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Giving others the first place

by Danisa Ndlovu

As we come to the conclusion of our time together it is fitting that we return to our text of Philippians 2:1–11. We return to it so that we might be able to go back to our homes singing its message.

In his letter, Paul refers to himself as a servant (v. 1). He is writing to elders and believers whom he desires to have “the mind of Christ” (2:5), longing that they conduct themselves “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 4:1). Paul’s deep hearted prayer for the saints at Philippi is that “your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (1:9–11).

These words of Paul come from a heart that fully understands that those who walk the paths of righteousness will inevitably face opposition and diverse challenges. Paul’s is a voice that refuses to sing any song other than one rejoicing in the Lord, in spite of incarceration for

the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. His voice therefore remains an encouragement to all of us who are eager to remain fearless and true to the gospel whether in life or in death.

The strength of every believer and every church of Jesus Christ anywhere in the world is the knowledge that when we suffer with and for Christ we are not anywhere near destruction; instead, we are full of life.

Any denomination or congregation that is experiencing turmoil of any kind is likely to experience divisions. They can be at each other’s throats over what colour of paint to use in the sanctuary or something as grave as infidelity within the leadership. Very often conflicts result from a pursuit of selfish ambitions, a refusal “to consider others as better than yourselves” or a failure to give room “to the interests of others.”

In the case of the Philippians, some were preaching Christ “out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice” (1:17–18).

It is in this context that we meet Paul calling us, as it were, to “Go Together in the Way of Christ.” The way of Christ is characterized by service in humility;

service to one another based on love and mutual understanding regardless of our diverse backgrounds and economic status. In a church where harmony prevails, where true fellowship wins the day, there must be a people endowed with the spirit of humility.

Gerald F. Hawthorne was right in his commentary on this passage: “Unity is impossible if each is out for oneself, each is promoting one’s own cause, each seeking one’s own advantage.” Selfishness of any kind is a killer disease in the life of a church. It is a cancer that eats the very sinews that hold together the bonds of unity in a church. It is not surprising to hear Paul admonishing us, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (2: 3–4).

As God’s global people, we have the potential to group ourselves by regions, by countries, by nationalities, by the economic statuses of our countries, by race, by tribes, by denominations and soon, without realizing it, pursuing selfish interests. Let us therefore be warned and stand our guard against the enemy, the devil himself, the father of self-interest.

It is the mind of the world that has for the most part shaped our valuing of our own personal interests more than those of others. The world of competition in

In this issue, Courier-Correo-Courier concludes a series of articles adapted from the sermons and Bible studies at Assembly 15, meeting under the theme, “Come together in the way of Jesus Christ.” The sermon by Danisa Ndlovu (these pages) and the Bible study by Chris Marshall (pages 4-5) were both on the sub-theme, “Go together in the way of Jesus Christ.”

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Danisa Ndlovu preaches on Philippians 2:1-11 at the evening service, July 18, 2009, at Assembly 15.

Photo (above) of Assembly audience by Max Wiedmer
Photo (right) by Lowell Brown



which we live has shaped our impulse to pursue self-interest at the expense of the interests of others.

We all want to be on top! Our nations' policies teach us to defend one's national interest before one is sympathetic to the other nation's interests. The organizations and companies we work for, sometimes including those labeled 'Christian,' orient us in ways that are contrary to Paul's teaching.

Paul calls us believers to a radical change in thinking. If we would fully understand the person and work of Christ and emulate him, our witness to the world will not be questionable or compromised. Our walk together in the way of Christ depends on how we embrace this important teaching.

As we go back to our respective places it should not be business as usual. Our conduct must reflect a change of thinking, an attitude evidenced in how we relate to one another. This is a clarion call for mutual respect, acceptance and above all, unity in the household of faith.

My brothers and sisters in the Lord, in order to positively impact our world it is not surprising that Paul calls us to have the attitude or mind of Christ (2:5). Christ embodies all that we are and are to become as believers.

In Christ we see what it means to serve others with humility, sacrifice and honour. He was not ashamed to teach us, contrary to the understanding of his day, through the act of washing his disciples' feet, that power and authority

are best expressed in love, humility and service to others. Christ lived to do the will of his Father. His whole life and ministry testifies of one who out of love committed his all, including his life, for the sake of others.

The call to follow Jesus Christ is a call to give others the first place in one's life. Our motivation in service should not be based on human rewards but rather on the joy and inner satisfaction that comes with our intimate relationship with Christ. This, dear brothers and sisters, is perceived by the world as weakness; but for us who believe, we know it is power, influence and authority for it is godly.

Nothing should prevent us from embracing an attitude of serving others in humility. This must be shown by our willingness to be like Christ in sacrificing what might be perceived as our rights and privileges in order to be Christ to other people for the glory of God. Those who have the mind of Christ are able to say with Christ, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39), when confronted with tough decisions about service in their journey with God.

And now, brothers and sisters, go in the way of Christ and do that which is only possible through the grace of God: practicing unselfish ambitions. Go and live in humility. Go and practice sacrificial love. Leave this place as servants willing to give our all, knowing

fully well that "[you] are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8).

Go together in the way of Christ as today's church through political, economic and social sufferings and challenges. Know that our destiny is not in the hands of mortals but with God Almighty who is able to reward pain, shame and death with life—life eternal.

Danisa Ndlovu of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, is President of the Mennonite World Conference and Bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe. Danisa delivered this sermon, slightly edited, at the final evening service of MWC Assembly 15, July 14–19, 2009, in Asunción, Paraguay.

Cover: Melani Susanti (left) in India with a participant in one of the many workshops conducted by MWC's teaching delegation in Asia, October 14 to November 18 (see story, page 6). Melani, of Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia, is a member of MWC's Youth Task Force.

One Community

Our Bible text comes from the middle of Paul's soaring epistle to the Ephesians—a document that spells out the universal reach, and cosmic impact, of Christ's saving work more passionately than any other part of Scripture.

The epistle opens with Paul's customary greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1–2). It closes on a virtually identical note: "Peace to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:23–24).

"Grace," "peace" and "love" are singled out for mention at both the beginning and end of the epistle. By this arrangement, Paul signals that his overriding concern in the letter is to expound the Christian gospel as the story of God's amazing grace, enduring love, and reconciling, restoring peace.

In the first half of the letter, Paul recounts the "glorious grace" (1:6, cf. 2:4, 7–8) that God has shown in sending Jesus to secure the healing of the universe and to "make peace" (2:14–15) between hostile peoples. He reminds his readers of how their own lives have been transformed by God's grace: Once they were alienated from God, devoid of all hope in the world, and languishing under the heel of sinister spiritual forces that held them in bondage to their own sinful passions (2:2–3, 11–12, cf. 5:10).

But now, as a result of God's "immeasurably rich grace" (2:7–8, cf. 1:6–8) and "immense love" (2:4; cf. 1:5, 15; 3:17,19), they have been set free from spiritual oppression, forgiven of their sins, adopted as God's children, filled with God's Spirit, incorporated into God's people, and infused with hope for the future (1:3–10; 2:11–21).

"For by grace you have been saved through faith," Paul exults, "and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (2:8–9). It is 100 percent pure, unadulterated, liberating, life-giving,

hope-releasing, peace-creating grace!

In the second half of the letter, which begins with our passage, Paul spells out what God's grace should mean for how his readers lead their daily lives. "I . . . therefore beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called (4:1).

In view of what God has done for you, Paul is saying, you must now

works cannot be separated. It is not enough to know the truth of God's saving grace in our heads and hearts alone; our ethics must match our theology. And since our theology is all about God's grace and peace and love, so too must be our ethics.

But how does this work? In this passage, it means being committed to reconciliation and peacemaking,



Photo by Lowell Brown.

Chris Marshall delivers the final morning Bible Study at Assembly 15, July 18, 2009.

commit yourselves to a new way of living in the world.

This is the central (indeed the only) command in our passage—to fashion lives that are consistent with the grace, love and peace they have received from God. They have been "saved by grace and not by works," that is true. But the purpose of having such grace lavished upon them is that they might "do good works" and "walk in them" (2:8–10).

Anabaptists have always recognized and rightly emphasized that faith and

especially within the family of the church. It means "making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:3).

Again, Anabaptists have always tried to take this seriously. A dedication to peacemaking and reconciliation is an indispensable ingredient of discipleship. Without peacemaking, Christian theology becomes mere theory, and Christian ethics loses its cutting edge. For that reason, Mennonites have been at the forefront of reconciliation work in

of grace and peace

Bible study on
Ephesians 4:1-6
by Chris Marshall

hostile environments all around the world.

But the call to Christian peacemaking in Ephesians 4 relates, first and foremost, to relationships within the community of faith. We will never be credible as peacemakers in a violent world unless, within our own congregations, communities and families, we “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3).

As we know, the church sometimes appears to be as crippled with conflict as is the wider world. Nothing has been or is more damaging to the cause of Christ in the world than the failure of believers “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”.

Yet Scripture calls on us “to make every effort” to do so. How do we do that? At least three things are required. First, we need to be absolutely clear on the content of our Christian calling. What, exactly, is “the calling to which you have been called” (4:1, 4)?

The answer is found at the very outset of the epistle. There Paul explains that we are called to participate in God’s great work of healing the universe through Jesus Christ. God’s ultimate intention, Paul says, is “to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (1:10)—to heal every rupture in the universe, to bring violence and antagonism to an end forever, and to restore harmony to creation. And we are called to be part of it!

We are called to know the “mystery” of salvation (1:9,18; 3:8–9; 5:32; 6:19). We are called to tell and retell the story of Jesus, who “came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who are near” (2:17), who “brought hostility to an end” through his body on the cross (2:15–16).

To “lead a life worthy of our calling,” then, is to lead a life of peacemaking, a life in which we practice unifying, restoring grace in all our relationships, and especially within the body of Christ.

This leads to the second thing we must do if we are to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We

must cultivate those qualities of Christian character that give expression to our calling. Paul mentions four qualities in particular: humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance.

- Humility means having the appropriate view of our own faults and limitations, not just those of others.
- Gentleness means doing nothing to deliberately hurt or humiliate any other person, no matter how upset we are with them.
- Patience means a readiness to endure the discomfort of conflict without lashing out in revenge.
- Forbearance means making room for those we disagree with, and whom we may not even like, but to whom we are eternally bound by our common calling in Christ!

When these four qualities are present it is possible to overcome every conflict, and to heal any hurt, that might arise amongst us.

This brings us to the third requirement for sustaining Christian unity and peace. We need to be clear on what it means to be the body of Christ.

Paul tells his readers, not to “create” the unity of the Spirit, but to “maintain” it. The unity of the church is something that already exists; it is an objective reality, brought into being by the Spirit of God.

There is only “one body” and “one Spirit” (4:4), just as there is “one Lord” (4:5) and “one God and Father of us all” (4:6). The word *one* recurs eight times in three verses! The oneness of the church is as essential to Christian faith as the oneness of God and the lordship of Christ.

Why is Paul so emphatic about there being only one church? First, because the church belongs to Jesus Christ, and there is only one Jesus Christ. The church is the living embodiment of Jesus Christ in the world. Christ has only one body, and that body unites all believers in one undivided communion of love.

The other reason why the oneness of

the church is so crucial lies in what the church represents in the saving purposes of God. God’s ultimate intention in history is to heal every wound in the universe, to bring tribalistic violence and antagonism to an end forever, and to restore universal harmony to all creation.

But this cosmic reconciliation is not simply a utopian dream for the far-distant future. The good news is that cosmic restoration has already started to impinge on human experience, even here and now.

Where is this healing to be seen? In the church! The church is a brand new kind of human society—one held together, not by the bonds of race, or class, or language or culture, but by the unique “bond of peace” forged by the peacemaking work of Jesus Christ on the cross (2:14–22).

The church is the only kind of human community that is not racially defined, or class-defined, or gender-defined, or law-defined, or culture defined, or occupation-defined, or even religion-defined. It is Christ-defined. The church derives its unique identity solely from its union with Jesus Christ.

The multi-racial, multi-cultural church prefigures the final unifying of all things in creation. That is why there can only be one church; a fractured community of the reconciled is a contradiction in terms!

But for Paul, this unity is still something that we must maintain. It requires a steadfast commitment by every believer, in every congregation, of every denomination, in every place and at every time—to confront the discord that inevitably arises in human relationships, in a spirit of humility, gentleness, patience and longsuffering.

Of course, that is not easy to achieve; it requires us to “make every effort” to do so. It is so difficult because the peace that Christ seeks is always a just peace. It is not simply the absence or avoidance of conflict, but the positive attainment of relationships of justice, equality, mutual respect, dignity and freedom (cf. 2:17–19). It requires us “to speak the truth in

Please turn to page 6

Global visits in the MWC community

MWC teaching team addresses identity and leadership on Asia tour

“Our children and young people have no idea what it means to be Anabaptist or Mennonite. What is MWC going to do about that?”

This question from a congregational leader in India summed up the purpose of a four-week MWC teaching tour to India and Indonesia, October 14 to November 18, in India and Indonesia.

Led by Canadians Robert J. (Jack) and Irene Suderman and Bert and Martha Lobe (Bert is secretary of the Deacons Commission), the tour included four cities in Indonesia and four in India. In each location national leaders from the MWC member churches joined them in the teaching tasks.

Among them was Melani Susanti, an

Indonesian member of MWC’s Youth Task Force, who accompanied the team in both countries, addressing concerns related to youth. In India, a veteran women’s leader, Rachel Bhag, worked with Cynthia Peacock (MWC’s Deacons Commission chair), Martha Lobe, Irene Suderman and the rest of the team in encouraging the churches to recognize the gifts of women.

The team conducted a total of 32 sessions on topics ranging from “Anabaptism and Pluralism” to “The Church’s Witness to Peace,” “Anabaptism and Gender,” “The Role of Women in the Leadership of the Church,” “Understanding the Church as Missional,” “Young People and MWC,” and “The Role of the Church in a Multi-Cultural Society.” The visitors also spent time with national



Photo: Bert Lobe.

Martha Lobe reconnects with longtime friend Weisylin Gwal in Singpur, India, during the MWC teaching tour. Weisylin and her husband recently donated land for the construction of a village church after 20 years of meeting in their home. The church is located between a mosque and a Hindu temple.

and regional church leaders, visiting congregations, participating in worship and touring various church ministries. In all locations, they presented the vision, mission and purpose of MWC and brought a face of MWC closer to these member-churches.

Some of the teaching venues were at the congregational level and others involved leaders from several church bodies at once. In India, for example, two workshops included all nine MWC member-churches from India and Nepal. In Indonesia, the visit generated a rare occasion that brought leaders of the country’s three Mennonite synods together to discuss ministry, identity and their common membership in MWC.

For a discussion of the issues addressed on the tour, see the interview with Jack Suderman, page 8.



Photo: Bert Lobe.

Leaders from nine MWC member churches at the All-India Leaders’ Conference in Vizagapatnam, India, November 4-9. Visiting teachers included Jack and Irene Suderman (second row, centre), Cynthia Peacock (second row, first on left), Melani Susanti (first row fourth from left), and Martha Lobe (to the right of Melani).

continued from page 6

love” to one another (4:15)—always with the intention of “building the body up in love” (4:16).

In conclusion, just as Ephesians 4 opened with a reminder to “lead a life worthy of your calling” in Christ—so now, Paul again lists the ethical virtues believers must nurture as a people called by God to declare his gracious work of cosmic peacemaking to the whole world.

“Put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind

to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (4:31– 5:2).

Chris Marshall is associate professor of Christian Studies at Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand. He has maintained close links to Mennonites in New Zealand and Australia since serving as a leader at the London Mennonite Fellowship while living in England.

West Africans strengthen connections to Mennonite World Conference

Anabaptists in West Africa are a scattered group that often feels isolated from Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in other parts of Africa and the rest of the world. That isolation has diminished in the last few months through a regional workshop to orient leaders to MWC's Africa Caucus and, earlier, a fraternal visit by a delegation sponsored by the MWC Deacons Commission.

MWC representatives held a three-day workshop in Accra, Ghana, February 27 to March 1, to strengthen connections both among the Evangelical Mennonite Church of Burkina Faso, Mennonite Church of Nigeria and Ghana Mennonite Church (which hosted the gathering), as well as between them and churches in other parts of the world.

The gathering was the second of four regional workshops in Africa this year designed to build a continental structure called the MWC Africa Caucus. Over one-third of Anabaptists worldwide are in Africa.

Toss Mukwa, a consultant from DR Congo, facilitated the sessions with support from MWC staff person Tim Lind. General Secretary Larry Miller led the group in discussions on the history and functioning of MWC.

A highlight of the meeting was the introduction of a newer member of the Anabaptist family in the region: l'Eglise Protestante Anabaptiste de Côte d'Ivoire (Protestant Anabaptist Church of the Ivory Coast).

Its leader, Reverend Affouka Eba, spoke of the history of the church, its encounter with Anabaptism and its current suffering due to the conflict in the country. More than 11 of the church's 32 congregations in the Abijan region have been closed because of



Photo by Tim Lind

West Africa caucus meeting. Gathered around the table from left: Emelia Amexo (Ghana), Victor Umoabasi (Nigeria), Ruth Anane Zohr (Ghana), Theophilus Tetteh-Akoso (Ghana), Thioro Bananzaro (Burkina Faso).

turmoil there. The Ivory Coast church is not yet a member of MWC.

Listening tour

The Accra workshop came in the wake of a regional visit of a delegation of four on behalf of MWC's Deacon Commission, November 23 to December 7. Invited by Ghana Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church of Nigeria, the group included Cynthia Peacock of India, chair of the commission; Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands; Ayub Omondi Awich of Kenya; and Ardith Frey of Canada. Unfortunately, Cynthia was unable to obtain a visa for Nigeria, the second leg of the trip, so the other three proceeded without her.

In each country, executive church leaders accompanied the team to meet with local pastors and leaders of women and of youth. (See back cover story by Cynthia.)

The leaders and the members spoke nostalgically of earlier decades when North American mission workers served in their areas through Mennonite Board of Missions (now Mennonite Mission Network) and Mennonite Central Committee.

The delegation, in turn, oriented the churches to MWC as a body that seeks to facilitate fellowship, but with limited capacities for material aid.

Following the trip, the four were in further communication with Mennonite mission and service organizations and with West African churches about ways to follow up the visit in the global Anabaptist community.

Since the visit, MWC has agreed to provide some Global Church Sharing funds for the repair of the Pimpimsu church, with the majority coming from the Ghana Mennonite Church itself.

From reports from Tim Lind and the Deacons Commission delegation.



The four members of the delegation sent to Nigeria and Ghana: Ardith Frey of Canada, Henk Stenvers of the Netherlands, Cynthia Peacock of India and Ayub Omondi Awich of Kenya.

teaching, listening, encouraging

Courier interview with Jack Suderman

Cultivating an Anabaptist identity

In 2004, Mennonite Church Canada approved a plan to offer the teaching gifts of Robert J. (Jack) Suderman to the global church via the “Global Gift-Sharing Initiative” of Mennonite World Conference. At the time, he was Executive Secretary of Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

In 2005 he assumed the role of General Secretary for Mennonite Church Canada and continued in that role until his retirement in August 2010. Since then he has been serving as assistant secretary of the MWC Peace Commission and, beginning this June, as co-secretary of the bi-lateral conversation between the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the MWC.

Jack has taught in a variety of Latin American contexts including Colombia, where he had served as a mission worker, and in Cuba, where several church networks maintain connections with Mennonite Church Canada. Jack’s MWC-related teaching assignments have included visits to Ethiopia, Philippines, Honduras, Indonesia and India. Following his return from the latter two countries in November, *Courier* asked Jack to reflect on his experience.

What subject areas have you been covering in your teaching?

My teaching has focused mainly on the calling of the church in society. We have talked about contextual and social issues, the meaning of the gospel, and the presence of God’s kingdom.

In every context the church has its particular needs, and so my hosts often ask me to teach about specific issues facing their church—such as the role of women, or the financing of pastors. I do my best to fit in, but there are times when I tell them I don’t have the expertise to address the specific needs.

What have you been learning about the Anabaptist-related churches and how they see their identity and role in the world?

I had expected to see more differences among churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. One of my surprises, however, was how much similarity there was wherever we went. Each context is unique, but it’s amazing how the same basic struggles are present everywhere.

A common question, including in the North, is that of ecclesiological and theological identity. Many people have a love-hate relationship with an Anabaptist identity—that is, beyond being just “Christian.” Nobody wants to be narrow

or to put their particular Christian identity on the front burner. Yet many also have a strong sense that a particular identity is critical, given the religiously pluralistic and ecumenical context they live in.

There are always those who advocate for an overt Anabaptist identity, and everywhere we go those people are passionate. They say that this identity is exactly what their context needs. The theology of the church as a sharing community is attractive in Cuba; the potential of a nonviolent Kingdom

community is relevant in Colombia; the emphasis on discipleship is desired in Indonesia; the dependence on the Holy Spirit is foundational in Ethiopia; the separation of church and state is critical in India. Others, however, note some of these same characteristics in other theological streams and wonder what difference it really makes to be Anabaptist.

Most importantly, I have observed that the vocation God has given the church for the redemption and liberation of the world, especially in the face of resistant principalities and powers, excites and stimulates the imagination of what it means to be the church in society.

So how do you respond when people seem ambivalent about identity?

The awareness that identity actually matters has to do with exposure and training of leadership.

My task as a teacher is to expose leaders to the questions of identity and show how it can be important for the long-term sustainability of the church. If people choose not to have a clear Anabaptist identity, they will inevitably reflect another identity. A non-choice is also a choice, because it is somewhat predictable where they end up—usually as another version of evangelicalism and largely similar to other evangelical churches.

There are relatively few major theological streams that identify the essential character of a church community. The most evident are Catholicism, mainline Protestantism, Orthodoxy, Liberation theologies, Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism. What is missing, often, is the stream representing the Radical Reformation.

This Anabaptist stream should be part of the mix. Ecclesologically speaking, it is a gift to the world. It may borrow from the other streams, but it puts the pieces together in distinctive ways that often speak directly to the nitty-gritty of discipleship and the Christian life in the very complex societies that people live in. Christian groups can nurture other streams while also learning from them.



Robert J. (Jack) Suderman, left, in a teaching session at the All-India Leaders’ Conference in Vizagapatnam, India, November 4-9. With him is Satyen Basumata of the Bharatiya Jukta Christa Prachar Mandali (United Missionary Church).

The Seventh Day Adventist World Church is a good example. It has been nourished (at times unconsciously) by the Anabaptist stream for 175 years, and now they want to name and explore this influence more overtly.

What are the major challenges as the church addresses its questions of identity?

A major one is sustainable theological education. Church leaders want more biblical, theological, historical and ministry education, but churches can't afford to make it happen over a long period of time. Outside agencies from more affluent countries are backing off of the traditional ways of funding: building institutions, funding professors, creating libraries, and so on. Few, if any, of MWC member churches in the South have been able to maintain their own theological institutions. Those that have managed have done so by very large injections of external resources.

This means, in most places, that Anabaptist pastors are not trained in Anabaptist-related theological schools. Instead, there is a variety of experiments and methods, and pastoral training institutes to supplement the education their pastors receive elsewhere. The MWC executive meetings, held every year in a different location, now include pedagogical events, since many of the members have teaching gifts. This has already happened in Ethiopia and Philippines.

These initiatives are good, but none of them is enough. Sometimes the training goes in spurts. Churches will put a lot of energy into leadership education for a time—five or seven years—but then they will drop it, because it's not sustainable. Then, the training does not get down to the grass roots. I have not seen a new model that is sustainable. Other denominations, too, are working with that challenge; Anabaptists aren't the only ones.

Do you find that people are ready to embrace and nurture an Anabaptist identity?

Yes, they are more than ready. It is interesting that when people are exposed to even a little, they eat it up and share it immediately. In India, one group of women and youth (ages 35 and younger) asked for an additional session on the Radical Reformation. One of my slides



Jack Suderman (left) and MWC Executive Committee member Adi Walujo of the Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ) Mennonite Synod share the podium at a teaching session in Indonesia. Photo by Bert Lobe

was a simple explanation of the profound shifts in understandings of church and discipleship in the fourth century, when the Christian faith became legal and obligatory in the Roman Empire. This was very new to the participants.

A week later, as we visited congregations in the Raipur region, those who had attended the first workshop had already convened more than 100 young people of the zone to share this slide. "Now we can see that it makes a difference what we connect to," they said.

In South Africa we worshiped with a congregation that is working hard to develop an Anabaptist identity. Although the pastor does not have formal theological training, he is working creatively at forming the congregation's organization, leadership and preaching to be more Anabaptist. This congregation is keenly interested in joining other Anabaptist groups.

In the Philippines, one pastor who attended my course as the final requirement for his master's degree told me that he feels like he should start studies all over again. In six years of study he had not been exposed to any of the principles he learned in the course on peace. Another leader indicated that the same course would re-focus his ministry from then on.

On the surface, the pattern of your visits seems to be one where churches in the South still look to churches in the North to help them shape the identity. Is that really the case, or is Anabaptist identity something that grows and is redefined everywhere, from the grass roots?

An Anabaptist focus is no longer something that comes from the North. The Shared Convictions of MWC, which is our common global Anabaptist statement of identity, are the fruit of global, cross-cultural discernment, dialogue and common responses to the same Spirit. I find it miraculous that such divergent experiences and histories can find enough common ground to agree on anything. But it happens time after time.

In a recent email exchange, Tim Lind, MWC staff person based in Congo, indicated that a task of MWC is to encourage its members to probe deeply into their own traditions and bring back to the global communion new "root stock" for the key Anabaptist values—peace-infused living, service, ethical relationships, a faith that impacts daily living, and however else they may be defined. This is already happening everywhere we engage conversations about identity.

How have you observed the church in the South instructing the church in the North?

The church in the North is learning very much, and needs to learn even more from the Southern churches. For example, in Africa and Latin America there is a new awareness that Pentecostal fervour is not contradictory to Anabaptism. Anabaptists in the South have shown and reminded us that Anabaptism at its roots is Pentecostal. We in the North have shied away from, even scoffed at certain aspects of the

Please turn to page 14

Peace with Lutheran neighbours

Last July in Stuttgart, Germany, delegates to the Lutheran World Federation assembly formally asked the Mennonite World Conference community of churches to forgive Lutherans for 16th-century persecution of Anabaptists and for distorted portrayals of Anabaptist Christians since then. As we did in the last issue of *Courier*, we include several stories of regional and local reconciliation events that took place in the months following.

New Mennonite "comes home" in joint service

Buenos Aires, Argentina—On Sunday, July 25, 2010, the members of our Iglesia Anabautista Mennonita de Buenos Aires (Mennonite Anabaptist Church) were invited to worship at the Iglesia Dinamarsquesa en Buenos Aires (Danish Church, Lutheran). The invitation came just four months after the Danish church paid us a similar visit.

In the time leading up to

our visits, we had been aware of dialogue between theologians of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC), and we followed the action of reconciliation on July 22 in Stuttgart.

So now, three days later, Mennonites in Buenos Aires were "making peace" with the local Lutheran community.

We participated in communion, Luis Ma. Alman

Bornes of our congregation preached, and then we shared a potluck lunch as a way to continue with the communion. Considering the international context, we keenly felt the importance of this event. Even though the weather was cold, rainy and windy outside, the weather was quite warm inside.

For me, it was like the closing of a circle. In 1995, at age 27 I entered the Lutheran church by conviction and

faith. Eventually, four years ago, I joined the Mennonite community where I am now. I always thought that changes in membership did not mean rejecting what I was leaving, but adding something new to the lived experience.

Today, Anabaptist-Mennonite principles guide my life. But I also keep an appreciation for Lutheranism and the liturgical forms of that community.

Pablo Casado

Telling Anabaptist stories at the "most Lutheran" event

Bammental, Germany—November 17 was the last of 10 days in which Christians in Germany annually gather for repentance, prayer and a focus on peace and justice. For 20 years the churches in Bammental have organized these days together.

Should we celebrate Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation on that day? On the one hand nothing could be more appropriate, since Stuttgart was about repentance. On the other hand this service was likely the most Lutheran event in the whole church year.

I pondered the question with Klaus Zimmermann, the pastor of the local evangelical church, which is part of the former state church and was formed by a union of Lutheran and Reformed churches in the 19th century. Most members know little about the persecution of the Anabaptists. Could we give enough information in a worship service? How would people react to criticism of the churches' "heroes," Luther and Melancthon, both of whom are depicted in the church's stained glass windows?

In the end, Klaus and I took the courage and organized the service. Instead of a sermon, there was a dialogue between Klaus and me. He told about the condemnations of Anabaptists included in the (Lutheran)Augsburg Confession and

how the reformers advocated the death penalty for Anabaptists. I told the story of the persecution, giving examples from our Bammental region, where Anabaptist believers from neighbouring towns were caught, tried and executed. Klaus confessed

the guilt of Lutherans in the persecution of Anabaptists. I confessed Mennonite failure and loss of the peace church heritage when German Mennonites became soldiers in the 19th and 20th centuries. We pronounced mutual forgiveness and embraced each other. Klaus is a tall person and never before had I felt the warmth of his cheek. We celebrated the Lord's Supper as reconciled people and churches.

Three weeks later, on December 10, I sat in a panel discussion in Augsburg about "The Churches and Peace—A

Lutheran Mennonite Dialogue," sponsored by "Evangelisches Forum," an educational organization of the Lutheran church in Augsburg and the "Vereinigung Bayrischer Mennonitengemeinden" (Union of Bavarian Mennonite Churches).

Half of the panel and also of the audience were Mennonite. Michael Martin, of the High Consistory of the Bavarian Lutheran Church, described the Lutheran support for participation in government even if this means military action as a last resort.

Rainer W. Burkart, a Mennonite pastor and member of the MWC Executive Committee, explained the Anabaptist commitment to nonviolence. Former military chaplain Carola Wagner emphasized the church's commitment to care for soldiers in Afghanistan; I pointed out how German Mennonites have counselled US soldiers in Iraq concerning conscientious objection. In the 16th century, Augsburg had seen bitter disputes between Anabaptists and the reformers. Our dialogue was different. All of us enjoyed full freedom and mutual respect.

Wolfgang Krauss, a Mennonite lay leader in Bammental, has directed a research project on Anabaptists in Augsburg. He also worked for the German Mennonite Peace Committee from 1984 to 2008.



Evangelical pastor Klaus Zimmermann (l) and Wolfgang Krauss, Mennonite lay leader

Inter-church unity in the home town of Anabaptist martyr Balthasar Hubmaier

Regensburg, Germany—While this southern German city is dominated by Catholic churches, it is home to one of the first Lutheran church buildings of the Reformation. Regensburg was also the hometown of martyred

Anabaptist leader, Balthasar Hubmaier. Today these churches, long ago in conflict, have regular contact through inter-church associations.

In our neighbourhood of Burgweinting, our Mennonite congregation works with local

Catholics and Lutherans in a children's Bible week, monthly services for toddlers, joint services during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, World Day of Prayer, outdoor Easter worship services and a peace procession.

A special bond between the Lutheran and the Mennonite churches dates back 200 years, when Mennonites began renting worship space from the Lutherans. About 50 years ago, the Lutherans rented space from the Mennonites. In 1992 a service marking the German Mennonite-Lutheran Dialogue was

held in the Mennonite church of Regensburg. Since then, they have met together for worship and communion at least once a year, even though the Lutheran church now has its own building.

The cooperation over many years has fostered openness and trust between the congregations and has had a tremendous impact on the community. People stop us, the Mennonite pastors, on the street to express how happy they are that the three churches work together and what a gift it is to the neighbourhood.

Liesa and Wilhelm Unger, co-pastors, Mennonite Church Regensburg.



Liesa and Wilhelm Unger (second and third from left) help lead last year's inter-church peace procession in Regensburg, Germany.

Joining forces in needy neighbourhood

Winnipeg, Canada—In challenging times groups often get together who might not do so otherwise. That's what's happening at Trinity Place, a church building in Winnipeg, where a small Mennonite congregation and a small Lutheran congregation meet separately under the same roof.

"There is a spirit of mutual goodwill between us," says Ron Penner, who with his wife Ruth co-pastors the Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church. "Both groups are eager to have their visions succeed, and both are happy to be light in this part of the city."

A year and a half ago, both congregations were discerning their future. Over the years, said Rev. Ron Nelson, the families of his flock at Trinity Lutheran moved out of the neighbourhood and the remaining members had aged.

Aberdeen had rented space from Trinity after selling their own building several blocks

away and then called Ron and Ruth Penner in an effort to renew the congregation.

Soon Ron Nelson included the Penners in dreaming about for the ministry of Trinity Place. Aberdeen contributed a significant sum from the sale of their building for much-needed capital costs at Trinity—particularly the replacement of rotting windows and the repair of the roof.

Trinity, meanwhile, had already begun opening its doors to a variety of ministries in its neighbourhood, which is one of the poorest and most crime-ridden areas of Winnipeg. Today, Trinity Place is also home to a First Nations (aboriginal Canadian) Pentecostal congregation, a mother's program and urban ministry orientation for service groups.

"No, we're not merging," says Ruth Penner. "This seems to be the first perception people have."

Ron Nelson adds that the two congregations will always

do things differently. "I don't want the Mennonites wearing vestments," he jokes. Baptism and attitudes to the state will remain doctrinal points of difference.

But, says, Ron Penner, "There is a more visible commitment to work with each other. We want to foster a sense of equality."

The two congregations sealed that commitment

January 9 when they celebrated a joint service of repentance and healing, inspired by last July's historic Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation in Germany. The two congregations sang from Aberdeen's hymnal, read statements of confession and forgiveness, and exchanged handshakes and hugs in the passing of Christ's peace.

The climax of the service was when Ron and Ruth Penner assisted Nelson in replacing the purple cloth of repentance on the altar with the white cloth of forgiveness



Ron Penner (a member of the MWC Executive Committee), Ron Nelson and Ruth Penner

Byron Rempel-Burkholder

and healing. "The worship service drew us closer together in the spirit of Christ," said Ron Penner.

"The sign of the cross is a plus sign," Nelson added, noting how the sharing of facilities and mutual support has become a positive symbol of reconciliation.

Byron Rempel-Burkholder, MWC staff

Southern Cone Anabaptists explore pastoral models

San Bernardino, Paraguay—“Effective Pastoral Models” was the focus of the 14th biennial meeting of Latin America’s Southern Cone Anabaptist Mennonite Congress in San Bernardino, Paraguay, January 26 to 30.

Some 170 participants gathered at Rancho Alegre, a retreat centre jointly owned by five Paraguayan Mennonite national church conferences, 45 kilometres (30 miles) from Asunción, the capital. Travelling from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile and within Paraguay, most belonged to member churches of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC).

Werner Franz, Director of the Centro Evangélico Menonita de Teología Asunción (CEMTA), introduced the theme by describing five distinctive practices of the Christian church related to pastoral ministry.

“The church is an earthly community. It is not heavenly,” said Franz. “These five practices are not based on a systematic theology,” he explained, emphasizing that they are rooted instead in practical theology. “If we want to introduce Jesus to people we can say, ‘Come to my church and see him.’”

A pastoral ministry thus grounded, Franz told the participants, promotes and forgives; it is creative—training people to think in new directions and allowing participation in God’s work; it seeks to break down barriers and to create a corporate identity; it empowers, gives confidence and demands accountability; it knows that God expects and respects decisions.

Three church leaders presented examples of different pastoral models. César Melgarejo of Paraguay spoke of

pastoral ministry that extends over a longer period of time, in one place. Edgardo Sanchez of Argentina explored pastoral teams. And Beatriz Barrios of Uruguay presented on women in pastoral ministry.

Olga Piedrasanta of Guatemala, coordinator of the Movement of the Latin American Anabaptist Women Theologians, shared on the pilgrimage of Latin American women and introduced the newly published study guide, *El mensaje liberador de Jesús para las mujeres hoy* (The liberating message of Jesus to women today).

Also on hand were MWC executive officers who had been in Asunción for meetings. President Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe brought greetings and expressed appreciation for demonstrations of solidarity from Latin America. Vice-President Janet Plenert of

Canada and General Secretary Larry Miller led a time of sharing on relationships between MWC and member churches.

Over the four days, the participants dealt with a number of business matters:

1) Youth participants proposed that future assemblies include special youth meetings. Representatives of Ediciones CLARA, a Colombia-based publisher, reported on their intention to start a website where Anabaptist books can be downloaded electronically.

2) Participants adopted a protocol by which official representatives at future assemblies are chosen from the conferences, even though attendance will continue to be open to all.

3) They also approved a slate of country representatives to plan future congresses: Freddy Barrón (Bolivia), Rogelio Duarte (Paraguay),



Youth participation was significant in this year’s Southern Cone Anabaptist-Mennonite Congress, held in San Bernardino, Paraguay, January 26-30. Photo by Janet Plenert

Mabel Castro de Donatti (Uruguay), Ruben Darino (Argentina), João Rainer Buhr (Brazil), and Daniel Delgado (Chile). Delgado was elected coordinator for the next four years.

This year’s gathering marked 30 years since the Congress first convened in 1981 in Argentina.

Milka Rindzinski, Uruguay

Mennonites in Ho Chi Minh City lose church centre

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam—Ten days before Christmas, local authorities in District Two of Ho Chi Minh City seized and demolished the home of Pastor and Mrs. Nguyen Hong Quang, leaders of the unregistered Vietnam Mennonite church. Their home also served as a leadership training centre and church headquarters.

Authorities cordoned off the area and began dismantling the Quangs’ home and a nearby guesthouse. Pastor Quang did not intervene. However, he reportedly was severely beaten when he objected to police taking the Bible school students into custody. Reports said that the students were sent home and told not to return.

Authorities gave Quang the keys to a housing unit in a nearby run-down apartment complex for him, his wife and three children.

The Quangs, along with hundreds of other families, are losing their property in an urban redevelopment scheme. Quang had earlier appealed to the city for additional remuneration, claiming that the proposed

remuneration was only one-fourth the amount needed to secure a replacement property in the city. He also helped many of his neighbours to file appeals.

In September the authorities launched a public campaign against Pastor Quang, accusing him of constantly challenging the government. The articles heaped on him the same slanderous accusations they had used in 2003 when he was arrested for interfering in a government investigation.

The unregistered Mennonite body is not an MWC member but shares a confession of faith similar to that of the registered Hôi Thánh Mennonite church, which does belong to the MWC and includes about 90 congregations. The unregistered group includes 64 congregations with 3,500 active members in five geographical areas. Most of the congregations are registered with local authorities. Pastor Quang coordinates an extensive training and mentoring program for young leaders. His wife, Pastor Le Thi Phu Dung, is the church president.

Luke S. Martin, USA

World Fellowship Sunday highlights generations and common roots

Singapore—Anabaptist congregations around the globe celebrated World Fellowship Sunday on January 23 with much colour and variation around the theme “Serving God together as one family of faith.” Most used the worship materials prepared by the Youth Task Force of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and disseminated in October.

In Honduras, the Mennonite Evangelical Church of La Ceiba spread the focus over two services on January 16 and 23. The first Sunday featured a presentation by a Mennonite Bible Institute teacher on the history of the Mennonite church in Honduras. The following week, the congregation heard from Karen Flores, a former MWC-Mennonite Central Committee intern at the MCC United Nations office.

“The youth were very excited to hear more about MWC and how it is involving youth in many areas,” said Karen. “I’m looking forward to WFS 2012!” added Karen.

The Mennonite Church of Singapore (MCS) celebrated WFS on February 6, on the Chinese New Year weekend. “It seems fitting to start the lunar new year in fellowship with other Anabaptist churches globally, and in remembrance of how the Anabaptist movement began,” said Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, who led worship that day. This was the first time her congregation had participated in WFS.

Sermon topics varied regionally. The Singapore church focused on intergenerational integration. Ray Brubacher, former MWC event coordinator, preached at Canada’s Breslau



Photo by Manjula Roul.

At the Bethel Brethren in Christ Church in Orissa, India, thanksgiving for the global family, prayers for the persecuted church and prayers for youth were part of the worship service.

Mennonite Church on the “Church as a Glocal (Global-Local) Community.” He showed how, in Luke 4:14-30, Jesus challenged people from his hometown to realize that God’s grace and plans are global, reaching beyond the Jews, even though the way God works is specific to local settings.

At India’s Bethel Brethren in Christ (BIC) Church in Orissa, youth, women, pastors and field staff drew on Hebrews 13 to encourage members of all ages in the church to show compassion to one another. They also used the day to support one another in prayer and song, seeking to stand firm for Christ in times of trouble and to reach out to every people, every village, with the gospel. Rev. Dr. Bijoy Roul, chairman of the Orissa church, recounted the first Anabaptist baptism that took place in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525.

In Paraguay, a Mennonite and a Mennonite Brethren congregation celebrated together at Asunción’s Concordia Church, where

they share a building. Ernst Weichselberger, pastor of the Mennonite congregation and national coordinator of the 2009 Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Asunción, had asked the inter-Mennonite youth group to plan and help lead the service.

The youth stretched the intergenerational focus to highlight multiculturalism, a reality that Mennonite churches in Paraguay face constantly with the mix of Spanish, Indigenous and German congregations. Several young people gave testimonies of what it meant for them to serve in a multicultural community.

An added blessing was the presence and participation of MWC officers, who were meeting in Asunción that weekend.

Melani Susanti, a member of the MWC Youth Task Force and coordinator of the WFS 2011, was encouraged by the responses of the global churches to the special Sunday. “The WFS material” she said, “is designed so that we re-learn our common roots

and focus on a theme that is globally pivotal, such as this year’s theme of unity between generations in the church.”

“It is our hope that WFS will be more widely celebrated by Anabaptist churches globally in years to come.” Melani added. “So mark it on your church calendar—it’s the fourth Sunday of January every year!”

Elina Ciptadi, staff for MWC Youth Task Force

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Task force begins planning for new network of service agencies

Asunción, Paraguay—A provisional task force appointed by Mennonite World Conference met for the first time in Asunción, Paraguay, January 24-26, to plan how Anabaptist-related service organizations from around the world can work together more effectively.

"We have a dream for a new table where different service agencies and church planting agencies are working side by side, respecting each other's gifts, all aware that they are part of the church and helping to empower it," said César García, task force member.

The meeting followed worldwide consultations in Pasadena, California, USA (2006) and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (August 2010). In Addis Ababa, participants from 27 agencies and 18 countries agreed that they wanted to work together in the future. In their minutes they called for "a space or

entity under MWC auspices in which every member relates in an interdependent way in order to more effectively serve the church and the world."

The participants established the task force to propose organizational relationships, develop communication strategies and help the agencies connect with each other.

The task force, chaired by Reg Toews (in the absence of Pakisa Tshimika, who had recently had surgery), met with MWC officers and staff several times during their separate meetings in Asunción.

A follow-up consultation is planned for potential members, May 2012 in Switzerland. The provisional task force will meet again in October 2011 in the United States, to continue planning for the new service network.

Ron Byler, MWC consultant



Photo by Ron Byler

Members of the provisional task force working on a new network of service agencies related to MWC. Left to right: César García (Mennonite Brethren/Colombia); Barbara Hege-Galle (Mennonite/Germany); Cynthia Peacock (United Missionary Church/India); Arli Klassen (Mennonite/USA); and John Fumana (Mennonite Brethren/DR Congo).

Assembly 15 alumni relive memories

Asunción, Paraguay—A year and half after Assembly 15 of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC), local organizers, church volunteers and assembly staff gathered here for a reunion, January 23.

About 150 Paraguayans and some visitors gathered to remember and to celebrate at Centro Familiar de Adoración, the 10,000 seat church that hosted the 2009 Assembly.

One group from the Indigenous and German-speaking church communities of the Chaco region travelled 460 kilometers (285 miles) to the event.

Participants from all eight MWC Paraguayan member conferences shared in the program, reliving their memories of the last assembly.

Following an opening and welcome from Alfred Neufeld, former president of the National Coordinating Council, a musical group played traditional Paraguayan songs as well as hymns especially dear to Paraguayan Mennonites.

A video prepared by Manuel Eckert recalled the months leading up to the assembly. It showed people planning, gathering information and sharing ideas until the arrival of delegates at the Centro to worship as a global Anabaptist family. The big cooking pot and the many young volunteers evoked special memories.

MWC officers, who were meeting in Asunción, also took in the alumni event. Danisa Ndlovu, MWC President and Larry Miller, MWC General Secretary, also shared updates on the global communion and thanked the alumni for their hard work. *From reports by Magali Moreno, MWC staff*



Photo by Magali Moreno

Alfred Neufeld, former president of the National Coordinating Council for the Fifteenth MWC Assembly in 2009, with Asciano Fautz, a leader in the Convención de las Iglesias Evangélicas Unidas–Enlhet, one of eight Paraguayan national churches belonging to MWC.

Cultivating an Anabaptist identity

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Pentecostal stream. It is important to find ways of understanding Anabaptism through a Pentecostal lens.

We also need to learn how to celebrate in the midst of brokenness and suffering. The churches in the South are showing us that celebration is part of the Christian life, even when life is tough. Someone from Latin America said, "If we're going to walk on thin ice, we may as well dance." These churches help us regain a sense that there are some things that are worth suffering for; that suffering is indeed integral to discipleship. It's something that we in the North find hard to learn.

In our travels we were moved time and again at the way believers experience the joy of discipleship and the thrill of being the church. Ironically, this is especially so in areas where they are a minority. In India and Indonesia, they have a very keen sense of the importance of connecting well with their Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu neighbours, knowing who they are and what they have to offer. Being a minority is not something to be ashamed of; it is a gift we offer to others who need to become aware of what we bring.



Len Rempel replaces Karen Martin Schiedel in finance and administration

Len Rempel has been appointed the new director of finance and administration for Mennonite World Conference, replacing Karen Martin Schiedel. He began work March 14 in MWC's North American office in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

Karen, meanwhile, accepted a post as business manager at Kitchener's Rockway Mennonite Collegiate.



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Larry Miller
Publisher

Byron Rempel-Burkholder
Editor

Eleanor Miller
Communications assistant

Sylvie Gudin
French translator

Marisa & Eunice Miller
Spanish translators

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www.mw-cmm.org

MWC welcomes new staff

Len comes to the position after 10 years in senior management at Ten Thousand Villages, a fair trade organization with Mennonite roots. Most recently he was Director of Operations in the Villages Canadian headquarters in New Hamburg, Ontario.

What drew him to the MWC position, he says, was the opportunity to work more directly for the church. One of the seeds of his interest in MWC was planted while travelling in West Africa with Ten Thousand Villages. "The sense of shared worship with people in other cultures was exciting," he recalls.

Len is no stranger to the MWC. "I had been to the [1990] assembly in Winnipeg and attended the [2006] General Council meetings in Pasadena, so when I saw this opening, I knew this was something that I had skills for, and I felt a close connection with the purpose of the organization."

Len lives in New Hamburg with his wife Kathleen and three children. He is an active lay leader at East Zorra Mennonite Church.

Karen, who served in the MWC office for six years, says she will miss the MWC



Photo by Andrew Schiedel

community. "Without a doubt the biggest highlight has been the opportunity to meet so many wonderful

people from around the world," she says. "I will certainly miss the regular contact with this large group of friends and the many opportunities to work and worship together with them."

Karen and her husband Andrew are parents to a toddler and are active in the Waterloo North Mennonite Church.

Liesa Unger becomes event coordinator for General Council

Liesa Unger of Regensburg, Germany, has become MWC's event coordinator, providing logistical support for the coming meetings of General Council, MWC commission meetings and service consultation, to be held in Switzerland in 2012.

The gathering, which will involve some 200 participants from MWC's 99 member churches, provides a bridge between the 2009 MWC assembly in Paraguay and the next assembly in 2015.

"Being able to work for a local church and the global church at the same time helps me to see beyond my own horizon," says Liesa, who with her husband Wilhelm co-pastors the Regensburg Mennonite Church. "It is a privilege to prepare a place here in Europe for the global church to meet face to face."

Liesa, who began her part-time duties January 1, will keep European churches informed on the upcoming meetings, coordinate delegate visits to European congregations and keep communication links open with the organizers of MERK [Mennonitische Europäische Regionalkonferenz]

(European Mennonite Regional Conference).

Apart from monthly visits to the Strasbourg office and some travel within Europe, Liesa will work electronically from her home

Previously, Liesa worked



Photo by Wilhelm Unger

with MWC as YAMEN! director (2001-2004) and as strategic communication manager (2005-2006). Her volunteer involvement goes back to the Strasbourg assembly in 1984 as a youth "servant"; more recently she served as interpretation coordinator for the 2009 Global Youth Summit.

Other appointments

In mid-2010, **Hansuli Gerber** of Villeret, Switzerland, began a part-time volunteer stint as web master. In the late '80s and early '90s he served on MWC staff as Executive Secretary of the International Mennonite Peace Committee (1986-91), and MWC Secretary for Program (1988-90). His work will be profiled in the next *Courier*.

In September, **Stéphanie Hege** resigned as an administrative assistant in the Strasbourg office in order to move to Paris.

In December, **Sarah Cain** was hired to fill the maternity leave of Kristen Hines, administrative assistant in the Kitchener office.

“You’re not alone”

by Cynthia Peacock

It was a warm day and our team of four from four continents started our journey to some of the village churches on behalf of the Mennonite World Conference Deacons Commission to Accra, Ghana, in November 2010. The churches there were feeling alone and abandoned and had requested MWC to send a delegation to walk with them, to hear their concerns.

There were four of us in the delegation: Ayub Omondi Awich of Kenya representing youth, Ardith Frey of Canada, Henk Stenvers of Netherlands and myself.

We had visited several other churches; but now we set out by road for Pimpimsu. It became dark with no moon or stars shining. As we approached, it was quiet and we wondered where we were heading. I found myself humming the song “You’re not alone, we are one body,” composed by Bryan Moyer Suderman and sung at the 2009 MWC assembly.

Soon we arrived in a place where we could see a few mud huts here and there, but no people. The driver put on the headlights and we waited for a few minutes. Then we saw little lights moving and coming, faster and closer. A stream of people came and the whole village seemed to light up. We were escorted to the church, a room with broken walls and nothing inside.

We saw women, men and young children bringing benches, drums, and a couple of chairs. Poorly clad women and children and old people came to greet us. After all were seated, the local pastor welcomed us and greeted us warmly.

Then a woman with a baby on her back came forward, a boy began beating the drum, and all began singing and clapping, dancing and praising God. The music was loud and the dancing infectious; we were one in our praise. Words cannot express the joy we felt! No one could stop.

Then the pastor made signs to stop and we all sat. We were introduced, and we heard stories of the church and the people’s struggles. We heard of their deep faith in God in spite of the daily challenges faced. The young have no access to jobs or proper education and yet it is the youth who are most enthusiastic about being faithful and doing what is needed for the growth of the church. We learned about women who must walk many miles for drinking water and yet are so faithful in teaching their children the stories of the church, the importance of belonging to the church. We learned about how

older men and women want to retain their cultural practices in worshipping the living God and inviting people to faith. We were amazed at the vibrancy and enthusiasm of the women and youth in the life of the church. They have so little and face so many challenges making ends meet and providing for the education of their children.

When we asked what they would like us to take back they said they would like some help to repair their church building. They asked if MWC’s Global Church Sharing Fund could help by providing some musical instruments. They were being ridiculed by villagers because they worshipped in a broken building and did not want God to be ridiculed. They told us they have no one else and felt left alone and are now so happy to see us from different parts of the world.

We assured them that they are not alone; we are one body and when one member hurts, all members hurt. We assured them we would take back their stories and share, pray and find ways to walk with them to help. We told them that we were moved by the joy and vibrancy with which they worship and the hope they have demonstrated in their dependency on God and not on material things. We told them that we all have gifts and need to find ways to share these gifts with each other and they and we together were encouraged.

We felt we were on holy ground, tasting a portion of heaven on earth. We gave thanks for this experience, one that will be unforgettable for a long time. We felt so blessed after shaking hands, laughing and hugging one another.

On the long journey back to Accra, despite being extremely tired, I found myself humming again, “You’re not alone, we are one body...” The song assured me of the Spirit’s continued presence, renewed joy and hope, knowing that our circle of friends in Christ has enlarged and we indeed are One Body. Thanks be to God for the immense riches in these experiences we enjoyed on behalf of the global church.

Cynthia Peacock of Kolkata, India, is chair of the Deacons Commission of Mennonite World Conference. She led a delegation of fraternal visitors to Ghana and Nigeria, November 23 to December 7, 2010. See page 7 for more on the trip.