

Courier Correo Courrier

Volume 41, Number 1



**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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César García Publisher
Kristina Toews Manager of Communications
Karla Braun Editor
Irma Sulistyorini Designer

Translators
Diana Cruz English → Spanish
Karen Flores Vindel English → Spanish
Corentin Haldemann English → French
Marion Meyer Spanish → English

Reviewers and proofreaders
Marisa Miller Spanish
Valentin dos Santos French

Courier/Correo/Courrier is available on request. Subscribe: mwc-cmm.org/courier-signup
 Send all correspondence to:
 Courier, 50 Kent Avenue, Suite 206, Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R1 Canada.

✉ info@mwc-cmm.org
 🌐 mwc-cmm.org
 📺 @MennoniteWorldConference
 📺 @MennoniteWorldConference
 📺 @mwcmm

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A Brief Historical Timeline

Drawn from the proceedings books of the Assembly and other recorded memories.

#1 1925 Basel and Zurich

- Purpose: get together to celebrate the 400-year anniversary and publish a commemorative book
- Choirs from Basel area (Holee and Schänzli) performed, and much singing was mentioned, including hymns “*Gott grüße Dich*,” “*Große Gott*,” “*Die Sach ist Dein*,” and “*Nun danket alle Gott*”

Cover: A selection of images from MWC events, clockwise from top left: Indonesia 2022; Zurich 2025; Campus IBA chapel singing; PA 2015; Calcutta 1997; Renewal 2017 in Augsburg, Germany; Bulawayo District Youth Choir

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Word from the editor



A messenger

Courier: “A messenger ... entrusted with the task of bearing messages.” That’s how MWC General Secretary Paul N. Kraybill introduced MWC’s new magazine in its first issue in 1986.

“The 1984 Mennonite World Conference Assembly at Strasbourg echoed a cry heard often before and since. We don’t know enough about each other. We are a worldwide community, but our knowledge is local and limited. In spite of our presses, publishers and publications, there is no international messenger!” he wrote.

And so: “Mennonite World Conference is pleased to introduce *Courier*, a new publication.

“*Courier* is designed specifically to be a messenger carrying messages to and from every part of the Mennonite world community.

“We welcome responses, comments, suggestions, criticisms and contributions-to the end that this will truly be a ‘courier’ bearing messages to and from every part of the world.”

Between then and 2026, the magazine has seen changes and will continue to! But our aim continues to be a place for the global family to get know each other.

And we continue to want to hear from you: how is *Courier* teaching, inspiring and helping you to understand the Anabaptist family?

In this issue, we look at the role music has played in MWC Assemblies as a tangible symbol of unity in diversity. Benjamin Bergey explores the history of music in global Assemblies throughout the year. Music leaders from around the world examine how singing songs – especially those from other cultural traditions – enriches their worship by bringing the global church into their every-day worship.

As we see disunity and disagreement around us, including in the church, may the messenger of music help to teach us the grace to embrace diversity.

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

***Courier* is interested in your contributions. Submit your photograph, artwork/graphic art to photos@mwc-cmm.org for consideration for use in *Courier*. Please ensure images are full resolution. Include artist’s name and local church. Include a short description of the artwork.**



#2 1930 Danzig

- “Mennonite World Aid Conference”
- Purpose: receive reports from various Mennonite communities and organizations on relief work, guidance on the plight of Mennonite communities in the Soviet Union, and for exchange about further coordinated aid measures
- Singing is referenced, and specific hymns are noted (“*Wach auf, du Geist der ersten Zeugen*,” “*Kein schöner Land in dieser Zeit*,” “*Innsbruck, ich muß dich lassen*”

#3 1936 Amsterdam and Elspeet

- Purpose: continue this type of gathering, strengthen bonds as one, celebrate 400 years of Menno Simons’ conversion in the Netherlands
- First songbook printed, with hymns in the order they were planned to be used for each service (German and Dutch texts)
- Unofficial singing mentioned on the boat as they crossed the IJsselmeer to go to Elspeet during heavy rain

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 T: (519) 571-0060.

the 400th anniversary of the Anabaptist Reformation. As the global church has now marked the 500th anniversary, this seems an appropriate moment to reflect on the Assemblies of the past century, through the particular lens of music.

One way to trace what has been sung at MWC Assemblies is through the songbooks created for each gathering. While no songbook captures everything that is sung or heard (and some songs printed are never used) they offer a tangible window into how the global church has understood itself, its unity, and whose voices are invited into communal worship.

Singing our faith together: why music matters

Singing together asks something of us that few other communal practices do. It requires vulnerability and trust, and it cannot be done privately in a crowd.

Voices are exposed, breath is shared and tempo is negotiated in real time. To sing together is to listen as much as it is to sound.

For a global communion like Mennonite World Conference, this matters deeply. Unity within MWC has not meant complete uniformity of belief, practice or perspective. The fellowship spans continents, cultures and histories shaped by vastly different social and political realities.

Yet again and again, the church

gathers and chooses to worship. In doing so, it practices a form of unity that does not depend on resolving every difference, but on committing to shared convictions, even as these convictions are embodied in diverse ways.

At MWC Assemblies, this unity is often carried through what might be called heartsongs: songs held dear by particular communities and bearing their stories of faith, suffering, hope and joy.

These songs do not necessarily mean the same thing to everyone who sings them. Instead, they invite awareness of different musical styles, theological emphases, textual languages and worship practices.



MWC USA Archive

Assembly 7, 1962, Kitchener (Canada)

Singing one another's heartsongs becomes a way of learning who we are together.

There is risk in this practice. Words may be mispronounced or misunderstood. Musical forms may feel unfamiliar or unsettling. Yet this vulnerability is precisely where music does its most important work.

Unity that costs nothing asks little of us. Singing across difference, by contrast, trains the church to listen before leading, to follow before shaping and to allow deeply held assumptions about worship and music to be stretched.

Songbooks, and a turning point: 1967–1972

Songbooks are not neutral collections. Every inclusion and omission reflects a set of values: whose theology is named, whose language is heard and whose musical forms are considered singable by a global community.

As Mennonite World Conference has become more global, its songbooks have carried increasing complexity.

The recorded proceedings of the first MWC Assembly in 1925 note choirs and cantors, but the first songbook printed specifically for an Assembly dates to 1936 during the gathering in Amsterdam and Elspeet, Netherlands. Prior to that, congregations likely sang from existing hymnals available in worship spaces.

These early Assembly songbooks

A Brief Historical Timeline

#7 1962 Kitchener

- A music committee is mentioned for the first time
- Many North American choirs mentioned
- Greater range of song leaders and organists mentioned (often just one or two in previous Assemblies)
- Fourth songbook with 40 hymns in German and English

#8 1967 Amsterdam

- The church was growing in the Global South with over 30 countries represented (see "turning point" in article above)
- Several American college and European choral groups mentioned
- Fifth songbook with 38 hymns in German, English, French and Dutch
- First songbook to include Western musical notation

#9 1972 Curitiba

- First Assembly with more participants from South than North
- Music shone through positively with group singing, and performances from North and South American Mennonite groups
- Sixth songbook included Spanish and Portuguese for the first time, in addition to English and German



contained exclusively European and North American hymns, typically in English, German, French and/or Dutch.

As representation within MWC grew more diverse, particularly with significant expansion in the Global South, this musical landscape began to feel increasingly incongruent. By the 1967 Assembly in Amsterdam, with delegates from more than 30 countries, participants became more acutely aware that the Mennonite communion was changing.

Diversity of culture, language and skin colour was no longer peripheral to the gathering; it was present in the room.

This moment marked a turning point.

The following Assembly held in 1972 in Curitiba, Brazil was the first MWC Assembly in the southern hemisphere. Historian Cornelius Dyck captured the challenge facing the church with a probing question: "What kind of unity is possible, and desirable, in a world brotherhood in which every congregation is ultimately responsible only to itself?"

The Assembly in Brazil took place amid significant challenges, including political repression under military rule and difficulties with translation and language access.

Yet the proceedings speak especially positively of music. Communal singing was met with enthusiastic applause, and, for the first time, performing groups from South America were featured. Only one-third of participants came from Europe



Mennonite World Conference

Assembly 9, 1972, Curitiba (Brazil)

and North America. A working group on music recognized the need for songs from many periods, genres and cultures in order to better reflect the global church.

Organizational changes also followed. General Council meetings began to take place in the Global South, regional conferences began meeting and mission networks grew to more than 50 countries where churches were often growing more rapidly than those in the North.

Mennonite World Conference clarified its purpose as a "channel of fellowship and witness," emphasizing communication, mutual encouragement and shared responsibility. They also later established a paid General Secretary role, shifting from

MWC being led more by historians to those with experience in mission leadership.

What we learn when we sing together

From the 1970s onward, MWC Assemblies continued to grow in size and diversity. International Songbooks with intentional global representation were developed, beginning with the 1978 Assembly in Wichita.

More languages appeared on the page and in worship, sometimes supported by simultaneous translation. Starting in this collection, heartsongs from each continent were prioritized. Women played



MC USA Archive

Assembly 10, 1978, Wichita (USA)

A Brief Historical Timeline



#10 1978 Wichita – “The Kingdom of God in a changing world”

- Performing choirs from around the world for the first time (including Russia which was met with much applause)
- First “International Songbook” published, effectively initiating the new model (including a Preface and Introduction)
- 63 hymns with Western musical notation, organized in five chapters by continent
- Ended with “[Praise God from Whom](#)”

#11 1984 Strasbourg – “God’s people serve in hope”

- Used 1978 International Songbook with a new supplement
- “The Abiding Place” oratorio by Esther Wiebe and Barbara Smucker was written and performed for this Assembly
- “*Je jourai l’Éternel*” became the heartsong
- Many performances [from around the world](#)

#12 1990 Winnipeg – “Witnessing to Christ in today’s world”

- Second International Songbook published, structured similarly to the first
- Huge crowd sizes, many performing groups
- “[He is with you all the time](#)” (#16)

increasingly visible leadership roles in music, including figures such as Mary Oyer as song leader. The President was someone outside of USA and Germany for the first time as well (Ethiopia).

By the 1984 Assembly in Strasbourg, the shape of the modern MWC Assembly had begun to take form: a program committee; music and worship subcommittee; a thematic structure with daily rhythms; and music woven throughout the life of the gathering. Musicians from around the world performed, showing that unity takes intention and practice.

The unity formed through song at MWC Assemblies is not permanent. When the final song fades, participants return to their home contexts, carrying different questions, convictions and challenges. Yet something lingers: the memory of having sung together reshapes how difference is carried afterward.

Music teaches the global church that unity does not require the resolution of every disagreement. It requires presence.

In singing, the church practices staying with one another in real time, listening closely, adjusting as needed and committing to a shared act even when it stretches us. Unity, in this sense, is not an abstract ideal but a practised discipline.

MWC Assemblies function as rehearsal spaces for this kind of belonging. They offer a glimpse of what is possible when

diversity is not managed or minimized, but welcomed into a shared rhythm.

Each voice matters precisely because it is distinct. And in the shared act of singing, the global church learns again what it means to belong together.

Unity is not an abstract ideal but a practised discipline.



Benjamin Bergey associate professor of music at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, where he directs the choirs and orchestra, teaches courses on music theory, conducting, and music & peacebuilding. He was music coordinator for the 2022 Assembly in Indonesia, and he conducts the EMU Chamber Singers who performed at the 500th anniversary commemoration day in Zurich. Benjamin Bergey also served as music editor for *Voices Together*, a hymnal for the Mennonite Church in USA and Canada. He is a member of Harrisonburg Mennonite Church.



Assembly 14, 2003, Bulawayo (Zimbabwe)



Assembly 17, 2022, Indonesia

Mennonite World Conference

Tiz Brotosudarmo

A Brief Historical Timeline

#13 1997 Calcutta – “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches”

- This songbook included reprints from the 1990 songbook and an American hymnal, plus some local translations
- Theme song written for this Assembly by Bishop Shant Kunjam: [“Sun Aatma kya kahta hai sab Mandliyon se” \(Hear what the Spirit is saying\)](#)
- The Global Church Village introduced with a stage providing an opportunity to share music

#14 2003 Bulawayo – “Sharing gifts in suffering and in joy”

- Third International Songbook published, this time including 5-continent representation on the committee, including several songs with non-Western musical notation
- The first international choir initiates the ensemble model with two singers from each continent
- A recording made in advance helped people learn Assembly music
- [“Hakuna akaita,”](#) still a favourite, introduced and sung frequently

#15 2009 Asuncion – “Come together in the way of Jesus Christ”

- Fourth International Songbook published with preface recognizing that not all read music notation, and dozens of languages used, but music is a unifying force
- *“Tengan la mente de Cristo”* (Let the same mind be within you) (#9) written for this Assembly’s theme verse
- Spontaneous singing happened when the power went out: [“Siyahamba”](#)
- All plenary sessions livestreamed for the first time



Germany

Rhythms and melodies carry images of encounters

How the music of world gatherings enriches my church

Ever since a camp counsellor at a children’s camp taught me my first guitar chords many, many years ago, music has been a part of my life. I also enjoy meeting Christians from other cultural backgrounds.

I have now participated in four global Assemblies of Mennonite World Conference. I am amazed at how our shared faith brings diversity to life in unity. The Japanese blessing song “*Kirisuto no heiwa ga*” has found a permanent place in my heart, as have the Latin American “*Adorad*” (Let us worship) and the English song “Way Maker.”

The rhythms and melodies carry images of encounters and feelings of joy and closeness within me.

My guitar and I were invited to be part of the international band at the monumental service commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Anabaptists in Zurich. Mutual respect motivated us to learn the

A global community celebrated our worshipful God in different languages and musical expressions.

different musical styles typical of the songs.

During the joint rehearsals and at the service, I felt a piece of heaven with us. A global community celebrated our worshipful God in different languages and musical expressions.

Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday is one of the occasions when songs of the global family can unfold their unifying power. I am happy to share my own stories of encounters from Indonesia, USA, Paraguay and India.

By practicing the songs in their original language, we feel a special closeness to the worldwide family. The German lyrics make aspects of our shared faith audible.

At this moment, I am preparing for the CMERK* in May of this year in the Netherlands. In addition to European songs, we will also use this opportunity to sing songs from the MWC Assemblies.

With songs like “*Ewe, thina*” (We walk his way) and “*Hakuna akaita*” we like to inspire people to participate in the next MWC Assembly that is projected to be in Africa in 2028. That would be my hope. Because these songs unfold their healing and joy-inspiring spirit – of course – in the global community.



Wilhelm Unger is pastor for the Mennonite churches in Friedelseim and Limburgerhof-Kohlhof (part of MWC member church Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland) in Germany.

*CMERK, a regional gathering for all European Mennonite churches is a combination of two names for the event: **Conférence Mennonite Européenne (French)** + **Mennonitische Europäische Regionale Konferenz (German)**. The event will be held on 14-17 May 2026 in the Netherlands.

A Brief Historical Timeline

#16 2015 Harrisburg – “Walking with God”

- Fifth International Songbook published
- “[Tú eres todopoderoso](#)” ([Because you’re holy](#)) became a heartsong
- One verse of “*El Señor és la meva força*” (In the Lord I’ll be ever thankful) sung in sign language for a large group of attendees who are Deaf or hard of hearing
- [Many videos](#) available from this Assembly

#17 2022 Salatiga – “Following Jesus together across barriers”

- Sixth International Songbook published, first to include Eastern musical notation
- Digital version also used by many virtual participants due to global pandemic
- “[Dhuh pangeran](#)” ([O Prince of peace](#)) written by Indonesian Mennonite Saptjoadi for the 1978 Assembly became a heartsong

2025 Zurich – “The courage to love”

- While not a full Assembly, this commemorated the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism
- Five music groups from around the world performed concerts and participated in the worship service in the Grossmünster
- Songs from the 2022 International Songbook were used, plus “[We want peace](#),” a trilingual song written by a Mennonite with a special arrangement created for the event



Paraguay

A community act that shapes our identity

Every week, during chapel on Campus IBA (Instituto Bíblico Asunción, Paraguay), we dedicate some time to worshipping our God through music. Since many different theological traditions, with varied cultural roots, converge at our Bible institute, one would think that these differences would carry more weight than they actually do. Even so, the choruses play an important role in strengthening our unity as the people of God.

Community and unity

During chapel services, we sing many different styles: classical hymns, as well as contemporary songs with Latin American and Anglo-Saxon rhythms. This variety comes from the diversity within our student body, which actively participates in our musical interludes.

Of course, as an Anabaptist institute, we deeply value the community and unity in Christ. For this reason, congregational singing is not simply a “musical moment” during chapel service; it is a community act that shapes our identity.

When we sing, more than being an accompaniment to the band, we are seeking to adore our Lord with one voice.

It’s interesting how music can transcend barriers that sometimes theology, with its debates and formulations, is unable to cross as easily. This does not negate the importance of theology – on the contrary, it is vital to the health of the church – but we recognize that there are different interpretations of secondary topics within the evangelical world.

In the classroom, we can dialogue, debate and go deeper into those topics that highlight our differences. But in chapel, when we sing the core truths of our faith, we find common ground where the essence resounds louder than the secondary issues.

On many occasions, I have seen how students from churches with different styles and traditions lift their voices together with deep conviction. While they may not formulate certain doctrinal points in the same way, they

are able to declare together, “Christ is Lord” or “We are the people of God.”

In those moments, music becomes a space where we can reaffirm our agreement, not on secondary issues, but on the central tenets of our faith.

Lord of the people

One key aspect of this experience has been choosing the songs we sing with intentionality. We try to include songs that lift up Jesus not only as our individual saviour but also as the saviour of the community. The lyrics speak of “us”, the church as a body, and walking in the light together. Lyrics like these help us develop a spirituality that is less private and more rooted in the community.

This is profoundly coherent with our Anabaptist heritage that understands faith as visibly following Christ in community.

At the same time, the songs of surrender and dedication to Jesus assume a unifying role. When the congregation sings words of surrender – “Take my life,”

“I submit to you,” “I want to be faithful to you” – we become spiritually aligned.

We are not affirming our personal preferences or defending our own points of view; we are submitting to the Lordship of Christ together. This shared posture of humility before Jesus aligns us with the central truth that Jesus is Lord and we are each growing into his disciples.

I’ve also noticed that music creates collective memories. Years later, alumni who return to the campus tear up when they hear a song that we sang together in the chapel. They don’t only remember the melody; they also remember the time of study, deep friendships and encounters with God in community.

With all of this, I don’t mean to imply that music can’t also be a cause of division because often it is. However, with what we experience every week on Campus IBA, the music we make together that is consecrated to the Lord has the power to unite us.

And who know? Maybe it also has the power to formulate theology with a right heart.

When we sing...we are seeking to adore our Lord with one voice.



Fernando Miranda serves as a current professor at Campus IBA, located in Mariano Roque Alonso, Paraguay. He is married to Miriam Sawatzky; they are parents to two children. In addition to his academic duties, Fernando Miranda coordinates and directs the worship times at IBA, especially the music.



Students lead worship through music during chapel times at IBA in Asuncion, Paraguay.

Photo supplied

USA

Practicing hospitality through worship

Singing from the MWC songbook in Pennsylvania

“All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.”

Psalm 86:9

When we sing songs from Mennonite World Conference’s International Songbook, we are practicing hospitality and belonging. Singing other cultures’ songs also connects us with the global church.

Songs such as “Here I am to worship” “Way Maker” and “How great thou art” fit neatly into the musical canon at Neffsville Mennonite Church. Others – like “*Cantai ao Senhor*” (O sing to the Lord) “*Kwake Yesu Nasimama*” and “*Tú eres todopoderoso*” (Because you’re holy) – are more of a stretch.

Our congregation is majority white, with many having a Swiss or German Mennonite lineage. However, we also have members from Puerto Rico, Haiti, Kenya and Uganda. Singing songs in their native languages is one way to express to them that they truly belong.

Also, quite a few of our members have served as missionaries overseas in Africa, Asia and South America. Singing songs from the MWC songbook encourages them as well.

Let me give two examples of how our singing has expressed welcome and solidarity in a tangible way.

Favourite song in a heart language

About three years ago, a missionary from Peru that we support visited Neffsville and preached on Sunday. That morning, we sang “*Tú estás aquí*” (My God is here) Tears began to roll down his cheeks as we were singing. He never thought he would hear a song in his native tongue at a Mennonite church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania!

I learned later that “*Tú estás aquí*” is one of his favorite songs. He and his family felt welcomed in a more profound way, simply

Singing songs... is one way to express that they truly belong.

because we sang a song in worship in his mother tongue.

God’s ways welcome a guest

The second example is recent. We sang “*Cantai ao Senhor*” in our service, in both Portuguese and English.

On the Sunday, there happened to be a family visiting our church for the first time who is originally from Brazil and speaks Portuguese in their home!

Some members of our congregation wondered why we sing in Portuguese. They knew of no one in our congregation from a country that speaks the language.

But this is how God works! This family was enthralled that a congregation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was singing in their native language.

They felt welcomed in a way beyond what any handshake could have accomplished. They felt seen.

Music connects across the world

One of my goals this year is for my congregation to sing at least one song from a non-majority culture in most of our worship services. Songs from the MWC songbook help us to do that in a way that powerfully connects us with our



Rashard Allen was part of the international ensemble of music leaders at Assembly 16 in Indonesia.

Anabaptist brothers and sisters around the world. When, as it says in Psalm 86:9, we “glorify God’s name,” we are doing so with the songs of “all the nations.”

After all, when we get to heaven, there will be people of all nations; every person in Christ who has ever lived. All of us – with all our various cultures, languages, races – will be singing “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!” (Revelation 7:10b)

Singing songs from other cultures and languages (particularly those from the MWC Songbook, many of which are also in our hymnal, *Voices Together*) serves as good practice for us.



Rashard Allen is the director of music and worship at Neffsville Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA. He first became familiar with the MWC Songbook through serving as part of the International Ensemble for MWC Assembly in Indonesia in 2022. He has since conducted workshops on worship music in Mennonite congregations in Uganda, and he organized the five international choirs at the Anabaptism@500 commemoration in Zurich in 2025.

Zimbabwe

Blending traditional rhythms with contemporary music

The lingering effects of the MWC Assembly 2003 on music in Zimbabwean congregations

My first real encounter with MWC was at the Assembly 2003, held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, here in Africa. This was indeed an amazing international and multi-cultural worship experience. The musical sounds of diverse cultures and traditions blended together in harmony, leaving an indelible mark on my soul.

The worship experience sparked a passion for global worship music that continues to inspire me, and most Brethren in Christ Church members, even to this very day!

The 2003 MWC Assembly in Zimbabwe marked a significant event in the global Anabaptist community. One of the lasting impacts of this gathering has been on the music styles of local congregations in Zimbabwe. This influence can be seen in the blending of traditional Zimbabwean rhythms with Western hymns and contemporary Christian music.

Traditional Zimbabwean music and Anabaptist worship

In Zimbabwe, traditional music is an integral part of cultural identity. Percussion instruments like the drums, rattle and shakers are commonly used in worship.

Post-2003, some Brethren in Christ congregations began incorporating these elements into their services, fusing them with Western instruments like the guitars and keyboard, creating a unique sound that resonates with local worshippers.

In fact, the majority of Zimbabwean congregations have grounded themselves in using musical instruments to accompany worship music. This has even extended to congregations in the countryside, where worshippers used to confine their singing to vocals only.

Influence of Anabaptist music

The MWC Assembly brought together musicians from various Anabaptist traditions. This exposure led to the adoption of songs like "Over my head, I hear music in the air!" (An African American folk song set to a Zimbabwean rhythm in local congregations).

Many churches started using songs with a mix of traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs from Africa and Latin America.

The shift to traditional elements was quite evident in fostering self-actualization and worship in an African context. This enhanced movement in singing as this comes naturally to indigenous inhabitants of Africa. Renditions like "*Hakuna akaita*" (There's no one like Jesus), "*Jes'uya khazimula*" (Jesus is ever shining) took up a renewed meaning and popularity as a direct influence of Anabaptist music.

A number of other "foreign" languages choruses, like "*Obrigado Senhor*" (Thank you, Jesus), and songs from Zimbabwe Assembly 2003 have also become a part of local worship music.

Impact on worship

The blending of music styles has affected worship practices. Services are more participatory, with congregants singing in Ndebele, Shona and English. Some churches have introduced dance, incorporating traditional Zimbabwean movements.

This shift has made worship more expressive and relevant to local culture.

MWC Zimbabwe Assembly went a long way in indirectly provoking local congregations to appreciate cultural diversity in worship music.

Singing songs from a shared hymnal like the MWC songbook has had several effects on congregations. Common songs foster a

sense of unity and shared faith experience among congregation members. It connects them to a broader community of believers across different cultures and locations.

Challenges and opportunities

While this musical fusion has enriched worship, it has also presented challenges. Some congregations struggle with balancing tradition and innovation. Older members may prefer traditional hymns, while younger members often favour contemporary styles. This generational gap requires careful navigation by both the youthful members and church leaders.

Youths in the Brethren in Christ Church district of Bulawayo have taken a proactive step in striving to accommodate everyone by forming the Bulawayo District Youth Choir. The group has transformed traditional hymns to be more acceptable to all age groups using local and Western instruments in their youth-led worship bands.

The MWC Assembly 2003 catalyzed a movement toward contextualized worship in Zimbabwean BICC congregations. By embracing local music traditions, the churches have created worship experiences that are both authentically Zimbabwean and globally connected.

This blending of styles reflects the Anabaptist emphasis on community and cultural relevance.

As Zimbabwean congregations continue to evolve, their music remains a testament to the power of faith expressed through local culture.

The most lingering effects left by the MWC are emotional and spiritual engagement, cultural connection and exchange, and above all what has been evoked is feelings of joy, reverence and contemplation, effectively enhancing worship experiences.



Nelson G Muzarabani is a member of BICC Entumbane, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and an elder in BICC Zimbabwe, having served as conference secretary for almost 10 years. As a trained musician, he is active in the music ministry of the church as well as other projects. He is retired from the public and private sectors, where he worked for slightly over 35 years as an educator, researcher/historian/archivist, administrator and manager.

India

Music as a unifying force

What I have received from participating in the international ensemble



Sushant Rajat Nand

Ashish Milap (fourth from left) was part of the international ensemble of music leaders at Assembly 16 in Indonesia.

I thank God for the gift of music in our life. I see it totally as grace of God that I could be the part of the Mennonite World Conference international ensemble for Assembly 2022 in Indonesia. I had dreamed of that since I attended Assembly in 2003 at Zimbabwe.

Taking part in music at the global MWC Assemblies, I learned songs in different languages. My first impression was that it seems strange to pronounce the words of the songs. The words in other languages sometimes have similarities in my language, but it gives a very funny meaning!

As I became used to sing those songs in different languages, I enjoyed it a lot. Learning those songs became my favourite thing to do.

A big global family

Singing songs in different languages, I feel that I am a part of brothers and sisters whose language I am singing. I feel united with them, their style of music and their culture.

Singing songs of different languages with Assembly choir with brothers and sisters from different continents, also gives me a picture of heaven.

Songs like, “*Dalam Yesus Kita Bersaudara*” (In Jesus Christ we are one family) help me to consider the reality that I am part of a big global family. I

have many brothers and sisters standing with me in every situation I go through.

Song like “True evangelical faith” is most memorable for me because it always reminds me to examine my faith and encourages me to live a life as a true follower of Christ.

Singing those songs has also united my family. When I used to practice singing songs for Assembly, especially songs of other languages, my young daughters jumped to sing those songs with me. Compared to them, I was slow learner to catch the pronunciation. We as a family spent many hours learning those songs together unitedly.

Building respect and curiosity

What I learned at Assembly has come to the church I served. I have taught many different languages songs, like “*Som’Landela*,” “We want peace,” “*Hakuna akaita*” (There’s no one like Jesus), “*Siyahamba*” “*Alabare*,” “*Tapaiko cheuma*” (I am your child), “*Segala puji syukur*” (Shout for joy), “*Kirisuto no heiwa ga*” (May the peace of Christ), etc.

I have translated some of these songs into Hindi so that church members could enjoy learning and singing those songs easy. Singing in English and Hindi gives us clarity about the message of the song, which is important for

conviction and participation. People are usually more confident singing in a language they understand as well.

But I usually encourage people to sing at least one verse or the chorus in the original language.

When our church members learn different words in a foreign language helps people experience the global nature of the song; it builds respect and curiosity for other cultures and makes the moment feel more united and meaningful. Ultimately it helps the congregation to find themselves united with the global family.

Understanding God’s Spirit

One of the members in my congregation shared that singing different languages songs helped her to understand God’s gratefulness. It can be seen in the language, pattern of music and culture. Even though we might not understand the meaning fully while singing songs from different languages, we feel that God has bestowed God’s joy and spirit in the language and music.

Singing song like “You’re not alone” helped her to understand that we are united. We share our pain and joy with each other and also stand in difficult situations with each other.

Singing Assembly songs helped her to understand that she has a place in congregation as a part of the family to care for the other members of the family who are in need.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Assembly songs have been very effective force to unite the church in their understanding for God, their place and role for the global family.



Ashish Kumar Milap is a pastor at Sunderganj Mennonite Church in Dhamtari, India, where he serves a congregation of 1 040 baptized members. In 2022, he took part in Assembly in Indonesia as an international choir member.

Online prayer hour

“Prayer is the backbone of the church. We need to practice it as a body of Christ regularly,” says Tigist Tesfaye, secretary of the Deacons Commission.

Join us online for a live prayer hour with brothers and sisters from around the world.

“This boosts up our fellowship as a family of faith,” says Tigist Tesfaye.

Visit mwc-cmm.org/oph/ to register for the next online prayer meeting.

Next events: 14:00 UTC

- Friday, 20 March 2026
- Friday, 15 May 2026
- Friday, 17 July 2026
- Friday, 18 September 2026
- Friday, 20 November 2026

Solidarity in the Family of Christ: Sharing Burdens, Sharing Hope

14 March 2026
Lumban, Laguna Philippines



Casa da Comunidade

Casa da Comunidade, part of the Mennonite Brethren church in Lisbon, Portugal, used the good Samaritan story from the worship resource for their AWFS service.

AWFS 2026

Unity, peace and solidarity at the heart of evangelism

“In this time when the church and its members are being persecuted and are victims of wars that have bereaved many families, it is urgent to place unity, peace and solidarity at the heart of the work of evangelism,” writes Rev. MUSOBWA KISHAKU Ernest. He is the representative for Kivu, the fourth district of MWC member church CEFMC, (Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo) in the eastern part of DR Congo which is experiencing much violence.

“Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday represents a precious opportunity for all of us to draw closer to the people, to heal internal wounds, to contribute to the healing of trauma, and to restore the social fabric that has been deeply affected by the consequences of war,” he says.

Every year, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) circulates a worship resource package to assist congregations around the world with celebrating this day. With a shared theme, Scripture passages, prayers and testimonies, congregations can enter more fully into fellowship, intercession and thanksgiving with and for the global faith family.

This year, congregations celebrated on Jan 19 or 26, the Sundays closest to 21 January.



Kristina Toews

At Level Ground Mennonite Church in Abbotsford, B.C., Canada, children enjoyed the colouring pages while the congregation prayed for the global Anabaptist communion, especially noting their solidarity with the people of Venezuela.

Continue with solidarity

May our prayers move us to action. In 2026, Mennonite World Conference focuses on solidarity. We invite you – particularly during this season of focus before Easter – to join in solidarity with the global Anabaptist through your prayers.

Take a photo or video to share with the global family how you are praying in solidarity. Use the text below. Send your photo or video to photos@mwc-cmm.org

On that date in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland. Here are some snapshots of how Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday was celebrated in our member congregations around the world.



Iglesia Menonita "Caminando con Dios"



Communauté Mennonite de Kinshasa



Castañeda Anabaptist Church

In Honduras, members of Iglesia Menonita "Caminando con Dios" in La Ceiba lit a symbolic candle for each continental region in MWC as they uplifted them in prayer. The white candle symbolizes the light of Jesus.

At Lingwaka congregation of MWC member church Communauté Mennonite de Kinshasa, members celebrated communion during their Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday service.

At Castañeda Anabaptist Church in the Philippines, members were divided into five groups to represent the five MWC continental regions. In those groups, they discussed stories of showing solidarity with peace, listening and forgiveness, support and perseverance.



Mennonite church of Bussum-Naarden



Yonatan Singh

Mennonite church Bhilai in India celebrated Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday with great enthusiasm. Prayers were offered for the five continents by various groups, including the youth group, women's group, church council and the pastor. A potluck lunch was also organized as part of the celebration.



Mennonitengemeinde Worms-Ibersheim

The congregation of Mennonitengemeinde Worms-Ibersheim in Germany followed their AWFS Sunday service with a coffee break with cakes. The church building stands on land donated to the parish by a Mennonite at the end of the 19th century. The middle of three stained glass windows depicts Christ standing on "a Mennonite foundation," says pastor Andreas Kohrn.

At the Mennonite church of Bussum-Naarden in the Netherlands, seven congregations from the region (Ring Midden-Nederland) held a joint service where they lit candles for all the continents.

YABs News

Building bridges across the global Mennonite body

Meet your new YABs Committee members

“We must recognize that every young person has the potential to grow and be mentored. With patience, we can allow them the space to explore their God-given gifts and share those gifts with the church,” says Ebenezer Mondez, YABs staff mentor (2022-2025).

Three new continental representatives have been appointed to the Young Anabaptists (YABs) Committee. The five volunteer Committee members plus a staff mentor facilitate a network of global Anabaptist young people for empowerment, support and decision-making. The YABs Committee also presents to the Executive Committee and General Council about the concerns of young Anabaptists worldwide.

Historically, YABs Committee members were appointed for a six-year term.

Now YABs Committee members serve three-year terms, with at least two asked to sign on for another three-year term. This provides both continuity and change for the Committee.

YABs Committee (2025-2028)

Asia



Blessing Joy Turqueza

Local congregation

San Juan Anabaptist Mennonite Church

National church

Integrated Mennonite Churches Inc. – Philippines (IMC)

Favourite memory from GYS

Leading a small group discussion with the youth assigned to me. In that space, I felt how deeply we were united by one faith and one calling, despite our differences. The global church became very real and personal to me. I felt like I was given a small glimpse of what heaven might be like.

What gifts do you bring to the global church?

I hope to help reach more people, especially youth, in places where we currently have little or no connection – particularly in Asia. I also hope to help build partnerships with other countries as we work together to strengthen and build up the body of Christ, the church.

Favourite “MWC” song

“Siyahamba” (We are marching)
“Caminamos en la luz” / “Nous marchons” (Indonesia 2022)

Europe



Raphaël Burkhalter

Local congregation

EEMT: Église Evangelique Mennonite Tavannes, Switzerland

National church

Conférence Mennonite Suisse (CMS / KMS)
Konferenz der Mennoniten der Schweiz

Memory from first encounter with MWC

Being able to meet during the General Council was indeed a privilege that helped make important connections within MWC. It was impressive to see young leaders from other Mennonite congregations worldwide. Finding common ground was unforgettable.

What are your hopes regarding becoming a YABs Committee member?

I learned so much from our 2025 YABs delegates meeting in person. How can we learn to foster more relational communities? I hope to learn to recognise the beauty in the variety of facets Mennonites engaged in their common vocation to follow Jesus, living out unity and building peace across the globe.

Favourite “MWC” song

“True evangelical faith” (Calcutta 1997, Indonesia 2022), “We want peace” (Zurich 2025)

North America



Liam Kachkar

Local congregation

First Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Canada

National church

Mennonite Church Canada

Favourite memory from GYS

Learning with, reflecting with and praying with my small group at GYS – also the nature walk!

What are your hopes regarding becoming a YABs Committee member?

MWC is a constant reminder to me that God’s Kingdom is stronger through our diversity and our many commonalities. This is especially impactful to me in a world that frequently divides, segregates and classifies people into different groups.

Favourite “MWC” song

“Kirisuto no heiwa” (May the peace of Christ) (Pennsylvania 2015, Indonesia 2022)



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Photo: Irma Sulistyorini

Serving one another

We are called to serve one another with the gifts we have received. This is the work of being good stewards of God's grace as a worldwide Anabaptist family.

Working together in solidarity guides our steps as a communion as we reach out in courageous love to a beautiful yet hurting world.

You are helping to build thriving communities across 110 national member churches in 61 countries. Your investment in the global church expresses solidarity to 10 000+ member congregations spanning the globe. Spaces of solidarity enables us to learn deeply. God is using each of us for kingdom purposes.

You can make a difference through investing your financial gifts in the worldwide mission of Mennonite World Conference. We reflect God's light together as we serve our communities.

When you make a financial gift in solidarity, you are

- building leadership capacity among young adults;
- extending ministries of peace & justice;
- sharing with churches facing challenges;
- collaborating in fellowship, worship, service & witness.

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Thank you for sharing your gifts with the MWC global family!



Irma Sulistyorini

At the end of the Global Youth Summit (GYS) in Germany, participants gathered around a bonfire to sing and make bread together.

The Officers' Column

Solidarity: What Will We Build Together?

The light of possibility before us is extraordinary: a world where people are healed enough to know their worth, and therefore capable of relationships marked by genuine intimacy, dignity and respect. A world where powerful technologies and global connections bridge divides rather than deepen them, becoming tools for mutual understanding and shared flourishing.

At the same time, we name the truth of our moment. Many across the world are living in fear-filled places – shaped by violence, displacement, economic uncertainty, climate crisis and deep social polarization. Fear is loud. It tempts us to withdraw, to protect what is ours and to imagine that survival is the best we can hope for.

And yet, these are not only challenges to endure. They are also moments that call forth courage.

Across the global Anabaptist family, communities are rediscovering their voices, their agency and their callings to live differently. Solidarity, as Mennonite World Conference understands it, is not passive agreement or distant concern. It is a faithful choice to remain connected: choosing

relationship over isolation, accompaniment over control, and hope over fear.

This solidarity is practiced when we listen deeply across cultures, when lived experience shapes our shared discernment and when we stay at the table even when the way forward is uncertain.

It reminds us that healing is possible, that new life can emerge from hard places and that unity is something we practice with patience and care.

As we step into 2026, we are invited to tend what has been entrusted to us – to build spaces of trust, to strengthen bonds of love and to shape a future marked by Christ's peace.

What we build will not be perfect, but it can be faithful.

May we open ourselves to the grace God has already given and live it through solidarity – walking together in humility, choosing one another with courage and trusting the Spirit who binds us together.

Lisa Carr-Pries is MWC vice-president (2022–2031). She is the Director of Spiritual Care at Parkwood Community (long term care/ retirement community) in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, and is a member of Nith Valley Mennonite Church, Ontario, Canada.

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Photo: Irma Sulistyorini



Binuangan Mennonite Christian Church

Binuangan Mennonite Christian Church in the Philippines celebrated Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday through singing “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “Blessed Assurance,” “Trust and Obey” and “God You’re Good.” Some of the songs were sung in the language-Ilokano. Ilokano serves as the common dialect used alongside local dialects such as Kankana-ey, Bugkalot, Ibaloi, Kalanguya, and others.

Imagination

Creativity helps us have the imagination to picture things we haven’t seen or experienced before.

When I read the story of Dirk Willems – an imprisoned Anabaptist who pulled his pursuer out of the water after he fell through the ice – I used to have to use my **imagination**. Since moving to Canada in 2019, I have seen frozen lakes and rivers with my own eyes. Walking on ice is real – as real as the loving Spirit of God working on the lives of Dirk Willems and his pursuer.

Today, when we look at a fractured world, full of anger, violence and disagreements, sadly even within the church, let us challenge our imagination to live into the world of shalom God calls us.

- What if the world were full of people like Dirk Willems?
- What if we saw Jesus in the face of our enemies?
- How could we be a global church whose spiritual cornerstone is mutual love among Christians, even to the point of giving up one’s own life?
- How could we experience that love in our families, workplaces and neighbourhoods?

It is that way of living that allows us to understand the other in a deep way, by listening and speaking to the other in love.

When we sing, as written about in this issue, we stir our imaginations. We sing of our love for God and for others, and the music moves us to feel it. We live into imagination through harmony as we express unity through diversity.

Let’s ask God for his presence to help us to live according to that **imagination** in each relationship around us.

César García, MWC general secretary, originally from Colombia, lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. This article is adapted from his 2016 & 2022 “holy day letter” for Anabaptist World Fellowship Sunday.