical grounding at Mennonite archives or remember old times in one of several museums. Wills and bequests are often made through Mennonite Foundation of Canada. In addition, the elderly can find “Mennonite” seniors homes in numerous communities; in Abbotsford, Menno Terrace East, for example, consists of 95 suites on six floors, complete with a wellness center. Several communities feature funeral co-operative or private funeral homes owned by Mennonites.

Mennonites in Canada have increasingly focused on national institutions to support their mission. Ironically, as Canadian Mennonites have become more open to a wider world, they have also become more nation-centric, decoupling themselves from North American institutions. In 1963, for example, MCC Canada was established, distinct from MCC headquarters in Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, thus more able to provide a “unified voice for Canadian Mennonites.” In 1967, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was organized to cultivate a unified historical identity, especially with the three-volume *Mennonites in Canada* history series begun by Frank H. Epp. The 1999 continental amalgamation of the OM and GC bodies to form a unified Mennonite Church denomination carried within its very founding a new division, one along the Canada-USA border, thus birthing MC Canada alongside its United States counterpart. Similar developments describe the MB, EMC, Brethren in Christ and other conferences.

The creation of MCC Canada also allowed for the development of a surprisingly close relationship with provincial and federal governments. In 1975, for example, MCC Canada opened an advocacy office in Ottawa, seeking not only privileges from government but also an opportunity to shape public policy. Indeed, Canadian Mennonites became known for their openness to working with government

agencies. The Canadian Foodgrains Bank, founded by MCC, took off in part because of matching funds from the federal government. Then, too, in Canada, an increasing number of Mennonite men and women served in the federal parliament and provincial legislatures.

Themes in Canadian Mennonitism

Over time a number of themes have come to characterize Canadian Mennonite identity. For instance, Canadian Mennonites have created links with Mennonites in other parts of the globe to build a strong global community. They have embraced binational organizations, such as MCC after 1920, Mennonite Disaster Service after 1951 and Mennonite Economic Development Associates after 1952. Historically, MB and MC churches have had close ties to North American overseas missions, especially directed to places in Congo, India and Central America.

Canadian missionaries of particular note include Susanna Plett, who inspired a generation of EMC missionaries when she left for Brazil without church support in 1942. Jacob Loewen of Abbotsford is perhaps the most recognized globally, an MB missiologist noted for ideas of critical self-analysis and indigenous leadership. Christian Peacemaker Teams have transformed the way Canadian Mennonite youth have considered issues of pacifism and nonviolence. Canadian churches have been strong supporters of Mennonite World Conference.



As part of the work of Mennonite Central Committee's relief program, which provided food and material aid for disaster-stricken areas, Alice Snyder labels Christmas bundles for international distribution in 1954. Photo by David Hunsberger/Courtesy of Mennonite Archives of Ontario

Canadian Mennonites also have learned to express themselves in new ways. Historically they have been singers, with Benjamin Eby producing the first Canadian hymnal in the 1830s and musicians such as Ben Horch of Winnipeg raising music to the level of community choirs and orchestras. They have also been writers, and their ranks include a number of nationally acclaimed authors; Rudy Wiebe's 1962 *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is still heralded as a pioneering work. Then, too, "Mennonite" films have become popular: for example, *And When They Shall Ask*, recounting suffering in the Soviet Union, has attracted thousands of viewers. Finally, numerous web-based resources have arisen, including the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopaedia Online (GAMEO), begun as a project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Canadian Mennonite history has been the story of migration. Seven specific stories of migration are key. The first three recount arrivals in the 1800s, with each group aiming to build exclusive frontier farm communities, all under the protection of the British monarch. These groups included Swiss-American Mennonites arriving in Upper Canada within a generation of the American Revolutionary War; Amish newcomers from Europe in the 1820s; and 8,000 Mennonites of Dutch descent arriving in Manitoba in the 1870s after Russia changed its military exemption laws.

The next two groups came in the twentieth century from war-torn Ukraine and Russia: 20,000 in the 1920s to take advantage of Canada's relative openness to immigrants, and 8,000 mostly women-headed households after 1948.

The sixth and seventh groups are newcomers from the Global South. Many are Low German-speaking Latin Americans, the descendants of Mennonites who left Canada in the 1920s to avoid English assimilation. Most significant for changing old images of Euro-Canadian Mennonites are newcomers from the Global South who joined Mennonite churches upon arrival in Canada: they include Chin (Burmese), Chinese, Hmong, Korean, Hmong (Loatian), Punjabi (Indian and Pakistani), Spanish (Latin American) and Vietnamese newcomers, among others. Oftentimes



At The Meeting House – a multi-site Brethren in Christ congregation headquartered in Oakville, Ontario – teaching pastor Bruxy Cavey (back to camera) preaches live on a Sunday morning. His sermons are then broadcast to satellite church sites throughout Southern Ontario. Courtesy of The Meeting House

these newcomers are refugees from civil war or poverty.

Recent developments

In recent decades Canadian Mennonites have also become open to new forms of worship and church life. Although Janet Douglas Hall was much ahead of her time when she pastored a Mennonite Brethren in Christ church in Dornoch, Ontario, in 1886, she was a forerunner to women who have increasingly served as senior pastors, first in MC churches in the 1970s, and more recently in MB, EMC and Brethren in Christ congregations.

Some churches have embraced informal leadership, including multi-site house churches such as Pembina Fellowship in Morden, Manitoba, or those without a paid pastor, such as Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg. The Meeting House, a large Brethren in Christ congregation at Oakville, Ontario, is a "church for people who aren't into church" and meets in movie theatres located in multiple locations that are linked by video connections.

Other congregations, such as the Toronto United Mennonite Church, part of the MC denomination, are noted for "welcoming" members of the LGBT community.

Church planting has also been part of the recent story. The MB denomination in particular has experimented with different forms of robust church planting, notably establishing the *Églises des frères Mennonites* in Quebec. In past decades the GCs in Manitoba sought to reach out to

and worship with Aboriginal communities, increasingly in ways that embraced the idea of Creator God.

Finally, many churches have dropped traditional hymnody for more upbeat choruses, aided with PowerPoint projection and live bands. Numerous churches, such as Bakerview MB Church in Abbotsford, however, have at the same time introduced liturgical services, reflecting a growing attraction among Mennonite youth for high-church traditions.



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A New Pattern of Leadership



“Colombian people do not fight for money. You fight for power.” These were the words of a North American missionary after several decades of ministry in Colombia. She was speaking about the ongoing reality of broken relationships among church leaders because of conflicts.

After 22 years of ministry in Colombia I must recognize that this is a sad reality in our churches. During this time I have witnessed too many unhealthy conflicts erupt in our congregations; I have also witnessed too many broken relationships, and seen too many hurt people leave as a result .

However, during the short time that I have served in Mennonite World Conference, I have found that issues of abuse of power and unhealthy conflicts among leaders are not only a Colombian reality. As a matter of fact, I have been discovering that these seem to be transcultural issues that are present in all peoples and nations, and a trans-Anabaptist gene that has affected all our churches. In spite of cultural and theological differences, issues of abuse of power and conflict among leaders have been with us since the time of Cain and Abel.

What are some of the characteristics that I have observed in church leaders around the world that are involved in unhealthy conflicts and abuse of power? I can mention the following so far:

Personal needs that have been not resolved. There are emotional weaknesses that are very evident when leaders face conflicts. For example, some leaders seem to be thirsty for recognition. They expect to receive a special treatment or an expression of gratitude for their service. When this does not happen, they may react aggressively toward others, or spiral downward into passivity and self-pity. How different would our churches be if we learn to pray as Mother Theresa did: “Lord, grant that I may seek rather to love than to be loved.”

Another example has to do with leaders that have learned to fulfill their sense of emptiness with the privileges that some ecclesial positions bring. To lose those privileges is something that these leaders do not want to do. It does not matter if people get hurt. For them to satisfy their emotional needs is more important that the people that they were called to give their lives for.

Extreme perfectionism. It is evident when leaders are not ready to recognize their mistakes or to ask for forgiveness when they have hurt others. To be vulnerable is something that is not easy for some people in positions of leadership. For some reason these leaders think that if they open their hearts and recognize their mistakes they will lose authority. This may be the influence of secular ideas about leadership. The idea of a strong, lonely leader that does not express his/her feelings is supported by cultural understandings that do not accept the idea of leadership as service, which in Christian terms is done from our wounds and vulnerability and not from a position of power.

Enforcing uniformity. A natural outcome for leaders that abuse their power is the attempt of suppress diversity. These kind of leaders do not tolerate those who think differently than they do. Theological differences or diversity in leadership style are criticized and labeled as sinfulness by people that exercise their leadership in an authoritarian way. Because diversity is perceived as a threat, these leaders demand the use of creeds as a tool to measure orthodoxy without recognizing that diversity has been part of the Christian faith right since its beginning.

These characteristics are found in many leaders who know no other way of exercising their responsibility. The need for a new pattern of leadership in our world is immense. How can our churches respond to such a need? God calls us to offer a new pattern of leadership – one derived from Jesus’ life and highlighted by our Anabaptist values: a leadership style that does not look for our own interests but for the wellbeing of others; a leadership style that recognizes our mistakes and is exercised from a position of vulnerability; a leadership style that celebrates diversity instead of suppressing it or persecuting it. I pray that this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courier* may help us, as a global family of faith, to move in that direction.

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

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