

Courier



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What Three Things Concern Us Most?

World Calendar

November 27- December 3	Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue #4, Assisi, Italy
January 10-12, 2002	Conference on Evangelism and the Peace Witness of the Church, Eastern College, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., co-sponsored by MWC and the Baptist World Alliance
August 11-17, 2003	Mennonite World Conference Assembly Gathered, "Africa 2003," Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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Cover photo: MWC Executive Committee members (left to right): Alberto Quintela (USA), Fimbo Ganvunze (Congo), and Hugo Moreira (Uruguay). MWC photo / Merle Good

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What Three Things Concern Us Most?

Mennonite Leaders from Around the World Reflect

Editors' Note: In the following collection of short reflections, seven leaders from around the world talk about matters of concern to them, especially about the church within their own countries or continents. They speak personally, not officially. We invite all readers to prayer and consideration of these issues.

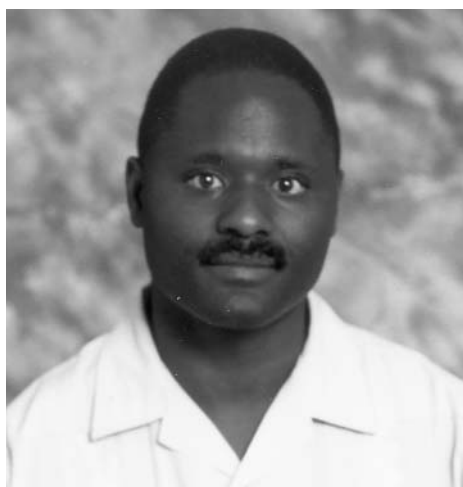


Photo Inn Studio

From Ronald Lizwe Moyo, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

1. I love my church and have never considered leaving it for another, yet even so, there are some issues that concern me in its attitudes and governance.

In my country the church can boast of having some of the most skilled, professional, and gifted people in the community. Unfortunately, on Sundays these gifted people just come into the church and remain on back benches. They leave the gifts which have brought success to their workplaces in their offices. They are not willing to bring this expertise to the church. This holding back of gifts and skills has crippled the church.

Why can't the administrators unleash their expertise in the church? This action would lessen some of the stress in the administration of the church so that more energy could go to the spiritual ministry of the church. Why can't the financial experts who have brought prosperity to their business empires do the same for the church? Healthy church budgets would be great vehicles for promoting outreach ventures.

I do not think it is right for people to benefit from church membership and yet not be willing to serve it. I think church leadership should also step out and boldly invite them to unlock their skills and get involved. With both human and material resources in place, the ministers would be able to better service their flocks.

2. The human spirit is forever searching for a place to belong. The church has the potential to be a place of healing and rest for the hungry and searching soul. That is why on Sundays when the Christians go to church, those who do not belong to or go to any church often say, "Please pray for us, too." It bothers me that in spite of all these ready opportunities for ministry, the church is not as warm a body as it should be. It is not friendly to those who don't belong or hold the same views as it does. It ostracizes "the sinners."

To the poor and less privileged in society the church is very overbearing, yet it divorces itself from social issues and is often unfriendly to the politician.

In its self-righteous stance the church does not accommodate the views of those of differing beliefs, so to the outsiders it is perceived as a body which is at war with itself. Just now we are confronted by the HIV/AIDS scourge. I think it is scandalous that the "worldly organizations" were in the forefront of reaching out to the sick and dying among us while the church was more concerned about how the victims contracted the disease and whose fault it was.

I think we Christians need to reexamine ourselves. We need to portray our joy in what we believe. We chose to be Christians. We were not forced. We have something good to share with the world, and the world wants what we have. Even

company directors are happy to employ Christian workers. Let's be warm, accommodating, and happy.

3. When Christianity was first introduced to us, we were taught and told about God. Much later, the Bibles came into our hands and we could read for ourselves. Today the Word is accessible in every household which may care enough to seek it.

It concerns me that though we have the Scriptures more readily available, there are issues which have almost brought division in the church. We are failing to resolve them because of different interpretations of the Bible. In the same church body there are differing views about understanding the person and role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Mass prayer and speaking in tongues are issues. The whole matter of a charismatic worship style is controversial. A gap has developed between young people and the older generation.

I believe the theologians need to take a stand and give us guidance from the Scriptures. What does the Word say concerning these issues? I know some dialogue has failed because of arrogance on the part of one or both partners, yet if we want to be true to what we say we believe, we need to go back to the Scriptures and let them guide us to good healthy relationships.

Ronald Lizwe Moyo is the former Director for the Brethren in Christ (BIC) Church Youth Program. He is currently employed as an officer for Emthunzini Wethemba, an institution for the rehabilitation of street kids in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He and his wife Sukoluble are the parents of two children. He is a member of Pumula BIC Church.



**From Nicolas Largaespada Alvarez,
Nicaragua**

1. I have a concern about doctrines and teachings. I live in the capital of Nicaragua. The pastors in the country keep the teachings they received when the missionaries arrived: for instance, practicing wearing prayer veilings for women and long dresses, but with no jewelry, and not watching TV nor listening to music other than evangelical music.

In the capital it is difficult to observe these teachings. The pastors in the country are always questioning those in the capital about why they do not keep the principles taught by the missionaries.

In our last meeting, the pastors agreed to seek one position regarding these issues. For that purpose they are planning to analyze and discuss the matter. Pastors, Sunday school teachers, and theology instructors of the Biblical Institute will participate.

For me, this is a source of distress. If they want to adopt a single position, somebody is going to be excluded or will exclude him- or herself. Until now we have lived together in spite of these differences. I think it will be very difficult to arrive at a single position. I know that other leaders are also concerned about this.

2. I am one of eight teachers at the Biblical Institute in Nicaragua, and I am also a pastor. This August we offered a one-week seminar on Anabaptist/Mennonite history in eight different areas of the country. Between 20 and 30 pastors attended in each group. In

these seminars the students are given an anthology to study and questions to answer. They also bring their reactions to discuss in class.

Included in the anthology is a document that said that Menno Simons believed that Jesus Christ was only divine. Menno interpreted that Jesus did not take from Mary any human nature. The students wondered whether Menno's idea was the inspiration of the anti-Christ (I John 4:3). This position was also upheld by some other Christians of Menno's time.

The uneasy question from the students was, if we come to the conclusion that Menno was heretical, should we continue to be called Mennonites?

I am certain there is a satisfactory answer, and I am getting ready to help our students to grapple with this matter and to arrive at our own conclusions.

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3. How can the Anabaptist/Mennonite principles be kept today? The context in which the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century lived was very different from ours.

There are technological advances, the little time our busy people have to pay attention to history when they have to overwork to make ends meet, the attraction of consumerism. . .

I feel it is not possible to live in the past. Neither should we forget the past.

How can modern people put into practice in their lives those historical paradigms that have to do with the way the Anabaptists struggled, lived, and died?

Nicolas Largaespada Alvarez is a pastor in Managua, Nicaragua. He is a member of the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee representing Latin America.



Photo Ed van Straten

**From Lydia Penner,
Den Haag, The Netherlands**

1. The first concern I have has to do with our commitment to God and Jesus, for I think we are distracted too much from our love for God. We have become very concerned about many things — things in the structure of the church, in the organization of activities, in dealing with the problems in the society around us, also in the logistics of our personal lives.

I'm sure we do many good things in all those areas, but we are in danger of losing sight of what it is all about; of losing contact with the central issue, which is our love for God. This concern includes me and all church people. I'm not thinking of any church in particular, for I've noticed it when I talked to people on buses, trains, airplanes. I've seen it in Canada, in Taize; it is a universal church issue.

This neglect is a bad thing, for if the love for God is not central in your life anymore you lose the warmth, the joy, the fulfillment that relationship with God gives us. We then also become less concerned about our commitment to the people around us.

You need inspiration for that commitment, and for me that inspiration comes from God in Jesus. If we are not careful to maintain a relationship with God, we are in greater danger of becoming islands of egoism.

2. I am concerned that the church can become too self-absorbed. There is a tendency to be so concerned about the survival of the church as we now know it, at

least in the Netherlands, that we are sometimes in danger of ignoring the needs of the world around us. I'm not saying we don't do anything, but this concern with survival can go too far. Globally people are more concerned with their personal salvation, or that their personal needs are met in church. We can so easily lose spiritual strength that is necessary if we are to be meaningful to society. We should be there for everybody who comes our way, including, for instance, the Moslim or Hindu people who live in our city. We have to bring love to them; that is the essence of the Gospel. That love may address physical and spiritual needs. We have to be open to the fact that many people have spiritual needs.

3. I am also concerned about women in the church, about the balance between women and men in the church. As we understand from Genesis, God made humanity male and female, and both have to reflect the image of God and do that together. A church can never become the full image of God if the Spirit is limited in the use of the talents that are available.

If a church has rules that exclude women from leadership or from being a preacher, those rules limit the Holy Spirit. Women have the same responsibility to reflect the image of God as men. A church that does not permit that leadership is handicapped.

In essence we are the image of God. But in us this image has become tarnished. We have to regain it. For that recovery we have to turn to Jesus. He has both male and female qualities, which is why women feel attracted to him, as we see in the New Testament.

This concern is true for the men and women in leadership, but there should also be a balance in membership. In the Dutch Mennonite churches men are under-represented, and that is not good.

Lydia Penner is pastor at Den Haag (Netherlands) Mennonite Church. She was born in Steinbach, Manitoba, worked for MCC in Germany, and studied theology in The Netherlands.



**From Ambrocio L. Porincula,
the Philippines**

1. My foremost concern has to do with missions. The goal of every church should be to be a church-planting church, a soul-winning church. I hope in the next 10-20 years, the Philippine Mennonite Church will be a self-supporting and sending

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church. We have sent one woman missionary to Hong Kong in cooperation with the Hong Kong Mennonite Church, with some support from Eastern Mennonite Missions (U.S.). We are looking at the possibility of developing a program for youth, ages 18-30, in partnership with Global Disciples of the Lancaster (PA) Mennonite Conference (U.S.), that would allow the young people to do both evangelism and service. Fifty percent of the youth would come from the Philippines; 50 percent would come from other countries. They would be trained and then sent out together.

I am always encouraging our churches to have their own livelihood projects, from their own initiatives. Churches that have their own sources of income can help support church-planting. I pray that God will give a person to lead in that kind of min-

istry, to help the financial needs of our churches.

2. Another concern I have is to develop education among Filipino church leaders so we can be identified as true Mennonite-Anabaptists. Most of our pastors come from different independent churches. Most are poor farmers living in modest areas who don't have money to go to school. We have district Bible schools that go to the pastors. The instructors are trained in Anabaptist theology, and they are training the pastors. And we have a small Bible school in the northern Philippines supported by Eastern Mennonite Missions. I have a vision to make it a good facility in 10 years.

My training was in the military. I experienced the kind of politics in the Philippines that I consider the dirtiest politics in the world. In my army training base, bold letters in front of the door said, "Kill your enemy." When I came to know Jesus, I was shocked to learn from the Bible, "Love your enemies." I had to dig deep. I had to ask my pastor for books. I learned about Anabaptist theology. Now I urge my pastors to practice nonviolence. I tell them, "First be loyal to God, and second to the church where you belong—an Anabaptist church."

3. Another concern I have is helping the needs of the community; cooperating with social and economic agencies. The church is not practicing this enough. We give more importance to our own needs. I tell my pastors, "Practice what you preach. Be a good example."

Churches can create jobs, not only for themselves, but also for nonbelievers. Nonbelievers work in my small factory. When I am home, we have 10 to 30 minutes of Bible study and prayer in the factory first thing in the morning. It is a way for them to hear the Gospel. Ninety percent of the workers have been converted.

Ambrocio L. Porincula is one of four Mennonite bishops in the Philippines and moderator of the four districts. He is a rice farmer and business man and the grandfather of three little girls.



From John Lapp, the United States

1. My first concern is the Biblical literacy of the church. Nearly all North American Mennonites and Brethren in Christ know how to read, but they appear to know less and less about the Bible. Many of us do not read the Bible regularly and study it far less.

Understanding the Bible doesn't just happen—it is not the result of merely knowing the words. Biblical literacy requires an understanding of what the writer was saying, the context in which it was said, listening to the Spirit as we translate the original text for the twenty-first century church situation.

The traditional ways in which we learned to understand the Bible no longer appear to be working very well. Sunday School today often substitutes other readings for the Bible. Sermons are usually limited to 15 to 20 minutes and are expected to capture the attention rather than teach. Families are too preoccupied to study the scriptures together. Only a few gain a depth of understanding in the scriptures in our schools, colleges, and seminaries.

The church thrives best when the Bible is central to its life, when members are familiar with the great stories of the Bible and discern their meaning in the context of the church. The Bible as sourcebook of the church requires Biblical literacy.

2. My second concern has to do with the nature of the Christian life which is frequently given the label spirituality. Contemporary consciousness of the non-physical dimensions of existence and the influence of Pentecostalism within the

Christian movement have pushed spirit and spirituality to the forefront. A fully developed spirituality focuses on the embodiment of the character of God in the flesh. It is lived experience, a disciplined life of prayer, Bible study, and action committed to loving God and one's neighbor.

An emphasis on spirituality in the church is always necessary. The recent emphasis on spirituality has been a healthy corrective to a theology that sometimes becomes too scientific and intellectual. Spirituality, however, sometimes focuses on the interior and the subjective qualities of the faith at the expense of the objective, worldly character of the incarnate gospel. Spirituality ought to connect Biblical themes with the nitty-gritty business of life.

The Mennonite and Brethren in Christ calling within the Christian family is to accentuate the ethical character of spirituality which we have called discipleship. This spirituality means following the path of Jesus as a covenant community. Spirituality requires moral discernment in the church and expression by the living body of Christ.

3. My third concern for the church has to do with the practice of mission.

How do we practice world mission now when there are churches on location in almost all countries? Now that Mennonites and Brethren in Christ have become a truly global body, is it time for American mission agencies to decrease—John-the-Baptist style—so that the global body of Christ can assume its rightful place as the centerpiece of continuing world mission?

Today there are more Mennonites in the Congo than in Canada, more Brethren in Christ in Zimbabwe than in the United States, more Mennonites in Andhra Pradesh, India, than in Pennsylvania. Churches are growing conspicuously without specialized mission agencies. It would be inappropriate to take the mission society model into an environment which is more akin to the growth patterns of the early church.

The global church expects us to do

mission differently. Workers, administrators, and boards will want to accept the initiative of the church on location. This is not easy for North Americans who have been accustomed to asserting leadership and providing direction.

John A. Lapp, Akron, Pennsylvania, USA, is Mennonite Central Committee Executive Secretary Emeritus and director of MWC's Global History Project.



From Hugo Moreira, Uruguay

What is going on in Latin America urges us to advocate for an integrated gospel for the whole person.

Globalization should have had beneficial consequences for all the peoples of the world. Far from that, it is having a disastrous effect on many people's well-being. The Latin American church is witnessing people's suffering from lack of food, of healthcare, of education.

The 16th century Anabaptists reflected life realities of their times and contexts. Their biblical theology in general and the interpretation of the Anabaptist vision in particular came to us in Latin America from North American and European sources. It is time for Latin American Anabaptists to seek to be a church with more Latin American color and shape. I would like to see the church, North and South, contextualizing the message of the gospel and incarnating the Good News of Jesus Christ.

I am concerned about the quality of leaders we are helping to form. There are those that do not allow their sheep to become leaders because they are afraid to lose their prerogatives. In that way they frustrate the possibility of choosing David, the little shepherd, with his potential.

The way leaders should be formed is by modeling. This method has to do with our concept of church. We don't go to church; we are the church. If we are the church, we are like Christ. If we are like Christ, we are models.

Jesus warned us, "I did not come to be served, but to serve." Jesus is the leader par excellence, the servant leader. When leaders have that quality, we have a servant church. A servant leader is one who speaks with persons about the things that really hurt them. Many people come to church seeking what the church can do for them, what God can do for them. As soon as possible, they leave with their miracle. We wonder, then, where we failed.

The good leader should seek to help each member to become a servant leader, functioning in the body in the particular way that has been given to him or her.

Hugo Moreira is a pastor in Montevideo, Uruguay. He is a member of the Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee representing Latin America.

From Enoch Shampani, Zambia

1. If you had asked me this question some time ago, the order of my priorities might have been different. As of now, I am inclined to place the need for peace in the world as a priority. It is at the top of my list for world affairs as well as continental ones.

War has brought untold suffering to humanity. My own continent has no peace to talk of. It is dogged by civil wars and displacement of people. This situation wreaks havoc on families and the whole fabric of society. It is not only the disturbance of wars, but the pain and suffering endured by the many innocent people, which bothers me.

Many countries in Africa are the homes of refugees from neighboring



countries. In Zambia alone, we have about 180,000 refugees. Most of these come from Angola and the Congo. They need shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and love.

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2. Another of my concerns is the relevance of the church in this day and age. What we preach in the church is not what we live. There are some areas where we are not changing people's lives. We are not making a difference. Our continent is clouded with poverty, crime, and disease, which go hand in hand. They are related. For this reason I say we should be "my brother's keeper." When I know that my brother has indulged in crime because of poverty I feel certain responsibility. I believe when God created the earth he placed enough natural resources to meet the needs of all of us. No one should lack, because there is enough to sustain us all. The problem is in an unwillingness to share by those who have been blessed with more or who have had a way of tapping into those resources.

3. The issue of HIV/AIDS, and the church's involvement in the fight against

it, is something I feel strongly about. The church should be the salt of the world. It should be the light. Everyone should learn from the church. For a long time we have been silent when it comes to confronting HIV/AIDS. We can't turn a blind eye to what we see around us. Neither can we turn a deaf ear to the plight of the orphans crying for love and care. We should adopt a holistic approach to dealing with HIV/AIDS because it challenges the whole Christian fabric.

I have challenged the preachers to speak about HIV/AIDS from the pulpit. We need to break the silence. I have said to my dear wife, "If I should die of AIDS, I do not expect you to lie to the people. I would want you to tell the truth because that is the only way we can hope to destroy the fear which is gripping all people."

In the Zambian church we make use of every major gathering to talk about HIV/AIDS. We are strengthening existing community, home-based care initiatives and moving towards training more peer educators, especially among the youth. We are making a special effort to reach the children in our boarding schools, as well as those who leave school and are at home and vulnerable. We have a challenge. We can make a difference.

Enock Shamapani is a bishop in the Brethren in Christ Church in Zambia, and a member of the MWC General Council.

Members of the MWC communication team interviewed most of the persons included in the preceding articles: Doris Dube interviewed Enoch Shamapani and Lizwe Moyo; Ed van Straten interviewed Lydia Penner; Ferne Burkhardt interviewed Ambrocio Porcincula; and Milka Rindzinski interviewed Hugo Moreira and Nicolas Largaespada Alvarez.

All photos in this series of articles are by Merle Good unless otherwise noted.

To the Anabaptist-Mennonite Churches of the United States of America: A Message of Gratitude, Condolence, and Hope

by Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas

Brothers and Sisters, may the peace of Jesus Christ guide you, accompany you, and comfort you.

Confronted with the terrible happenings in New York and Washington September the 11th, I have two strong feelings on my heart as I write to you. One is of gratitude and the other is of condolence, and the two meet to produce a great yearning for faith and hope.

My feeling of gratitude arises in response to acts of tremendous love and solidarity that you have shown for the situation of pain, destruction, death, and hopelessness that we, the people of Colombia, have suffered as a result of injustice, cruelty, and terrorism practiced by the armed groups, legal and illegal, in our territory.

I see the face of God in your faces, my beloved brothers and sisters, in the acts of solidarity that are manifestations of tenderness among people. I saw how these small seeds of hope and love are growing between our peoples. I saw that among us, the global family of faith, the universe is our homeland and in this way we are not strangers, but sisters and brothers in faith, in love, and in hope.

I send my condolences, accompanied by fraternal pain, which arise in response to the images of destruction and death and the dazed and incredulous faces seen on television during the terrorist attack suffered by your nation, the most powerful in the world today.

I think that this act brings us closer together. Now that you, too, have experienced pain and fear, it's not necessary for you to imagine what it's like to live with insecurity and be exposed to a terrorist attack. Now that you have lived through it, you know that no government, no matter how strong, can protect us from the effects of evil, injustice, hate, and revenge.

With troubled hearts and tears in our eyes we say to you, may God protect you brothers and sisters. We know what it means to suffer, the pain and the lashing of injustice, because this has been our daily bread all our lives. Who better than we to understand you, sisters and brothers, than we who have learned through our own misfortune? For this reason we tell you with deep pain in our souls that we understand your pain. May God comfort you and give you strength and courage to transform these acts for good, and not be tempted by seductive feelings of hatred and revenge.

While it is important that acts that destroy human life not end in impunity, Romans 12:17-21 invites us not to take revenge into our own hands, but to allow God to bring justice. We are called to overcome evil with good.

Now for my yearning for faith and hope. Through these acts that we suffer, God is trying us and inviting us to be birth parents of the new history where evil is overcome by good, where the enemy is loved, where we can all live without fear, and where nations respect the human dignity of all people on Earth.

May your compassion increase with your own suffering and permit you to understand that it is in your country that the birthing process must begin. At this time the United States is the center of the world, and what is done there has positive and negative repercussions in the other countries of the world.

It seems very symbolic that precisely this passage on birthing new life (Romans 8:22-23) is included in Paul's letter to the Romans, given that Rome was the center of the world in those times. I believe that this is a direct message to all the church of Christ that finds itself in the center of world political power, and that is where

you are. What a great challenge and responsibility has come upon you today!

The global family of faith looks to you, filled with hope that you, from the center of the world, will begin a great campaign to keep the effects of evil, of hate, and of revenge from nesting in the souls of leaders and governments of the countries of the West. May you impede them from using their economic and military might against the people of the East and of the Third World that are as innocent as the inhabitants of New York and Washington, who were victims of humans alienated by pain, hate, and hunger for vengeance.

Let us unite in a great campaign of fasting, prayer, preaching, and song, and in so doing rise to the challenge of taking to your leaders the message that violence only brings more violence. It is time for the peoples of the earth to treat one another with respect, dignity, and solidarity. Only then can they calm the hate and vengeance felt by people who have been historically mistreated. War will only produce more hate and vengeance, and the people of the US will not have peace and will only live in permanent anxiety.

It is time to birth a new world order, and the people of the US have the historic opportunity to show the rest of the world how to really live civilly and with justice, without violence, without acts of death and destruction of innocent human lives, to return evil with good and take away from the terrorists the excuse for a holy war of hate and death.

Your brother in Christ and humanity,
Ricardo Esquivia Ballestas

Ballestas, of the Colombian Mennonite Church, is Director of the Commission of Human Rights and Peace of the Council of Evangelical Churches of Colombia (CEDECOL), and Director of Justapaz.

Colombian Mennonite Church Thrives Despite Conflict

by *Islandes Losada and Pablo Stuckey*

Colombia has been living amidst a situation of armed conflict for more than 50 years. During that time over two million people became refugees or left their homes seeking safety. Most of them were women and children.

This situation of generalized violence is producing more than 30,000 deaths every year. There is an acute economic crisis aggravated by conflict and corruption and by international economic policies that have led small- and medium-size producers into bankruptcy, bringing about the highest rate of unemployment in the country's history (officially 20 percent). There is social disruption brought about by governmental policies that cause the closedown of hospitals and reduction of funds for schools. On the people's side, there are strikes called by carriers, teachers, peasants, and native people, but also the emergence of people's initiatives in favor of peace and human rights.

In this context, the Iglesia Cristiana Menonita is seeking to be faithful to Jesus Christ the crucified. Pastor Islandes Losada, in the course of one year, received death threats as a reaction to his ministry toward persons who are seeking God, trying to desert guerrilla groups, and setting arms aside.

With the support of sisters and brothers of the Mennonite churches, Losada tried to meet the armed group that was threatening to kill him to explain the Gospel and the ministry to which he and his church have been called. In spite of the threats and opposition, he explained, he would continue to be faithful to this call.

Losada was assaulted and had to confront very difficult moments. With the support of prayer and counsel from the church, he was able to witness to the Gospel of peace and to inform the guerrilla group about the projects of the Mennonite Church in Colombia. Since then, all threats have discontinued and Peace Sanctuary activities in his congregation and in others went ahead. A number of people have come, ready to desert violent



MWC photo / Merle Good

groups. The presence and witness of Pastor Losada's congregation, as well as other churches, have given rise to new Christian congregations in different parts of the country where armed conflicts have increased.

Many churches experience what this congregation has been enduring. The economic, social, and political situation in the country affects all of them. The Mennonite church in one small town is offering a program for families which helps recover and strengthen ties in many homes. One church in the capital city offers a weekly space to pray for peace in the country. It organized a Justice and Peace Committee to serve the number of persons that weekly come to ask for urgent help to overcome threats. Several churches carry out an educational ministry. Others organize programs to support marginalized elderly people.

Churches in the southern part of the country are also trying to survive the armed conflicts. The various Anabaptist denominations in the country are seeking to strengthen ties so that they can give more effective support to each other, as they face serious economic needs, and also to surrounding communities.

To tend to these needs the Mennonite

Church gets help from the Mennonite Central Committee, from the missions agency of the Mennonite Church in the USA, as well as from other churches and organizations. The National Bureau of the Mennonite Church in Colombia is organizing committees in the congregations to tend to the spiritual, economic, psychological, social, and health needs of the people.

Justapaz sponsors efforts to promote conscientious objection to military service among all groups. Their initiatives combine peace and development, support to churches in their activities such as peace sanctuaries and in their connection to social movements towards peace in the country. Justapaz also is promoting a project of sister churches. Their goal is to relate Colombian churches with churches in other countries in order to share ways of action and support. The organization also takes part in the initiatives and dialogues with armed groups to promote peace. And Justapaz offers support to other evangelical churches through the organization's Human Rights and Peace Committee. There is a good acceptance of Anabaptist perspectives and theology.

Another program, Mencoldes, continues its long history of promoting development projects for impoverished, marginalized, and displaced persons, to empower them to overcome the serious economic crisis they are facing. The program also offers medical, dental, and psychological assistance for the displaced, help with resettlement, farming techniques, and housing, and also training and pastoral care.

Mennonite schools offer training in the Gospel and explain the call to nonviolence. Two homes for the aged respond to the urgent need of elderly persons with minimum resources. The Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Colombia has training courses for those who will become the leaders of the church. The bookstore, Librería La Luz, and the Center for Anabaptist Resources (CLARA) offer Anabaptist literature which emphasizes the way of Anabaptism for the practice of faith today.

In addition, the CREER Center offers space for retreats and reflection.

The witness of Christian Peacemaker Team's sisters and brothers from North America, invited here by the Mennonite Church in Colombia, have been helpful. The Mennonite church is also sponsoring the Witness for Peace program, which brings to the country international delegations that want to verify personally the impact of USA policies and its Plan Colombia. When they are back in their country they hope to work to change policies, to stop the promotion of military solutions, and to support nonviolent peace initiatives in response to the situation in Colombia.

How does this uncertainty and unrest affect life? How do people maintain hope and continue to witness amidst such difficulties and danger? Pastor Losada reflects, "It is not easy to live amidst conflict, much less when your life is being threatened. But

this threat also represents the challenge to keep on transmitting the Gospel of Peace to people who suffer because of the blatant violence that prevails in this country. Our only hope is God."

Losada adds, "This experience has helped me not to become paralyzed because of fear. Instead, I have learned to look for spaces and to carry out actions that lead us to solutions different from the ones offered today in our country. The nonviolent option is one example."

How has the situation affected the prayer life and worship of the church? "The experience has led people to a more personal relationship with Jesus through prayer, so that daily life may be more in accordance with Jesus' ways," says pastor Losada. "The local church I am part of has grown almost 200 percent. There is an attendance of about 400 people committed to the kingdom of God. The church is

taking care of the basic needs of families and is taking the message of the Gospel to other areas of the country, particularly to those regions where the armed conflict is stronger. It is trying to do something to stop violence. The Gospel is undoubtedly the message and alternative for this situation in today's hard times.

"We are thankful for prayers and support from sisters and brothers from all over the world. In my case, many churches in different countries organized prayer meetings to ask for God's help. And God has responded. This encourages us to pursue our different projects. We ask our brothers and sisters to persevere in prayer. We need that perseverance to overcome this crisis our church and country is going through."

Islandes Losada is a Mennonite pastor in Colombia and Pablo Stucky is Program Coordinator for Justapaz in Colombia.

Celebrating Christmas Around the World . . .

In the family—

Christmas is considered as a "family gathering" and a time of sharing for immediate and extended family. Any activity before, during, and after Christmas is centered on "gathering."

—Dothan Moyo, Zimbabwe

Having homemade ice cream on Christmas evening, when we come home from church, developed into a special family tradition.

—Carmen Epp, Paraguay

Several days before Christmas, we usually make or buy snacks for friends and neighbors (including Moslem neighbors).

—Miriam Krisetya, Indonesia

Holiday meals in our home are an inter-cultural experience. My wife Helen is of Irish-English background, raised in South Carolina. My brother-in-law, Steve, is Anglo and was raised by a Native American family. And I am of Mexican heritage.

As a family, we are thrice blessed with cultural traditions.

—Alberto Quintela, Jr. USA

At the beginning of every December, we buy toys and clothing for our children. We also talk about the birth of Jesus. We

parents buy flowers to decorate the house and plan a special meal that all will enjoy. It is a time of rejoicing at the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

—Gambandu Pumbu, Congo

We don't like to give presents at Christmastime. I think the big present that should be focused on is Christ's coming into the world.

—Inneke Reinhold, The Netherlands

In the congregation—

In many churches there is a vigil all night on Christmas Eve. We have a special worship service. The sermon deals with Jesus' birth and how this blessed and benefited us lost people. There are festive meals and some churches prepare dramas.

—Nicolás Largaespada, Nicaragua

In Salatiga, there is a worship service on the big square, starting at 4:00 a.m. in which all churches in Salatiga (including Roman Catholic) take part. People come with mats and umbrellas and candles. For that occasion the mosque remains silent, so in a way they help.

—Miriam Krisetya, Indonesia

Sometimes the pastor announces two weeks before the holiday that the congrega-

tion will eat a Christmas meal together. At other times we eat our meal at home after the church service.

—Gambandu Pumbu, Congo

Children's puppet presentations are becoming a part of the holiday activities at our church. The children design, create, paint, and dress their own hand puppets. As a means for the children to remember their lines, they participate in the writing and re-writing of the scripts. This practice results in some interesting contemporary references in traditional presentations.

This program is an opportunity to invite children and friends to a church activity.

—Alberto Quintela, Jr., USA

Usually a special day is set aside to fellowship with less privileged members of our society, such as orphans in homes (orphanages) or with street children.

—Dothan Moyo, Zimbabwe

Christmas Eve serves as an opportunity for those brothers and sisters who have resentments/shortcomings with one another to reconcile and forgive each other.

—Ambrocio L. Porcinula, The Philippines

This collection was gathered and compiled by Merle Good.

Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee Moves Projects Forward

by Phyllis Pellman Good

MWC photo / Merle Good



The MWC Executive Committee and staff at work in Thomashof.

The Mennonite World Conference Executive Committee held its annual meeting in the Mennonite retreat center of Thomashof, on the edge of Karlsruhe, Germany, August 18-24, 2001. It was a setting rife with Mennonite history; planning for the sixth Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly had happened there, anticipating the event held in August of 1957 in nearby Karlsruhe.

The excitement of Assembly planning was on the Executive Committee's (EC) agenda this time, too. The EC spent as much energy and imagination considering how to allocate the organization's time and modest resources in the face of all the expectations and requests coming its way.

Next Assembly

Planning for Africa 2003, the upcoming Assembly to be held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, is kicking in at full throttle. Dothan Moyo, National Coordinator, reported that more than 50 people in Zimbabwe have already been appointed to planning committees. Kenneth Nafziger of the U.S. and Eunice Khanye of Zimbabwe, co-leaders of the Music Committee, are on a search for a "versatile,

international ensemble of 12" who will teach and lead the music at the Assembly. They will demonstrate, said Nafziger, "that we can all learn to sing each other's songs."

The Executive Committee, despite their enthusiasm for this first-ever African setting for an Assembly, acknowledged the political, economic, and medical uncertainties facing the host country, and, consequently, the event itself. In the end they chose to stand in solidarity with the sisters and brothers of Zimbabwe, but without bravado. "Let's move forward with God opening the way. Let's pray and continue to prepare," said Fimbo Ganvunze, EC member from the Congo.

The Zimbabweans have already begun "providing a

prayer cover," explained Moyo. Not only is a Prayer Committee in place, "nights and vigils of prayer, and prayer camps are being set up."

"Zimbabweans are so looking forward to having us come," reflected Doris Dube, MWC regional editor for Africa.

MWC is closely monitoring the Zimbabwe situation, will continue to do so, and is prepared to make necessary adjustments to the unfolding plans. In that spirit, MWC staff and a team from MTS Travel were in the country the first week of September.



Dothan Moyo



Ken Nafziger



Andrea Lange (pastor of the Mennonite church in the Weierhof) and Nicolas Largaespada (MWC Executive Committee member) converse next to the gravestone of Christian Neff, early MWC visionary and leader.

MWC photo / Merle Good



Joram Mbeba of Tanzania addresses Ineke Reinhold-Scheuermann of The Netherlands and Justina Heese of Canada, and other members of the Executive Committee.

Global Gifts Sharing, Phase 2

Pakisa Tshmika and Tim Lind reported completion of the gifts inventory that they have been gathering among member churches in Africa, as part of the Global Gifts Sharing Project. But the Project refuses to stay within its neatly bound covers. Instead, a new phase to this global sharing of gifts has presented itself. Many of the uncovered riches cannot be shared without some further subsidy. For example, a group of women in Ghana have a food preparation technology to offer to the women of Burkina Faso. Unless they can visit each other, the efficiencies cannot be passed along.

Tshmika and Lind are also fielding requests to speed up a gifts inventory in Latin America, in Asia, and in North America.

EC members reminded themselves that, in the short term, MWC may need to “facilitate gift-sharing between churches,” but in the long term, MWC is instead to “lift up, communicate, and celebrate the sharing that is done by its members.”

Global History Project

Two volumes of the global Mennonite History Project are scheduled for release at Africa 2003--the Latin American book and the African book, each prepared by writers from those respective continents. John A. Lapp, coordinator, reported that the project has stirred questions that demand thoughtful response in the increasingly mutual relationships being fostered among members of the global church: Who owns

the archives of the mission groups who worked in the Congo, for example? Don't mission groups have a moral obligation to return archival material to the people among whom they worked? And what is appropriate nomenclature for referring to this project and its subjects? Many MWC member churches do not use “Mennonite” or “Brethren in Christ” or “Anabaptist” in their names.

Selecting writers for the volumes about Europe and North America is currently underway. Said Lapp, “Women are being urged to apply.”

Conversations with Other Christians

On an excursion to the Weierhof, EC members were hosted by the local Mennonite pastor, Andrea Lange. Lange,

one of the delegates to the Mennonite-Catholic Dialogues, reflected on those continuing conversations: “When you enter a dialogue, you enter an adventure. You don't know the outcome. I have come to think it's a scandal that the body of Christ is so fragmented.”

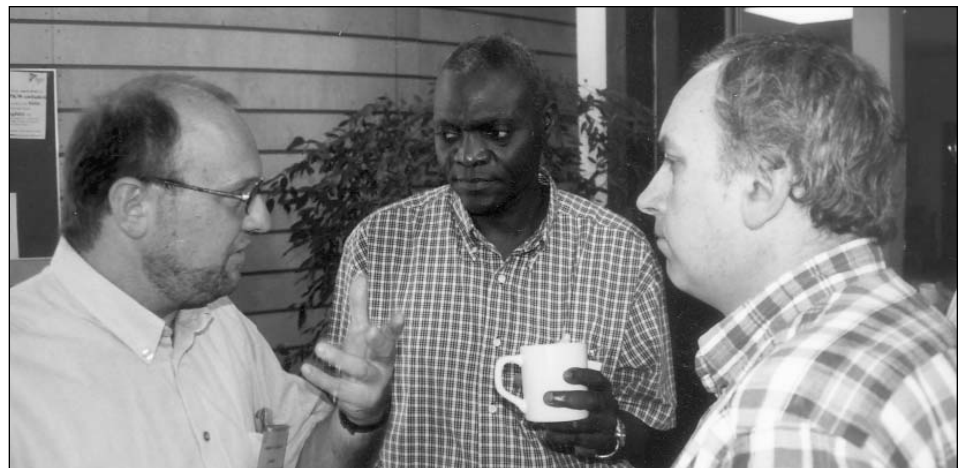
Fernando Enns, German Mennonite Churches' (AMG) delegate to the World Council of Churches, and Rainer Burkart, Secretary of MWC's Faith and Life Council, struck a common theme in their reports. They reminded EC members that as Mennonites are seen as bearers of a peace witness, the spotlight turns more penetratingly on Mennonite behavior. “Our own weaknesses and problems in that area are also being exposed,” commented Burkart.

MWC's Future

As the end of the nearly weeklong meeting approached, Antje de Vries-Van Dijk joined the EC for a day. She is a member of the International Planning Commission, MWC's appointed think-tank for shaping its future. After testing one of the Commission's tools for gathering data with the EC, de Vries reminded the group of MWC's largest task: “We offer ‘prepared land’ to our member churches.”

On that “prepared land” is MWC's gilt-edged gift to its member churches--a meeting space and place. In addition, there are a growing number of projects, designed to help those churches become increasingly a global congregation

Phyllis Pellman Good, Lancaster, PA, USA, is assistant editor of Courier.



Rainer Burkart of Germany (left), Secretary of MWC's Faith and Life Council, in discussion with Executive Committee members Fimbo Ganvunze (center) of the Congo and Hugo Moreira of Uruguay.

New Exchange Program Aims to Create Global Network

by Ferne Burkhardt

MWC photo / Merle Good



Liese Unger

Liese Unger enjoys working with youth and young adults. "I want to support and challenge them to use their gifts," she said in an interview at the Thomashof Mennonite retreat center in Karlsruhe, Germany. As the first director of the new YAMEN! program, she will have that opportunity.

YAMEN! (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network!) is a joint Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee program to facilitate church-to-church youth and young adult exchanges and gift-sharing. Pakisa Tshimika, MWC staff person who will supervise the program, sees a global network of Anabaptist-related young people as "one of the roads" in building a world communion.

For one year, young participants will use their gifts in the congregation that receives them. On their return, they will share what they learned during their exchange year with the sending congregation for at least three months, noted Unger.

Besides a spirit of optimism, Unger brings a rich background of training and experience to her new job. She was born in Russia and moved to the Palatinate with her family at age 10. She now lives in Karlsruhe with her husband Wilhelm, pastor of the Thomashof Mennonite Church.

"I always wanted to do voluntary service, but I decided to get professional training and experience first," she said. Trained as a social worker, she worked for a non-profit agency among the Umsiedler in Germany and eastern Europe. "The day I got a permanent contract, I applied for voluntary service. I was afraid I would lose my vision," she explained.

As an MCC volunteer, she worked in the inner city of Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada) from 1990-92. For the past eight years she has directed Christliche Dienst, the German Mennonite voluntary service organization, working with young adults and visiting partnership organizations in Germany, North America, and Israel.

Unger and Tshimika will develop an application, screening, and orientation process for young participants and the churches who will host them and provide jobs. They hope to place five young people the first year, 10 in the second, and 15 in the third year.

Ferne Burkhardt, Petersburg, Ontario, Canada, is MWC News Editor.

Mennonite World Conference Expands Staff

by Ferne Burkhardt

On September 1, two Mennonite World Conference associate executive secretaries began full-time work. The new portfolios will allow Larry Miller, executive secretary, to focus more on vision and oversight of MWC, relationships with churches around the

to be held August 11-17, 2003 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, "has the potential of being one of the most exciting world conferences ever," said Brubacher.

Southern Africa's special gift of music, along with plans by an international committee to lead vocal and instrumental



Roy Brubacher



Pakisa Tshimika

world, communications and financial development.

Roy Brubacher, Waterloo, Ontario (Canada), formerly MWC director of special projects, is now Associate Executive Secretary, Events and Administration. Brubacher worked for MWC part-time while studying at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana (U.S.A.) in 1999. He then worked in the MWC office in Strasbourg, France, from January 2000 until he moved to the Kitchener, Ontario, office in October 2000.

Brubacher's new administrative tasks will include updating policies and ways of keeping records, but his primary task for the next two years will be planning the Africa 2003 assembly. Assembly Gathered,

music will give music, special emphasis at this assembly, said Brubacher. He also anticipates more emphasis on programs for youth and higher attendance from the southern hemisphere.

Among Brubacher's challenges will be putting to rest, primarily in western countries, anxieties around politics and HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. He acknowledges that the political situation may worsen in the run-up to the election in April 2002, after which he anticipates greater stability in the country. He urges people to look beyond current unrest as they consider attending the Assembly in 2003.

The health crisis in Zimbabwe should not be a concern for visitors, he said. Pre-assembly information will suggest any health care precau-

tions participants should consider.

Brubacher knows Africa well, having served there with Mennonite Central Committee in positions ranging from teacher to Africa director to international program director over nearly 30 years. While he was pastor at Elmira Mennonite Church in Canada from 1981-89, he also served on the binational and MCC Canada boards.

Assuming the position of Associate Executive Secretary, Networks and Projects is Pakisa Tshimika, Fresno, California (U.S.A.).

"I do whatever Ray doesn't

do. I'm the director of leftover jobs," quipped Tshimika. In a more serious vein, he added, "There are lots of ideas floating around...that might work with a new twist. I want to start with results and figure out how to build to get there."

He's had experience with "a new twist." A native of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Tshimika came to the U.S. to study to be a surgeon. When a horrific car accident thwarted that plan, he turned to other health fields, earning Masters and PhD degrees in California. He then worked in the DRC, as African Program Director for

Mennonite Brethren Missions Services International and National Director of Health and Development. One of his specialties is HIV/AIDS.

With conflict raging in the DRC, he returned to California in August, 1999. Travel in Africa for his job was easier from a U.S. base, he said. He continued working half-time for MBMS International, but ready for a change, he began working for MWC as director of the Global Gifts Sharing Project and as an advisor on other projects.

Most recently, Tshimika has traveled all over Africa with MWC Global Gifts Sharing

Project co-worker Tim Lind, creating an inventory of gifts African Mennonites and Brethren in Christ have to offer. His new full-time position expands his responsibility to creating and overseeing a range of projects and staff, including the new YAMEN! (Young Anabaptist Mennonite Exchange Network!) program.

"I like to network with people who have challenging ideas. I want to make them happen," said Tshimika, whose immediate travel and work link him with Africa, Europe, and North America with Latin America and Asia in waiting.

Mennonite World Conference Makes Communication Changes

Mennonite World Conference has made two new appointments to its communications team and introduced a French translation of its quarterly magazine, *Courier*. French-speaking Mennonites in France, Quebec, the Congo, and other French-speaking countries in Africa and around the world were able to read the first edition of *Courier*, the French magazine, in April, 2001.

Sylvie Gudin Poupaert translates the English magazine into French. Plans include adding some material exclusive to the French edition beginning next year.

Gudin Poupaert lives in Strasbourg with her family, including two teenage children. She does other translating work for MWC, but her primary job is with "Church and Peace." She coordinates the French-speaking sectors of the European ecumenical network of about 60 Christian communities, churches, and organizations committed to peace and reconciliation.

Gudin Poupaert is no stranger to global Mennonites.



Sylvie Gudin Poupaert

She organized the Peace House at the MWC 1984 assembly, worked with Larry Miller, MWC executive secretary, when he was Mennonite Board of Missions director for Europe and served with Mennonite Central Committee as a trainee and at seminars.

Appointed MWC News Editor is Ferne Burkhardt, Petersburg, Ontario (Canada), replacing Larry Kehler, Winnipeg, Manitoba (Canada), who retired after three years in that position.

"Three and half years ago, a communications expert told me that MWC must increase



Ferne Burkhardt

the flow of news around the world about the global family of faith. Larry Kehler offered his services shortly thereafter," said Larry Miller. "Three months ago, the same expert said he had noticed a remarkable growth in the number of news releases from MWC in Mennonite and BIC publications. Larry Kehler is the main reason for the change. While a volunteer in retirement, Larry worked with quiet and exemplary effectiveness to spread significant news of the church in one part of the world to the church in all other parts of the world."

To continue that flow of news, Burkhardt joined the communications team as a part-time volunteer in August. Last December, she retired as editorial assistant and regional editor for the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada at *Canadian Mennonite*. Burkhardt's work with the Canadian news magazine began with a decade as a volunteer writer, three years as interim associate editor, followed by 11 years as editorial assistant.

She gained familiarity with the global Mennonite family through 13 years on the Mennonite Board of Missions (Mennonite Church). She also served on the executive of the Council on Church and Media and on the Publication Committee for Mennonite Women.

Burkhardt and her husband Don are members of Mannheim Mennonite Church, where she edits the church newsletter. They have three grown children and seven grandchildren.

MWC News Service

World Fellowship Sunday, 2002

by Larry Kehler

The focus of MWC's World Fellowship Sunday rotates from continent to continent each year. North America will be featured in the materials which will be circulated to the global family of Anabaptist churches for this special day of prayer and worship on January 27, 2002.

Justina Heese, who represents Mennonite Church Canada on the MWC General Council and who serves on the MWC Executive Committee, has coordinated the preparation of the material for 2002. The theme will be, "Walking in unity in the light of God."

The packets of materials will include suggestions for worship which were submitted by representatives of various MWC member churches in North America (scriptural texts, songs, stories, a call to worship, prayers of intercession, litanies, sermon ideas, and benediction). A drawing of a candle which can be used on a bulletin cover will also be enclosed.

In 2001 the World Fellowship Sunday featured the Anabaptist churches in Asia. Pastor Joao Gomes de Miranda, leader of the Igreja de Comunidade Menonita em

Angola (ICMA), which was accepted into MWC membership in 2000 at the MWC General Council meeting in Guatemala City, sent a letter of thanks to MWC for the material.

Pastor Miranda wrote, "We, your brothers in Christ from the Mennonite Church of Angola, have the joy of thanking you and sending you a report on World Fellowship Sunday. We are sure this will bring you as much joy as it brought us. This is what we did. On receiving your correspondence, the idea interested us so much that we wanted to start with the text of Ephesians 4:16, as you did in the introduction.

"The theme of the text, "Unity in diversity," served as a subject for a seminar held in all of our churches from January

23-28. On the 28th all the members of the local churches met together in the central church of the ICMA to celebrate World Fellowship Sunday prepared by sisters and brothers in Asia. That day we were truly united as one in Christ. The results of this were very positive. On the 27th after the seminar, 26 people were baptized and Sunday, the day of World Fellowship, we all celebrated communion. So everything went well. We would ask you to remember us for future celebrations of this sort and to continue to pray for us because Angola is still without peace.

"In conclusion--there were 682 members and 81 new converts present for the celebration."

Larry Kehler, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, is former News Editor for MWC.

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Do You Have a News or Feature Story for Courier?

Courier welcomes news and feature stories and ideas, plus photographs, from Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowships everywhere. Please send manuscripts, ideas for stories, and photographs to the Continental Editor in your region:

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To the members and leaders of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in the USA

Dear sisters and brothers,

We greet each of you in the name of Jesus Christ and on behalf of the worldwide family of faith. Before leaving for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where we are now on a pastoral visit to MWC member churches, we received messages of condolence and concern for your welfare from various parts of the world. In every place we visit, the first questions asked are about you and your faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

The letter to the Hebrews speaks of "a great cloud of witnesses." As we write this letter, we are surrounded by members and leaders of the Mennonite churches of the Congo. Together with them, we bear witness to you that you, too, are surrounded by a great cloud of sisters and brothers.

From the moment of the first news of the tragic events of September 11 and during the difficult weeks since then, the worldwide family of faith has been holding you up in heartfelt prayer. And as we traveled through the restricted areas in the interior of the Congo, where Mennonites and their compatriots have been suffering under the effects of war, economic collapse, political crisis and more than two million deaths, expressions of grief and solidarity with

Americans and with you in particular are prominent in nearly every meeting and worship service. Those we meet ask us to assure you of their fraternal love and fervent prayers.

These same sisters and brothers also ask if you are keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. From their own life situations, they know that you now face heavy pressure and high obstacles as you

*Your brothers and sisters
ask if you are
keeping your eyes fixed
on Jesus Christ.*

seek to follow and bear witness to the Savior who loves enemies. They believe that a warlike response to the September 11 violence will harm many people and impede Christian witness around the world, directly or indirectly, including here in Africa. They encourage you to seek a message from God amidst the present events and to seize this opportunity to reinforce your proclamation of the Gospel of Peace as they have tried to do during the war years in the Congo. We have reported that you are focusing

on the Prince of Peace and that you are searching for ways to promote His ways. They will continue to follow your decisions and actions, surrounding you continually with prayer.

At the same time, all Christians and political leaders whom we have visited in this country solicit your prayers that the Inter-Congolese Peace Dialogue, scheduled for mid-October in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, will be an ongoing witness and encouragement. The years of suffering have taken a great toll on all people here, including the Mennonite communities. Please form a great cloud of witnesses in prayer for this country, these churches, these sisters and brothers.

May God give you the strength to run with perseverance the race marked out for you.

Keep the Faith!

*Mesach Krisetya
President,
Mennonite World Conference*

*Larry Miller
Executive Secretary,
Mennonite World Conference*

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