

Courier Correo Courier

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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

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Word from the Editor



The cost of hospitality

Displacement caused by war, violence, politics or religion is sadly not new in the story of human history. For some members of our global family, like those in Colombia, it has been an ongoing reality. For others, like our members in Europe, the massive and desperate recent exodus from Syria and Iraq added to the steady trickle of migrants from Africa has brought the issue to their doorstep.

So it seems an appropriate time for the church to speak to itself about how God calls us to treat strangers.

The Middle Eastern culture of the Old Testament demanded hospitality toward strangers, and the New Testament urges it even more strongly (Romans 12:13). The stranger we serve may be an angel (Hebrews 13:2) or Godself (Matthew 25:40–43).

Hospitality can be a balm for people who have been displaced, or a threat to people who want to protect boundaries of identity or tradition. It is not easy; hospitality demands that we give something of ourselves. It goes beyond charity to mutuality.

And through its practice, we proclaim the gospel.

In this issue's Inspiration and Reflection article (p 3–5), pastor Janti Widjaja from Indonesia explores how the Christian call builds on Eastern traditions. Hospitality is a response to God's nudging and to the needs before us, and it is motivated by assurance of enough.

The three national Mennonite churches amid a Muslim majority population in Indonesia practice hospitality in daily life and after all-too-frequent natural disasters in the island chain located atop intersecting tectonic plates. In so doing, they have opened respectful relationships with those of other religious faiths and even with a militant group, and have seen God provide as they respond.

In our Perspectives section, we read personal experiences of pastors from Canada to Colombia who are giving and receiving. Ryan Dueck asks himself and his congregation to develop the heart of a stranger as they learn the ways and needs of a refugee family they are welcoming from Syria (p 10). When Walter Jakobeit's congregation in Germany opened their church to at-risk teenagers, they had to sacrifice their comfortable schedules (p 8). In return, however, they have developed rich relationships with a new community of people and have seen the gospel take root in the hearts of newcomers. Elizabeth Kunjam in caste-segmented Indian society recalls how hospitality cuts across the boundaries to welcome outcasts and transform broken lives (p 9). And Ricardo Esquivia, a peace activist in Colombia, has both given and received humble generosity, having been himself persecuted and displaced in his own country (p 6–7).

These stories encourage us to ask what self-giving, Jesus-following hospitality might look like in our own lives and communities. There will be costs, but also rewards.

Finally, we tour Latin America – where ethnic and theological differences challenge our churches to practice hospitality even within the Anabaptist faith family. Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, editor of *Mission and Migration*, the volume on Latin America in the Mennonite World History Series published by MWC, offers a brief analysis of the historical context and present issues of Mennonite churches in the region (p 11–15). MWC regional representatives Peter and Gladys Siemens introduce readers to the Mennonite churches of Brazil and their current opportunities (p 16–17).

Amid the many cares of this world, from church conflict to state violence, I pray this issue will exhort you to live as citizens of the already-but-not-yet kingdom of God as we offer hospitality – physical and spiritual – to both strangers and siblings in the name of Christ.

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

Cover Photo:

On an MWC Commission visit to Panama, Joji Pantoja (Peace Commission chair) of the Philippines braids the hair of Gladys Siemens (Deacons Commission member) of Brazil in the home of an indigenous Panamanian.
Photo courtesy of Henk Stenvers.

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Hospitality

Piring bukan beling
Hospitality not hostility



by Janti Widjaja

Indonesians are famous for their hospitality. If you visit their home, they will serve you food and drink. In the villages, the housewife will cook the family's only chicken to serve a guest.

I learned hospitality from my parents. I grew up in a big family with nine children in a small home with only three small bedrooms. We were not rich, but our family helped our cousins and our friends who needed housing and food. They often stayed with us so they could continue their studies. Our small home was like an oasis for everyone who needed love and care. My father and mother became parents to them all.

My mother and father taught us to love, care, understand, help and support each other. We shared what we had with others, not just thinking about ourselves. My parents also taught us to respect everyone regardless of their status, faith or tribe. For example, my cousin is Buddhist, my brother's friend (of Arab descent) is Muslim, my sister's friends included a Catholic Christian

from Java and a Hindu believer from Bali – and all were warmly welcomed into our home. My parent also taught us about equality, to treat and respect everyone as human beings. The woman who served as our maid became a part of our family; she sat and ate with us in the same table at the same time.

After a time away (I went to the USA 1995–2001), I came back to Indonesia where the situation had become completely different. I was surprised to see Muslim women wearing long dresses, blouses with long sleeves and hijab (headcoverings); in the old days, they weren't recognizably different by their clothing. Some clerics were teaching it is *haram* (forbidden) for Muslim to greet Christians with "Merry Christmas" and for a Muslim to visit Christian worship. I was so sad; I remembered in the old days when we really had a good relationship and respected each other. We sent food and visited our Muslim neighbours for *Idul Fitri* (*Eid al-Fitr*, the end of Ramadan) and our Muslim neighbours visited us at Christmas. The tradition to visit and celebrate, to spend our respective joyous time together, is gone.

A church fellowship meal in Taipei.
Photo by Merle Good.

I was sad to learn that in Maluku and Poso, Sulawesi, where Christians and Muslims used to live peacefully side by side, they have come into conflict and even killed each other.

Violent conflicts have been causing displaced people and refugees in many areas of the world. We as the Anabaptist communion worldwide would like to think about what it means to welcome the stranger, especially when those strangers hold a different religious belief than us. What should we do?

Let's learn and be inspired from 3 stories.

Elijah and a widow from Zarephath
(1 King 17:8–16)

Elijah is fleeing from Jezebel who is trying to kill him. The brook has dried up but God promised to supply Elijah's need. The word of the Lord comes to him, saying, "Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and stay there; behold, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you" (NASB).

Hospitality is opening the door (welcoming), being open so the other will get to know us and know our God.



Elijah does not move until there is communion with God. He waits until he has direction from the Lord: “Go to Zarephath.” The Hebrew word *halak*, used here for “go” it carries the idea of travelling or journeying through hardships and danger. And the first command “arise” means to wake up.

It is interesting that Elijah goes to Zarephath which belongs to the land of Jezebel who wants to kill Elijah. God provides for Elijah through a Gentile woman, a woman outside the circle of God’s own people. She is a poor, destitute, depressed widow facing starvation.

It is interesting too, that the widow is willing to give the one and only meal she has. The widow is willing to share her resources/food in her scarcity. She opens her door for Elijah to stay at her house. She gets to know God from Elijah.

Hizbullah & Mennonites (Yogyakarta)

The 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake (also known as the Bantul earthquake) occurred at 05:54 local time on 27 May 2006 with a magnitude of 6.3 on the Richter scale and a maximum intensity of IX (*Destructive*) on the Medvedev–Sponheuer–Karnik scale. The shock occurred on the southern coast of Java near the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta, and caused more than 5,700 deaths and 37,000 injuries, and financial losses of 29.1 trillion Indonesian Rupiah (US\$3.1 billion).

The earthquake toppled down all the building and houses. Almost all the homes of those from our outpost Mennonite church in Pundong (GKMI Yogyakarta Cabang Pundong) were ruined by the earthquake.

What was the Mennonite church do?

Amid our condition, we built tents, a community kitchen, community bathrooms, a health clinic. With assistance from Mennonite Central Committee and other NGOs, we helped everyone in need, regardless of their faith. We shared electricity with the community.

Volunteers from different backgrounds and faiths worked together with us. Hizbullah soldiers (Sunan Bonang division) guarded our logistics truck (because of the scarcity, there was a lot of robbery). The Mennonites and Hizbullah’s carpenter worked together to build houses. After all the houses were done, then we built the church and the community building.

Outpouring of provision

Mount Merapi in Central Java, Indonesia, began an increasingly violent series of eruptions that continued from late October 2010 into November. Seismic activity around the volcano increased from mid-September onwards, culminating in repeated outbursts of lava and ashes. Large eruption columns formed, causing numerous pyroclastic flows down the heavily populated slopes of the volcano. Authorities said Merapi’s eruption was the largest since the 1870s.

More than 350,000 people were evacuated from the affected area. However, many remained behind or returned to their homes while the eruptions were continuing. During the eruptions, 353 people were killed. The ash plumes from the volcano also caused major disruption to aviation across Java. On 3 December 2010, the official alert status was reduced to level 3 from level 4, as the eruptive activity had subsided.



Top: Families in Pennsylvania opened their homes to guests from around the world during Mennonite World Conference’s Assembly 16 in July 2015. Photo by Liesa Unger.

Above: Young Anabaptists from around the world practiced hospitality by listening to different perspectives and learning about fellow Christians at the MWC Global Youth Summit. Photo by Aubrey Kreider.

The church also suffered when the Mount Merapi erupted. More than 350,000 people were evacuated to the stadium, school, church, village yard. They were hungry.

What should we Mennonites do? We are a small congregation (100–150 members); most are poor. But we wanted to do something. We asked God's blessing; with Rp 3,000,000 (approximately US\$300) that we collected, we made a community kitchen in the church. We cooked and sent 1,500 boxes of food every day to the relief location.

God is great! God sent people – some who we didn't know at all – to help and support. Like the widow at Zarephath, we had supplies to the end. When we all were too tired, God sent people to help us, so we had strength to cook again. We did this ministry until done.

Food, not fragments

Piring Bukan Beling. This is a Javanese illustration about relationships. (*Piring* = plate, *beling* = a sharp broken glass.) *Beling* is like a bottle with its bottom broken off to hurt another person in a drunken fight. It is also the word for the sharp fragments embedded in a high wall surrounding a house to harm a robber who tries to climb the wall. So *piring bukan beling* is like this: it is useless to build the high wall; you are still not safe because it makes a boundary between you and your neighbour. Don't be hostile to the others or hurt them. It will be better if you show hospitality; give *piring* – a plate with good food to your neighbour. Then your enemy may become your friend. You can work together and help each other. Offer hospitality, not hostility.

The events of life are tools and agents of God. The same events that test us often become the means by which God is able to use us in ministry to others. In other words, our trials often become vehicles for ministry, opportunities to manifest the life of Jesus Christ and the power and love of God. In the same way that Elijah's request became a means of meeting needs in the lives of the widow and her son, our inadequacies may become the means of meeting another's need.

Through the disasters that happen to us, God reminds us again that we are not here for ourselves, even in our pain and need. God cares for us, but we are not alone. God cares for others too, and often ministers to the people around us through the character changes God is bringing about via our own suffering or want.

Hospitality means that even in our pain and scarcity, we are to think of others and help them. This goes totally against the self-centred society focused on what is best for me regardless of what it could mean to others.

Hospitality means opening the door and being willing to share what we have, even when that is the last and the only resource.

Never fix your eyes on the conditions. Look beyond the instruments to the real source of supply – the Lord. Never judge or measure God's supply by what we can see. God is the One who does exceeding abundantly beyond all we can ask or think (Ephesians 3:20) – like the provision the Mennonite church experienced when Mount Merapi erupted.

We need to walk by faith not by sight.

Don't count only money but count God's blessings. Do God's work with love and compassion. Start from what we have, don't wait until we think that's enough. We know that by sharing our blessings with others, our giving will not be our lack.

Hospitality is opening the door (welcoming), being open so the other will get to know us and know our God. We must open the door even for the enemy and serve the enemy with food and kindness. Hospitality also means to enter the open door, to enter relationship with another, being humble to receive love from the others, even from someone that we consider weaker. We must open our eyes, choose to live side-by-side and learn to understand each other.

Hospitality means to treat the others as equals, regardless of faith, people, tribe, organization or church. Don't be prejudiced. Treat others as friends/family. Respect the others. Remember that we all belong to the world community. We are God's creation.

Hospitality means that we are open to God's way. We need to ask God for the compassion and love to reach out to others with God's power and love.

"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:33–34, ESV).



Janti Diredja Widjaja is a pastor with one of the Mennonite conferences, Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She has served on the MWC Faith and Life Commission (2009–2015) and is currently studying psychology at Gajah Mada University in Yogyakarta.



Colombian Mennonite churches share the love of Christ through Pan Y Paz on Peace Sunday by giving out bread to strangers on the street. Photo courtesy of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ciudad Berna, Bogotá, Colombia.

Hospitality

Exploring what it means to offer hospitality as followers of Christ

Shocking photographs published in the news media awoke the Western world to the refugee crisis last September. With a heightened awareness of the issue, the Anabaptist communion worldwide considers what it means to welcome the stranger as those from different religious backgrounds enter our neighbourhoods. How does Christ's love for us motivate and guide our response to strangers in our local context?

Colombia

A ministry of inclusive hospitality

by Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas

A Scripture: "Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49, NIV).

A story: A refugee complained bitterly to God because they had not let him in a church and God responded: "Don't feel bad. They don't let me in either."

Using this Biblical passage and short story as reference points, I write this simple note from my own personal testimony to contrast these texts.

Colombia, where I currently live, is a country with an internal war for the last 60 years and has the last internal armed conflict remaining in the Western hemisphere. With more than five million internally displaced people, it has the second highest rate of internally displaced people in the world according to the United Nations, plus has another million external refugees in other countries. Twenty-five thousand violent deaths occur each year, thousands of persons are disappeared and kidnapped, and the Colombian government recognizes more than six million victims in general.

If there were oil or any other economic interest of the multinationals in our conflict, this impressive social scenario would have appeared in the mainstream news in the U.S., Canada and Europe. The Anabaptist churches of the North would have heard about it.

Threats and uncertainty

After living for many years in Bogotá, in 1986, my wife, our children and I moved to a small town called San Jacinto, in the northern part of the country in the Caribbean region.

There we acquired a farm, house, agricultural machinery and vehicles, and with my wife and four small sons, we lived from my law practice, agriculture and journalism. We supported the social and grassroots work of the peasants in the region.

Due to my work with the *campesinos* (local peasant farmers), I was accused of being an ideologue of the guerrilla movement. The local police commander, and later a paramilitary group called "Death to Kidnappers" (referring to the guerrillas), began to persecute me and threaten me on a regular basis.

In March 1988, the Colombian National Army and the police joined forces to raid our home. The death threats increased. Our friends avoided us. The banks wouldn't serve us. Living there became unbearable. Because of the death threats, we found ourselves forced to move to the nearby city of Cartagena, losing everything we had acquired with our labour.

There in Cartagena, we received hospitality from one of my uncles, who opened his home to us. In his patio, with support from the Mennonite church, we built a dwelling to reside in while the storm passed.

But the situation of a displaced person, whether displaced internally or internationally, is quite difficult. You are leaving

It is when we practice these acts of hospitality that the damnation of Sodom is broken and the beautiful phrase of Jesus becomes reality.

behind your territory, friends, family members, job, belongings, culture, contacts and good name. Additionally, you enter an unknown territory, which is threatening and inhospitable; a world full of prejudice and stigmas.

From being considered an upright person, suddenly, you are suspected of terrorism and criminality which creates great fear among your neighbours. You enter into an environment of fear, not only due to your displacement, but because all the people surrounding you – your friends, relatives and churches – all fear that they may be mistaken for or pointed out as the enemy and declared "military objectives," threatened and hurt.

The fear impregnated in others is what most affects the person who is displaced

No one was excluded and there was always a place for the stranger, the traveller and those who suffer.

as it paralyzes those people and hinders hospitality and solidarity. Many church people want to be hospitable, but they have families, small children, debts and mortgages, and are afraid of endangering their lives and threatening the stability of those who depend on them. They say that if they were alone, they would give their lives to help, but in these conditions, it would be irresponsible of them and unfair to their children.

In July 1989, we arrived once again to Bogotá; beaten down, but not defeated. A displaced and threatened couple with four children. We arrived in a city affected by terrorism, full of the living dead begging at every intersection, boys and girls abandoned in the streets, the threat of crime; surrounded by areas of racist and discriminatory poverty.

The central government had used the excuse of war to suppress most civil liberties and ordered raids and arbitrary detentions each day in the city and in the country. Distrust and fear reigned in the city. The ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu said "War is the art of deceit," to which American politician Hiram Johnson famously added, "where truth is the first victim." This makes it difficult to believe in someone and even believe in God.

Shelter and welcome

However, today my family and I are alive thanks to decisive action by a group of people belonging to the Teusaquillo (Bogotá) Mennonite Church, headed by pastor Peter Stucky. Although they had young children and people under their responsibility, they overcame fear of stigmatization and of being declared supporters of the guerrillas, and organized themselves to offer inclusive hospitality that sheltered us and gave us enough energy to awaken our power of resilience and to recover.

It is when we practice these acts of hospitality that the damnation of Sodom is broken and the beautiful phrase of Jesus becomes reality: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did for me" (Matthew 25:35-40, NRSV).

But it did not end there with the assistance to one family who were members of the church. The concept of inclusive hospitality expanded. No one was excluded and there was always a place for the stranger, the traveller and those who suffer. Inclusive hospitality opened the doors of the church and created an entire ecclesiastical ministry to support hundreds of displaced people who arrived fleeing their lands after losing their belongings and their hope. "The refugee [or displaced person] is the living messenger of misfortune, bringing with him the image, smell and taste of the tragedy of war, genocide, slaughter and abandonment of their home because of violence." (Javier Jurado, member of the Arjai Association, an initiative of philosophy students).

For many years, this ministry of the Teusaquillo Mennonite Church has functioned in Bogotá. Hundreds of people have been assisted and comforted. From there, dozens of displaced people have been sponsored by the Canadian Mennonite church and today enjoy a new and tranquil life in that country. This ministry also expanded to the city of Quito, Ecuador, which receives hundreds of Colombians who flee the country seeking refuge.

To create, initiate and maintain a ministry such as this, open to any person regardless of where they come from, what they believe, what political ideology they have, whether their persecutors are guerrillas or paramilitaries means a great risk. Sometimes, members of the congregation stop attending. However, we are convinced of the coherence between the mandate of Jesus and the right of asylum. The community is strengthened and new leaders emerge open to hospitality.

It is gratifying to be a historic, Anabaptist peace church where no refugee will protest to God for being denied entry, and like Job we can say, "I have never turned away a stranger but have opened my doors to everyone" (Job 31:32, NLT).



Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas is a lawyer and a member of the Colombian Mennonite Church, with more than 45 years of experience in peacebuilding from a community and ecclesial base. He is director of Sembrandopaz (Planting Seeds of Peace) and works with returned communities in the Colombian Caribbean.

Germany

Love opens hearts to learn more

by **Walter Jakobeit**

Refugees have been part of the story of the Mennonite Brethren church in Neuwied since its beginning: the history of our church is marked by efforts to integrate people from different cultural backgrounds.

Evangelische Freikirche Mennonitische Brüdergemeinde Neuwied, Germany, was founded after World War II by refugees from West Prussia (now Poland) and is the oldest Mennonite Brethren Church in Western Europe. At the beginning, the Mennonites who founded the church had to work out a way to worship together with brothers and sisters from different Christian traditions like Protestant, Plymouth Brethren and Baptists. The next generation learned to integrate Christians from Croatia and South America who joined the church in the 1960s. In the mid-1970, the integration of great numbers of Mennonites from the former Soviet Union was a challenge. Even though they had the same Mennonite roots, they held to some specific traditions that differed from the culture of our church. But with God, nothing is impossible. Over the years, brothers and sisters from North America, Asia and Africa have also become part of this colourful community of Christ followers.

Presently, we are a congregation of 460 members that Christians from more than 14 different nations call their home. Even though the background and traditions of our church members are sometimes very different, their faith in and commitment to the one Lord Jesus Christ help to build bridges between each other.

A new chapter

A completely new chapter of church life began about eight years ago, when we had the courage to open our doors to people with a completely different religious background.

How did that happen?

Community leaders from our city came to us with the request: would we be willing to open a youth club and help the city take care of young people 12–17 years of age with an immigrant background? Looking back, we know we were very naïve at the time; nevertheless, we were faithful when we said yes to obey God's command "to seek the peace and prosperity of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV).

And so, this youth club (30 young people from Muslim and Yazidi background) found a home in our church building. We quickly realized that these young people took it for granted that they could attend "their meeting place" at any time. When the doors opened, they entered, whether it was to a ladies meeting, a prayer time or another event. When they found the doors locked, they would simply sit on the steps in front of the entrance and hang out there, not caring if it was day or night.

The first three months this youth club opened were really stressful for the church! We only survived this time with much prayer, patience, discussions and by setting up some rules and consequences for the youth.

We hear often that it is not what we say that makes them come to church but the warm love and care they feel.

Appreciation, respect and Christian charity

To our surprise, the relationship with the young people got better in the coming months. In our church, the young people experienced something they had not received so far: appreciation, respect and Christian charity. The leaders of the city were amazed to see the behaviour of these young people change in a positive way.

Through the experience with the youth club, we were prepared to welcome the refugees and asylum seekers with open arms and hearts when they came to church looking for help and fellowship. For us, their religion is very foreign. It's hard to hear what these people have experienced on their journey to Germany, fleeing from war and terror. But on the other hand, it is also hard for them to get settled in a completely new culture with all these traumatic experiences that happened to them. We hear often that it is not what we say that makes them come to church but the warm love and care they feel.

This love opened their hearts to learn more about this Jesus of whom we speak. And so, we started with a Bible study group in Farsi and later another in Arabic. When people out of this group find faith in the living God and are baptized, we are aware that there will be more changes in our church through these new brothers and sisters.

Every nation and tongue

Everybody noticed that when the first brother from Iran was baptized. When he came out of the water, his Persian friends responded with a storm of true jubilation that struck the rest of the congregation speechless with surprise. But when we realised that we were witnessing God's promise come true – that people from "every nation and tongue" will be part of his kingdom (Revelation 7:9) – there was joy everywhere!

Meanwhile, we have learned that it's a blessing that our typical German characteristics such as punctuality and order are being supplemented with characteristics from other countries, such as spontaneity and hospitality. Though hospitality is supposed to be a special trademark for Christians, we are learning a lot about it from people from an Eastern background. They always seem to have time to talk and enjoy a cup of tea while having fellowship. Their doors and tables are always open for guests.

Investing in strangers takes courage, because in doing so we leave our well-known comfort zone. But what we learn living this way is indescribable. The encounters with my new friends from around the world, has changed my life so positively that I cannot imagine what it was like when they were not yet a part of my life.



Walter Jakobeit is pastor of the Evangelische Freikirche Mennonitische Brüdergemeinde Neuwied, Germany, (MB church). He is chairman of the AMBD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden Deutschland) a national church that was accepted to the MWC General Council in July 2015.

India

Hospitality transforms

by Elisabeth Kunjam

Deymaand's story
In the late 1970s, during the period in India's history known as the Emergency (when democratic freedoms were effectively suspended), Deymaand, an 18-year-old youth, decided to be baptized in a local Mennonite Church. Since Deymaand's family belonged to another faith, they opposed his decision to accept Christian faith. When Deymaand refused to turn back, his family disowned him. So Deymaand decided to leave his village. This resulted in a mob-like situation in the village. Due to political unrest in India in those days, Deymaand was immediately arrested to avoid any undue incident and was brought to Rajnandgaon to be imprisoned. A month later when the situation in the village was under control, Deymaand was released from prison but was asked not to enter the village again.

Disowned by his own family, Deymaand had nowhere to go and knew no one who would shelter him. But the pastor of the Mennonite Church of Rajnandgaon (MCR) welcomed Deymaand into the church and into his own family as one of their own sons. Deymaand decided to pursue theological education and completed his theological studies from Union Biblical Seminary, Yeotmal. From there, he went on to serve the Lord through preaching and teaching the Bible across India. In the midst of threat to his life and equal threat to the church, MCR helped sustain Deymaand and his faith in the Lord Jesus.

Sarika's story

In 1990s, under the leadership of pastor Theo Philus Singh, MCR started an outreach program in the State of Maharashtra, planting some new churches in villages. There was much opposition and persecution from the extremists. Members of the newly formed church would often visit homes of the members of MCR to find support and spiritual growth. The people of MCR risked social reputation and the

threats of the fanatics when welcoming the new believers in their homes. Members of MCR visited the newly formed churches and ministered to needs even in the face of opposition.

A young man from MCR married a young woman, named Sarika¹. As time went by, Sarika discovered that her husband was an alcoholic. She was being physically abused at home. When Sarika couldn't take it anymore, she approached the women's group of MCR. The church council tried its best to bring reconciliation between the couple but all efforts were in vain. So, the women's group helped Sarika and her nine-year-old daughter flee from her abusive husband. They received Sarika and her daughter in their homes and sheltered them. The women's group offered them spiritual, moral and financial support.

Today, after 15 years, the daughter is well-educated, serving as a nurse in a reputed hospital. Sarika recognizes that MCR received her when she was a stranger and helped her when she needed to find a way out. She is grateful to the women's group for all that was done to protect and sustain their lives.

Hospitality and evangelism

These stories are just a few among several others where the Mennonites reached out to their communities and welcomed strangers among themselves. Such opportunities have transformed not only the life of the church but have helped the church to transform lives of many others. Our understanding of hospitality is to not just offer food and water to strangers and send them their way but also being willing to journey with them even in the basics of life.

We have come to understand that hospitality is an integral part of evangelism. Without creating space in our own lives for others, we cannot lead others to make

¹ Name changed. Sarika originally belonged to another faith. She and her husband had eloped to get married. Later on MCR had received them as members.

Without creating space in our own lives for others, we cannot lead others to make space for Christ in their lives.

space for Christ in their lives. Hospitality has never been easy because it brings disruption in our lives.

Hospitality, in context of evangelism, puts at risk our own identity as a church. Receiving people from other faith increases our struggle to evade integration of rites, rituals and traditions from other faiths. This has taught us the importance of being strongly rooted in the Lord, being united as a church and discerning between right and wrong.

The Conference of the Mennonite Church in India (MCI) has been involved in activities of hospitality since the beginning. Each unit church has stories to tell. My home church is thankful to God for the many privileges of receiving strangers in our midst and ministering to them in a variety of ways. Being a part of this church has proved formative and helped shape my understanding of hospitality.



Elisabeth Kunjam, originally a member of the Mennonite Church in India, became a member of the Governing Council of the Mennonite Brethren Churches in India in 2005 after marrying Frank Sanjay. She serves as a member of MWC's Deacons Commission. She is also coordinator of Theologically Trained Anabaptist Women of Asia (TTAWA), an association that started with the help of MWC's Deacons Commission in 2012.

Canada

The heart of a stranger

by Ryan Dueck

Once I heard a newcomer to Canada describe the relief he felt at being welcomed into a church community of other recent immigrants after a long period of disorientation. His words stuck with me:

They knew how to embrace the stranger because they had the heart of a stranger themselves.

In other words, those who know firsthand the experience of being outsiders – the desperation and loneliness that come along with being separated from all that is familiar and all that gives one meaning, security and stability; the frustration that comes with not being able to speak the language; what it means to long for embrace – these ones have the heart of a stranger. These ones have hearts that are willing to make room.

Choosing strangeness

And yet, the experience of being a “stranger” in any meaningful sense is foreign to many of us. Some of us have experienced discomfort as we navigate unfamiliar contexts of our own choosing. However, these are mostly the inconveniences borne out of choices exercised within the parameters of privilege. Others have never even had the luxury of being a “stranger” because we’ve never been able to travel far beyond the places of our birth.

But how many of us have been driven to distant shores by violence and political instability and poverty? Have we ever arrived in an unfamiliar land with few possessions, no language and years of trauma in the rearview mirror? Have we ventured forth in contexts where few people look or sound like us? Where the customs are incomprehensible, the beliefs impenetrable? How many of us have been strangers in any sense deep enough to produce “the heart of a stranger?”

So, what would it take to develop the “heart of a stranger” in our present cultural moment, with so much polarizing discourse among Christians (and others) about the Syrian refugee crisis and what it asks of us? There is so much fear and suspicion, so many angry and misinformed words, so much reactionary and impulsive dismissal, so many arms protectively closing rather than opening in embrace. How might we move beyond these reflexive responses to better paths?

What would it take to develop the ‘heart of a stranger’?

Memory and imagination

Could it be as simple as looking a few generations back and remembering that nearly all of us are a part of a story of strangers on some level? Could our unwillingness to embrace the stranger be due, in part, to the fact that our hearts have lost or forgotten or never developed the ability to put ourselves in the stranger’s shoes?

Could our chief problem be little more than a failure of memory or imagination – a failure either to remember what it was like to be the “other” that longs for welcome or to even imagine this possibility? Could the “heart of a stranger” be as near to each one of us as choosing to remember and imagine differently?

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the divine command to care for the stranger is tied directly to the fact that the people of Israel were also strangers once (Deuteronomy 10:19). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus sums up all of the Law and the Prophets – and “all” is a pretty comprehensive word, it should be remembered – in the simple exhortation to do to others as we would have done

to us (Matthew 22:40). The former urges us to better memory, the latter to better imagination. We need both, if we are ever to develop the right kind of hearts. And once we begin to take these steps – once we try to remember and imagine in better ways – it becomes easier to intentionally move toward the stranger.

The church that I am a part of is welcoming nine people from Syria into our community and into our lives. We, along with others in our community, have spent months preparing for their arrival. We’ve secured a house, applied a fresh coat of paint, purchased food, clothing and toys. We have made connections with others in our community: other Christian churches, folks from the university, a group of local doctors, members of the local Muslim community. We have had opportunities to share meals with Syrian families already in Lethbridge and to learn from them in impromptu cooking classes and cultural background information evenings. We have made new friends.

We have tried to develop the heart of a stranger. And in so doing, we have discovered that the heart of a stranger is actually not far from any of us as long as we are willing to remember and imagine in the right ways.



Ryan Dueck is pastor of Lethbridge Mennonite Church in Alberta, Canada. The church is part of a local Ecumenical Social Action Group that is sponsoring two Syrian refugee families to resettle in Lethbridge. He regularly blogs at ryandueck.com and contributes to Wondering Fair, “an online café” for discussing matters of faith.

Latin America

Brief historic journey, profile, tendencies and challenges of Mennonites in Latin America

by Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares

These reflections are a brief summary linking the historical development, profile and tendencies of the multiethnic Anabaptist communities and Mennonite churches in Latin America that belong to MWC, and present the challenges faced by Mennonites in their mission work, ministry and witness for peace and justice as they follow Jesus in a multiethnic continent.

Multiethnic character of Anabaptist and Mennonite communities and churches

Argentina. In 1917, the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in Elkhart, Indiana, sent missionaries Josephus W. and Emma Shank, and Tobias K. and Mae Hershey to Argentina; in 1919 they planted the first Mennonite church in Latin America in the town of Pehuajó. This missionary effort led to church-planting among the Tobas in 1943.

Mexico. Ever since the first decades of the past century, the Mennonite presence in Mexico was characterized as ethnic due to migration. An example is Old Colony Mennonites, originally from Russia, migrating from Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Canada). It was located in the city of San Antonio de los Arenales, Mexico, from 1922 to 1926, founded with the migration of around 6,000 people.

Paraguay. A total of 1,763 Mennonite settlers from Canada emigrated to Paraguay between 1926 and 1927, establishing Menno Colony. Fernheim Colony, which was also located in the Paraguayan Chaco, was made up of 2,000 migrants from: a) Molotschna in Russia (1930–32), b) Amur, a region near Harbin in China (1932), c) a small group from Poland. The third colony called Friesland was founded in 1937 due to the breakup of Fernheim Colony and was located in eastern Paraguay. It was from this colony that missionary work began among the Enlhet in 1937, which led to a new indigenous Mennonite church organization in Yalve Sanga (Lago Armadillo).



The annual gathering of Latin American Anabaptist-Mennonites celebrated birthdays in their midst as they gathered in Bolivia in 2015. Photo by Luis Ma. Alman Bornes.

The Mennonite Anabaptist history in Latin America must be seen as the encounter between the evangelical brothers and sisters sent by North American mission societies and the Latin and native peoples of this continent. On the other hand, Mennonite colonists (with many ethnic and cultural customs inherited in Europe in the 16th century) settled in the territories of native, Afro-descendant and mestizo peoples. The encounter between culturally diverse people occurred in very different historical contexts and countries; through mutual aid and cultural, ethnic and social tensions, churches that emerged today are a part of Mennonite World Conference.

In the Mennonite-Anabaptist communities and churches, conversations and praises to God can be heard in English, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Creole-English, Creole-French, but also in Qom, Guaraní, Bribri, Enlhet, Cabécar, Kekchí, Tupí, Garífuna, Quechua, Emberá-Wounmeu and many other indigenous tongues. The dynamics of the interaction between the various cultures in the formation of churches and faith communities was fostered since

the very beginning by Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite voluntary agencies, education organizations, Mennonite seminaries and universities (largely from the United States and Canada, but also from Europe). They provided vitally significant input on the practice of following Jesus.

Throughout the history of constant migrations, tension can be seen between those who prioritize the growth of communities and the building of temples – without challenging the social structures of their times – and those who emphasize the struggle for peace and justice as a priority of the gospel. On the basis of these migrations – of Mennonite groups of German origin, as well as internal and external migrations by indigenous peoples – Anabaptist communities and churches emerged.

Regarding the beginning of this movement in Latin America, the presence of Anabaptist-Mennonite churches and

The challenges of the gospel amid the mis/understandings between such diverse communities are just as strong as at the time of the first ethnic migrations of Mennonites in Latin America.

communities in almost all the countries is characteristic of the last decades (1980–2015). When MWC's 2015 statistics are compared against those of 2009, the countries that show the greatest Anabaptist growth are located in Cuba (150%), Haiti (70%) and Bolivia (80%). Here, we observe that Mennonite communities marked by intercultural encounter and an understanding of the purpose of ministry and evangelism share significant aspects linking them to their past.

Cuba. In the 1950s, the Brethren in Christ came to Havana, Cuba, to evangelize together with Quakers and Nazarenes in Cuatro Caminos. In 1954, the Franconia Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (USA) sent missionary Henry Paul Yoder and his family to plant a church in the province of Las Villas, in the town of Rancho Veloz. The revolution headed by Fidel Castro against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959 brought about a great exodus of North American missionaries who left the island in succeeding years. During the revolutionary period, the leadership of Juana M. García was fundamental to maintaining the church work that the Brethren in Christ had begun in the town of Cuatro Caminos, in Havana. On August 19, 2008, new missionary work was begun by Mennonites in Cuba. Pastor Alexander Reyna Tamayo and his family had served before as pastors of the Iglesia Evangélica Misionera (evangelical missionary church). In 2004, he met Janet Breneman from the USA and Jack Suderman from the Canadian Mennonite church, after they had given courses on Anabaptist tradition in the Iglesia Evangélica

Libre (Evangelical Free Church). In agreement with the Iglesia Evangélica Misionera, Alexander Reyna contacted the Canadian Mennonite church and formed this new organization that works in small home cells in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Olguín, Granma, Villa Clara and Cienfuegos. The tremendous growth experienced in Cuba, especially in the last decade, reflects the new political situation on the island – which has recently renewed diplomatic relations with the United States – and the religious openness it is experiencing.

Haiti. The poorest country in Latin America with a population originally from Africa, Haiti has suffered its governments' political and economic crisis as well as a devastating earthquake on 12 January 2010. Haiti is another example where Anabaptist churches have a multiethnic profile and service tendencies.

In the case of Cuba and Haiti, we need to carry out a detailed study in order to explain their great numerical growth as well as the current cultural profile of the life and mission of the members of their communities.

Bolivia. This country received the greatest migration of conservative Mennonites of German background to Latin America in the last two decades. From 1980 to 2007, a total of 53 new colonies have been established in the provinces of Pando, Beni and Santa Cruz. These colonies originated from the internal division of other Mennonite colonies in Bolivia, Belize, Paraguay, Mexico, Argentina and Canada. In 2007, altogether these new colonies had a population of 30,618 people (including adults and children).

In civil society, one of the reactions to this situation seemingly is that agrarian reform still hasn't come to Latin America to strengthen the most disadvantaged groups, such as the native peoples or those of African origin. Our questions once again are oriented toward: a) the relationship that arises between the Mennonite colonies and the surrounding native population; b) the role of missionary societies and the founding of churches whose purpose is to follow Jesus based on their own cultural and ethnic roots. The challenges of the gospel amid the mis/understandings between such diverse communities are just as strong as at the time of the first ethnic migrations of Mennonites in Latin America.

Statistics of Mennonites in Latin America

Mennonites in Latin America

I. Central American Region (including Mexico)

Country	Membership
Mexico	33,881
Guatemala	9,496
Honduras	21,175
El Salvador	909
Nicaragua	11,501
Costa Rica	3,869
Panama	820

II. Caribbean Region

Country	Membership
Bahamas	25
Cuba	8,664
Jamaica	733
Haiti	5,566
Dominican Republic	5,780
Puerto Rico	798
Belize	5,405
Grenada	8
Trinidad & Tobago	300

III. South American Region

Country	Membership
Venezuela	596
Colombia	3,664
Ecuador	1,340
Peru	1,524
Brazil	14,748
Bolivia	26,661
Chile	1,452
Paraguay	34,574
Uruguay	1,464
Argentina	4,974

Grand Total: 199,912

Statistics from Mennonite World Conference, Membership, A Community of Anabaptist related Churches, Membership, June 2015.



Left: The Latin American women's theologians group networked with women theologians from around the world at MWC's Assembly 16 in Pennsylvania in July 2015. Photo by Jim Cheng.

Bottom: Conservative Mennonites from a German background have settled in colonies in Latin America where they preserve a particular way of life. Photo from Martin Durksen Collection at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies archive.

Pastoral challenges

These brief reflections lead us to consider the following pastoral challenges in light of the multiethnic reality of Latin America.

Renewal in the Spirit. The experience of the Spirit, like that of our ancestors in the 16th century, should mean enlightenment and strength so as to recreate our Anabaptist identity in order to take on a) a critical view of the state, b) a theology and pastoral practice in favour of the poor, c) a contextual biblical hermeneutic of nonviolence, d) a commitment for peace and justice, e) a great tolerance of the diverse forms of understanding the profound mystery of God in the multiethnicity of Anabaptist churches and communities, and in the civil society.

Movement of Latin American Women Theologians.

The meeting of African women theologians that convened in 2003 at the MWC Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, marked a great challenge for Latin American women. From this meeting arose the "Movement of Latin American Women Theologians," which has carried out various meetings in Latin America with the support of the MWC project "Global Gift Sharing."

At the MWC Assembly held in July 2009 in Asunción, Paraguay, 120 Latin American Mennonite women met to reflect on the



theme: "Jesus' liberating message for women today." At the 2015 MWC Assembly in Pennsylvania, USA, the "Movement of Latin American Women Theologians" gathered with Anabaptist women theologians from all around the world to promote a global network. One of the major challenges of this movement is how to integrate women into leadership to represent the multiethnic character of Mennonites in Latin America.

Based on this great diversity of peoples and cultures, our families, churches and movements will be able to bear greater witness in society and at the heart of MWC itself.

Witnesses for peace. The witness of those who work for peace, even risking their lives for other people's well being, reminds us of Jesus' words: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of

From this desire to learn from one another and to put our gifts at the service of others, this great ethnic diversity of Mennonites in Latin America can nurture the Anabaptist community.



God" (Matthew 5:9). The testimonies from Mennonite organizations such as Justapaz in Colombia and Mennonite Central Committee during the revolution in Central America in the 1970s and 1980s remind us that it is possible to contribute toward peace. But this leads us to reflect on how shall we bear witness in the new scenarios in Latin America with the growth of the population, the destruction of ancestral cultures and peoples, racism, xenophobia, youth unemployment, environmental pollution and new forms of oppression and violence that destroy populations and life on our planet.

Pastoral models. It is necessary to carry out a more detailed analysis of what the Anabaptist and Mennonite witness has been in Latin America. In the 1970s, a method was developed which guided pastoral action in many communities: "see, judge and act"; in other words, with the help of the social sciences, analyze what occurs; judge this in light of the Word and following Jesus, and finally respond through the ministry with concrete actions. Maybe it is

Panamanian hospitality.
Photos by Henk Stenvers.

time to acknowledge that this method challenges us once again to review our pastoral tasks, but not only in the sense of analyzing a situation of injustice on a macroeconomic and social level, but also based on the needs of a ministry that is attentive to the new expressions of family in the whole continent and the cries of new marginalized groups of our society which also include our indigenous, Afro-descendant and poor mestizo peoples.

The Afro-Caribbean expression. The Caribbean is the region in Latin America which has had the most difficulties in organizing itself due to its history, political complexity and great diversity of languages. At the MWC Assembly in Asunción, Paraguay, in the Latin American caucus, the representatives of the Caribbean expressed their need to also be organized as a region. The strengthening of the theological, social and pastoral reflections of the Anabaptist churches and communities in the Caribbean should be a priority for MWC. Afro-descendant churches in the Caribbean greatly enrich the multiethnic character of MWC, which will strengthen the dialogue between these sisters/brothers and the Afro-Brazilian churches and the Mennonite churches in Africa.





Great ethnic and cultural diversity. Amid economic poverty, the Mennonite communities of indigenous peoples and those of African background in the whole continent, share with us their historical, cultural and spiritual heritage. Through their stories and myths buried deep in the rainforest, the seas, the rivers, the rocks and grasslands, they urge us to protect and look after Mother Earth. Their visions and dreams help us to see the disorder caused by economic systems that protect the economic interests of transnationals, or “promote development” at the expense of destroying cultural diversity.

The visit of the brothers and sisters of indigenous peoples such as the Métis and Ojibwe (North America), the Quechuas (Peru), the Kekchíes (Guatemala), the Emberá and Wounaan (Panama) to the territories of indigenous peoples in the Paraguayan Chaco during the MWC Assembly in Paraguay (2009), is a beautiful sign of unity and fraternity amidst diversity. From this desire to learn from one another and to put our gifts at the service of others, this great ethnic diversity of Mennonites in Latin America can nurture the Anabaptist community; and, furthermore, make real our efforts to be instruments of God in the creation that waits eagerly in the pains of childbirth to be set free, thus we groan inwardly for the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:18-25).



Photos above: The Anabaptist-Mennonite family in the Southern Cone gathers yearly to discuss common theological and practical issues, and to worship and fellowship as they learn together and receive hospitality. Photo by Luis Ma. Alman Bornes.

Right: Colombian Mennonite churches share the love of Christ on Pan Y Paz Sunday by giving out bread to strangers on the street. Photo courtesy of Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Ciudad Berna, Bogotá, Colombia.



Jaime Prieto is from Costa Rica, married to Sílvia de Lima from Brazil, and they are the parents of Thomáz Satuyé. Jaime has a PhD in Theology from the University of Hamburg, Federal Republic of Germany (1992), has been a member of the Costa Rican Mennonite Church since 1971, and now belongs to the Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas Menonitas de Costa Rica (member of MWC). He is author of *Mission and Migration*, the volume on Latin America in the Mennonite World History series published by MWC.

Brazil

Newcomers to natives:

Diversity and challenges for Mennonites in Brazil

by Peter and Gladys Siemens

The first Mennonites arrived in Brazil during the year 1930, coming as refugees from Russia/Ukraine, where their property, churches and schools were taken over by the state during the Stalin years.

Thousands of Mennonites (15,000–25,000) and other groups took their few belongings and travelled to Moscow in 1929 to get a visa. Only 5,000 received permission to leave the country. Arriving in Germany, they were not allowed to stay there, so they had in mind to migrate to Canada. Because of the economic depression of the 1930s, Canada only accepted a few of these migrants, mainly those who had close relatives already living in the country and who were in good health.

The other two options of countries that would receive them were Brazil and Paraguay. European and North American church leaders encouraged the refugees to move as a group to Paraguay, where there was already a settlement of Mennonites from Canada. In Paraguay, Mennonites already had several privileges like exemption from military service and the right to self-government of the colonies. Around 3,000 chose to go to Paraguay.

Early struggles

Another 1,300 chose to move to Brazil. The real reasons for the choice of Brazil are not very clear. Arriving in Brazil, they were settled in a hilly, rainforest region in the south, completely different from what they had known in Russia. One settlement group (Stolz Plateau) could not develop, and they found a good place in Curitiba (300 km north). Here, there was a colder climate and prairie land. Within a few years,

all Mennonites had moved away from the original settlement place.

Among the settlers, there were three different groups: Mennonite Brethren, Mennonite Church (*kirchliche*) and Evangelical Mennonites. Initially, all the services were held together except the assembly meetings, everything in the German language. During World War II – which Brazil joined in 1942 – the use of the German language was prohibited in public until the end of 1945. So the churches conducted their services in Low German, sometimes in Russian and even began to use Portuguese.

Outreach

The first outreach project began in 1948 with an orphanage for abandoned children and with it the first exclusively Portuguese-speaking congregation, in the outskirts of Curitiba. It had the support from Mennonite Brethren (MB) workers from North America. Several other church planting projects followed, and soon the Association of Mennonite Brethren Churches was formed with Portuguese-speaking congregations. In 1994, the German-speaking conference and Portuguese-speaking conference merged, creating COBIM (Convenção Brasileira das Igrejas Evangélicas Irmãos Menonitas: Brazilian MB conference). Today, COBIM has more than 60 congregations and several mission projects in Brazil and Africa.

In the year 1955, the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities of the Mennonite Church General Conference in the United States sent their first missionaries to Brazil. Several congregations were planted in Sao Paulo, central Brazil and the Amazon region, forming the Aliança Evangélica Menonita (evangelical Mennonite alliance). The Associação das Igrejas Menonitas do Brasil (AIMB: association of Mennonite churches

But the Holy Spirit is moving among the different conferences and congregations, to support and help out more each other.

in Brazil, a merger of two German-speaking groups and other evangelical Mennonites), and COM (Commission on Overseas Mission) joined this church planting project and began to send missionaries in 1976. AEM now has some 35 churches and congregations and mission projects in Brazil and Albania.

In the year 1965, Mennonite Central Committee started several agricultural and social development projects in Northeast Brazil. In 2012, this outreach was ended. Some local organizations (AMAI) are keeping on several of the projects, in promoting peace and reconciliation. Three congregations were planted and are affiliated with AEM.

The AIMB conference formed by Mennonites and evangelical Mennonites has nine churches and congregations. For many years, they had their services in German. In the 1980s, this began to change as the churches moved into using more Portuguese to reach out to neighbours and to the Brazilian context. Their strongest mission project is Associação Menonita de Assistência Social (AMAS: Mennonite relief organization) with six daycare centres for low income families,

MWC's Assembly was held in the Global South – Curitiba, Brazil – for the first time in 1972. The theme chosen for the conference, “Jesus Christ Reconciles” was ironic because cultural and theological differences stirred up controversy around the gathering. However, this Assembly resulted in major changes in the conference structure to allow greater representation, especially of Mennonites from the Global South, in conference planning. Photo from the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives via MAID.



Mennonite national churches in Brazil

**Alliança Evangélica Menonita*

Members	2,900
Congregations	35
Headquarters	Paulista, Brazil
Presiding officer	Cristiano Maiximiano de Oliveira

**Associação das Igrejas Menonitas do Brasil*

Members	1,184
Congregations	9
Headquarters	Curitiba, Brazil
Presiding officer	Fridbert August

Church of God in Christ, Mennonite

Members	344
Congregations	5

±*Convenção Brasileira das Igrejas Evangélicas Irmãos Menonitas*

Members	6,960
Congregations	70
Headquarters	Curitiba
Presiding officer	Emerson Luis Cardoso

Igreja Evangélica Irmãos Menonitas Renovada

Members	3,350
Congregations	27
Headquarters	Sao Paulo
Presiding officer	Jose Eguiny Manente

* indicates membership with MWC
 ± COBIM has re-engaged the process of taking up membership with MWC

Source: MWC World Map
www.mwc-cmm.org/maps/world
 Accessed January 2016

caring for more than 1,000 children daily.

In 1960s, a group of Holdeman Mennonites (Church of God in Christ Mennonites) moved from the USA to central Brazil (400 km west of the capital city Brasília), and formed their colony in Rio Verde in the state of Goiás. Their contact with the larger Mennonite community in Brazil is mainly through Anabaptist/Mennonite literature they distribute.

After 85 years in Brazil, the number of church membership of all conferences may be estimated as 12,000 to 15,000. In the last 30 years, there have been several divisions and splits in the churches and conferences, mostly because of Pentecostal/charismatic renewal movements. A desire to move away from the German ethnic church culture has also been a factor that led to the formation of several independent Mennonite congregations.

What are the main challenges for Mennonites in Brazil?

- 1. Identity.** What does it mean to be a Christian Mennonite in Brazil, where 90 percent of all evangelical Christians are Pentecostal/charismatic/neo-charismatic? Related to this, we still have an ethnic church culture. One leader observed: “We do not live in the colony anymore but the colony is still in us.” Brazilians do not understand this Mennonite mindset and find it foreign to their culture.
- 2. Outreach and acculturation.** How to be committed and faithful to a Jesus-centred interpretation of the Bible in the midst of a context of all kinds of religiosity, “Christian superstition,”

“direct divine revelation,” power controlling-centred gospel, prosperity gospel, etc.

- 3. Diversity and conflict.** The congregations with the German speaking background are reaching to the end of language change. Some have two services, one in each language and others have bilingual worship. Interethnic marriages are more common than before. The new baptized members are mostly non-German background. Cultural and theological diversity are every day more present.
- 4. Leadership.** The concept of a servant leader, appointed by the congregation, forming team leadership is being challenged by power-oriented, hierarchical, productivity-centred, even “self-appointed” leadership.

But the Holy Spirit is moving among the different conferences and congregations, to support and help out more each other. The Theological School Fidelis belongs to the 3 bodies: AEM, COBIM and AIMB.

Other projects as the Mennonite School Erasto Gaertner and the Nursing Home Lar Betesda, are under a joint board with Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren.

The need to dialogue, to share experiences, to learn from each other is getting every time more important.



Peter and Gladys Siemans are team pastors at Vila Guaira Church, Curitiba, Brazil and regional representatives to Mennonite World Conference. Gladys also serves on the Deacons Commission of Mennonite World Conference.



Left: The new YAB committee: (l-r) Dominik Bergen Klassen (Paraguay), Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube (Zimbabwe), mentor Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle (Ethiopia), Larissa Swartz (USA), Jantine Huisman (Netherlands), Ebenezer Mondez (Philippines).

Above: The new YAB committee met for the first time in Indonesia with the Executive Committee in February 2016.

Photos: LIFE TV (Indonesia).

A new generation of YABs committee members

Bogotá, Colombia – Five new young adults have been appointed to represent young people from their continental regions in Mennonite World Conference (MWC) on the Young AnaBaptists (YABs) Committee.

Makadunyiswe Doublejoy Ngulube (Zimbabwe), Ebenezer Mondez (Philippines), Jantine Huisman (Netherlands), Dominik Bergen Klassen (Paraguay), and Larissa Swartz (USA) will have their first meeting as the new YABs committee from 12-19 February 2016 alongside the MWC Executive Committee meeting in Indonesia.

The YABs Committee consists of five continental representatives chosen primarily from the most recent GYS delegates. The committee member terms start after the Global Youth Summit (GYS) 2015 and go until the next GYS in 2021 with

the possibility of midway replacement due to relocation, study, family or work commitments.

The previous YABs committee, who finished their term after GYS 2015, consisted of Tigist Tesfaye Gelagle (Ethiopia), Sumana Basumata (India), Marc Pasqués (Spain), Rodrigo Pedroza García (Mexico), Lani Prunés (United States), and Ayub Omondi (Kenya) as the YABs mentor.

Gelagle will be transitioning to the role of YABs mentor, guiding the new committee as they begin their service. “I’m looking forward to work with the new YABs committee,” says Gelagle. She’s excited “to help them by sharing my YABs experience and also to support them in their work of the Kingdom of God by making the blueprint (the YABs guiding document) reality.”

The YABs committee represents the YABs Network, which includes all young people in Anabaptist churches. The committee works

to strengthen Anabaptist identity among young people and to build and develop connections among youth and young adult groups in the global family through social media. The YABs committee will also plan GYS 2021 in Indonesia.

The YABs committee and network build on the work of an earlier MWC youth committee called AMIGOS, which worked from 2004 to 2009 and planned the 2009 Global Youth Summit. Based on this experience, a Youth Task Force was formed to develop a blueprint for formal youth involvement in MWC. This was adopted by the MWC Executive Committee in 2010 and the Youth Task Force was replaced by the first Young Anabaptist (YABs) Committee.

— MWC Release

Watch for information and worship resources on a brand new YABs fellowship Sunday in June 2016. www.mwc-cmm.org

World Fellowship Sunday 2016: Walking with God



A church in Costa Rica celebrates World Fellowship Sunday. Photo submitted by Sandra Campos Cruz, president of Convención Menonita de Costa Rica.



Jesus Village Church, one of the oldest Anabaptist-related congregations in South Korea, celebrated World Fellowship Sunday with Faith and Life Commission secretary John Roth who was in the area for the first-ever Korean Anabaptist Conference, an event to introduce Anabaptist theology and values in a public, academic setting and to challenge Korean Anabaptists regarding their identity and role in South Korea. Photo: Bock Ki Kim.

Indonesia 2021

During the MWC executive committee meeting in Indonesia (12–19 February 2016), leaders of the three local Mennonite synods shared how they have been inspired by fellowshiping with each other at the MWC Assembly in Paraguay in 2009. Since that time, they have been meeting regularly as an “Indo-Menno-Leaders” group. Out of this group grew the desire to invite the worldwide Anabaptist community to meet in Indonesia for the next MWC Assembly: Indonesia 2021.

The excitement to host the Assembly is growing. Volunteers at the 2016 executive committee meeting came to serve wearing “Indonesia 2021” t-shirts.



Peace Sunday

“Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18).



In a world ravaged by violence, it is not easy to be a Peace Church – a church dedicated to the ways of Christ’s peace. These ways require much intentionality, persistence and even sacrifice. It is not always certain that Christ’s ways of peace will be effective. And yet the author of James reminds us that how we plant our seeds matters. If we indeed want the fruit of righteousness (which is closely related to the principle of justice), we must plant in peace.

Along with the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Church of the Brethren, Mennonites are one of three historic Peace Churches. These churches have, throughout their history, confessed peace and the ways of peace as central to participating in God’s kingdom.

How does your church form a faith identity rooted in the ways of peace?

As a worldwide communion of faith, we will be commemorating Peace Sunday on 18 September 2016. How does your church foster the peace that is so needed in our world?

—MWC Peace Commission

Top left: MWC staff and Indonesian Mennonite church leaders offer Lunar New Year greetings.

Left: Leaders of the Indonesian Mennonite synods: Andi O. Santoso – Gereja Kristen Muria Indonesia (GKMI), M. Z. Ichsanudin – Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa (GITJ), David E. Meijanto – Jemaat Kristen Indonesia (JKI). Photos courtesy of Liesa Unger.

Give a gift to MWC

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

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

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

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



Photo: Kazutomo Ray Epp

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

Reader response

The publishing schedule of *Courier/Correo/Courrier* has changed from two 16-page issues plus six newsletters per year, to two 20-page issues per year. MWC also releases Info, a monthly email newsletter that points to news, testimonies and prayers on the website.

With this new publishing schedule, do you still feel connected to the global family?

- Yes
 No

CCC is published biannually now. How often do you prefer to receive it?

- Twice a year is perfect
 I prefer bimonthly
 I prefer quarterly

This CCC is 20 pages: how is that length for a biannual publication?

- Just the right size
 Too long – less content please.
 Too short – should be double size at that frequency.

Which electronic means of connecting with MWC do you use?

- Website
 Facebook
 Twitter
 Email newsletters

Would you like to see more of a particular section?

- Inspiration & Reflection
 Perspectives
 Profiles (national & regional)
 Resources/news
 It’s a good balance

Comments:

Other comments on MWC communication:

Please respond by 27 May.

Clip out this section and send to one of the addresses below:

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

OR email your response to info@mwc-cmm.org.



MWC Publications Request

I would like to receive:

MWC Info

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

- English
- Spanish
- French

Courier

Magazine published twice a year (April and October)

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

Name

Address

Email

Phone

Complete this form and send to:

Mennonite World Conference
50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1 Canada



Readers of *Courier* in DR Congo.
Photo courtesy of Cisca Ibanda.

A life with no sin



What comes to your mind when you hear the word *hospitality*? It usually reminds me of the experience I had when I visited a country in another continent.

I thought Colombians were good hosts until a family from a different culture hosted me. It was just amazing: the amount and quality of food they offered, their tangible efforts to make me feel very welcomed, every detail in my room, their questions, their respect and readiness to serve in every possible way.

However, more than anything else, it was their attitude that touched me. They were ready to stop all their activities and just focus their generous hearts on serving their guest.

Hospitality is defined as the ability to pay attention to a guest.

This is very difficult because we are troubled by our own needs. Our own concerns prevent us from shifting our focus from ourselves towards others. If sin is the focus of the soul on itself, as Augustine of Hippo described it, then a life without sin is one that is able to focus on others. In other words, a life of hospitality is a life with no sin.

Jesus is the best example of what hospitality means. In his life and death on the cross, God enters into the world of human existence. Through his compassion, he focuses his attention on others instead of on himself. It is through Jesus' suffering and brokenness that God shares the mortality, frailty and vulnerability of humanity. And then, in the book of Revelation, Jesus makes room in his glory for the multitude of all the nations that come to worship him.

Jesus' attitude and focus on the other brings healing to the people who have been abused, who have experienced pain and suffering. Neither the injustice of Jesus' wounds, nor the reality of his ultimate triumph and lordship lead him to take care of himself. He is there to bring comfort, guidance and to shepherd others. Jesus has come to serve, not to be served – and this even in his glory.

Today, when we face the crisis of refugees that we see around the world, our call to hospitality as the body of Christ invites us to reveal God's presence in the midst of that suffering and pain. It is a call to provide hope, healing, guidance and care. It is a call to focus our attention on those that are persecuted, sick and without a home. Even though we may experience many needs and enough problems to worry about, the call to serve others is still there. Regardless of our poverty, lack of resources, disagreements, conflicts, projects and plans, the call to focus our attention on others is still there.

That is the reason why this issue of *Courier/Correo/Courrier* addresses this topic. The family that received me was such a good host not only because of their culture but also because of the way in which they lived out their experience of Christ. May God lead our global community to respond to others with the same attitude, living out our experience of God according to the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ!

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