



courier

A quarterly publication of Mennonite World Conference

• Volume 17, No. 3

• 2002 Quarter 3



To pray is to say yes to God page 3

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Contributions welcome

Courier welcomes news, feature stories and ideas, and photographs about Anabaptist-Mennonite fellowships. Send manuscripts, ideas, and photographs to the continental editor in your region. Submissions may be by regular mail or via email.

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Mennonite world calendar

2002

July 25-August 1	Africa Global Mennonite History Writers, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
July 31-August 1	African Mennonite & Brethren in Christ Fellowship (AMBCF) Executive Committee, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
August 2-7	MWC Executive Committee, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
August 7-10	GAMCo Continuation Committee, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
October 9-14	6th Latin America Anabaptist Consultation, Mexico

2003

February 20-23	11th Southern Cone Mennonite Congress, Buenos Aires, Argentina
August 11-17	MWC 14th Assembly Gathered, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Cover: *What happens when we pray? How does our God respond when we pray? The theme of this quarter's issue of Courier / Correo / Courier is prayer and how prayer functions in the life of a believer.*

Cover photos by Merle Good (large) and Milka Rindzinski (insert)

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(ISSN 1041-4436) is published quarterly by Mennonite World Conference, 8, rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. It seeks to nurture community, communication, and cooperation in the worldwide Mennonite and Brethren in Christ faith family, a part of the Anabaptist movement. Publication office: *Courier*, 616 Walnut Avenue, Scottsdale, PA 15683-1999, USA. Periodical postage paid at Scottsdale, PA. Printed in USA.

Publisher Larry Miller
Editor Milka Rindzinski
Managing editor J. Lorne Peachey
News and copy editor Ferne Burkhardt
French edition editor Sylvie Gudín Poupaert
Communications assistant Eleanor Miller

Courier is mailed free on request to church leaders worldwide. Send manuscripts and address changes to *Courier*, MWC, 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. Email: Strasbourg@MWC-cmm.org.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Courier, P.O. Box 346, Lancaster, PA 17608-0346

To pray is to say yes to God

by Mario Higueros

*How do we learn to pray?
And what happens when
we come before our God?*

When asked to put into words what prayer is, I have to admit I am perplexed. I have sought encounters with the Indescribable; however, only ineffable, fleeting perceptions have come to me. Many times I do not succeed when I seek this, but then an encounter happens when I least expect it.

Sometimes I find myself crying for joy when listening to Bach's music or to the marvelous voice of Maria Callas singing, "Oh mio bambino caro." On other occasions, it happens when I see a fragile drop of water hanging from a leaf of the fig tree in my garden. I say to myself, there is my life, oscillating, hanging frailly but illuminated with his grace, like sunbeams seeping through the crystal of my life. Other times, it happens when I witness the devotion of a brother or sister singing, "Oh, Son of God, to you be all glory, dignity, and honor!"

Prayer may be best understood when we actually pray. We also understand it when we invite another person to pray with us. Prayer is an experience, a phenomenon to which we can only bear witness, not theorize or theologize. We should start by admitting what the Lord stated—that we do not know how to pray. Perhaps he meant that only by "not knowing" are we admitted to the spheres of prayer and worship.

To say that we do not know how to pray is an act of humility before our Father who knows everything. It is to recognize our weakness and to be open to the Holy Spirit's help (Romans 8:26). Our arrogance, quite natural in this age of self-sufficiency, many times

prevents us from getting in touch with the Father.

For that reason, "not knowing" is the attitude that allows us to put ourselves in the Lord's hands, fully and without question, without articulation of phrases, without trying to manipulate God's power in our favor. Perhaps our sighs and broken sobbing at the loss of a loved one are profound discourses that reach the Most High, as did the clamor of his people in Egypt. Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Hannah, Samuel's mother, pointed the way to experiencing the power of prayer by admitting they were "servants of the Lord."

Oriental experiences of prayer, increasingly popular, teach us that to pray is to say yes to God unconditionally. From them we hear what the Bible also teaches, that effective prayer is not a transaction; God's answers to prayer are a free gift. When we pray in a manipulative way, we are naive if we think that we are forcing God's will.

Recently, Bertita Bonilla, a saint of

the Lord and a member of the Casa Horeb Mennonite Church in Guatemala City, like one of those holy biblical women, showed us what it is to pray from a sickbed. Before she went to be with God, she said: "I am in his hands, either to continue to live here or in the beyond." For a year and a half, she ministered to us in prayer, offering many prayers for others but few for herself. Her sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, and each member of our church stood with her in the presence of the Father, wrapped in her love. Many times, instead of comforting her, I left comforted. Perhaps consolation comes to us as we offer consolation to others.

Why should prayer be addressed to the Father? Because he created us, in his image, with the capacity to communicate with him. Jesus, mediator par excellence, brings us to the Father. In his life and work, he experienced con-



Mother Teresa's hands by Milka Rindzinski

stantly going to the Father. For that reason our model prayer starts with “Our Father.”

The Lord’s Prayer points the way to community, because we usually pray it with others. The contemplative shows that we may pray alone, wrapped in community, as Jesus himself prayed in the garden of Gethsemane amidst his dozing, unconcerned disciples.

His prayer to the Father in his agony, and his question, “Why have you forsaken me?” was an affirmation rather than a complaint. Jesus never felt abandoned by his Father. On many occasions he heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” Used to being accompanied and constantly assisted, the Son, left to the cruelty of human hands, felt the loneliness of the moment.

Prayer is to put complete trust in God’s care—and then petition. A widow with two daughters and one son, Bertita told us often how she counted on God’s support. The God who protects the helpless, those who are at the mercy of others—orphans, widows, and foreigners—this God had

always helped her out. If this was her experience during her widowhood, how could she not believe that she would be with the Lord in heaven when she left this world?

Paquita, my wife, cried when a breast carcinoma was diagnosed. Her neighbor said, “Why are you crying? Ask the Lord to heal you and trust that he will.” Paquita answered, “I am crying, not because of the disease, but because I am deeply thankful to the Lord. I cry, dissolved in love and thanksgiving, not because of what he is going to do, but because of what he is already doing!” My wife lost her breast, but her life was saved. Eleven years have elapsed. She never needed to take a single tablet.

Mario Higueros (at right with his wife Paquita) teaches psychology and pastoral theology and is academic dean at the Seminario Anabautista Latinoamericano (SEMILLA).



Eleanor Miller

Prayer may be best understood when we actually pray. We also understand it when we invite another person to pray with us.

—Mario Higueros

One April Monday, at a prayer meeting at Casa Horeb, I found myself reflecting on the petitions of my brothers and sisters. My rendition of these prayers, in symbolic language, is the following:

We pray, Lord, from the depth of our needs, wanting to come to the surface illuminated by your grace.

We come to you, eternal Father, holding your hand so that we may not fall into the temptation of arrogance. We cast aside everything because we know that only when we do not cling to anything can we be in you, the One who has everything and is and moves in all of us.

We pray, eternal Creator, babbling our sorrows in the hope that your Spirit intercedes for us with adequate words. We pray from the cold uncertainty that drenches our bones, looking for your kiss at the dawn of our faith. We pray from bodies that crumble, tortured by stings that damage our cells, hoping for redemption. We pray that you take away our illnesses but also that you free us from our fear of them. We pray for your transforming grace, aware of your presence in us when we are sick even though our sickness may not leave us.

We pray, eternal Companion from burdens we no longer can carry, hoping for your help to bear them. We speak to you from our sin that oppresses us like a grindstone, giv-

ing way to unfaithfulness. Forgive our lack of faith.

Lord, we beg you to make us aware of the pain of others. Help us to pray from the anguish of the attacked, the oppressed, and the abused who claim liberation. Help us to pray from the tears of the dispossessed, flowing like rivers that end in your maternal bosom to be dried in your love and tenderness.

We pray for absent children whose joyful voices fill our silence. We pray because we do not know how to educate our children without hurting them with words or with the rod.

We pray in solidarity with sincere joy and confidence that everything is given to us by grace. We pray from our exultant joy at what you already are doing for us.

We pray, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that our uncertainty may give way to the breeze of your moving in our history. We humbly pray, loving God, trying to thread our words and hoping your Spirit will reveal the intention of our hearts.

Help us, too, Lord, to keep silent before you, in that way saying it all.—*Mario Higueros*

How God hears and answers our prayers

Stories from seven Mennonite and Brethren in Christ believers from around the world who find prayer the channel for a close relationship with Jesus Christ.

The day I accepted the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior, I deliberately began a prayer life. When I pray, I commune with God. Sometimes I feel his presence, and other times I feel that I am talking into a vacuum, even after experiencing the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Because God's Spirit resides in me, I know that he has heard me. God listens and responds saying yes, no, or wait.

Cultivating the habit of prayer is the key to a Christian life. And God answers those prayers. Here are some of my experiences:

Conversion: The day I became a Christian, I prayed to God to bring to his light all my family, standing on the promise, "Believe in Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Surprisingly, all came—my mother, my three brothers and a sister, all except my father. He has now left his Islamic practices and has changed his attitude about us. I believe he will confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God and take him as his personal Savior too.

Revival: In the Gondar Public Health College where I was assigned to teach in 1970, during my Ethiopian Year University Service, three other students and I prayed for revival, and my students came to the Lord. We soon rented a house and began chapel service every day at lunchtime.

The prayer and Bible study were attended by public health degree students, laboratory technicians, nurses, and sanitation students. At the end of the academic year, our number reached 87. Many who graduated from that college are today Christians; some of them are full-time ministers. The work has continued in the college (now a university).

Protection: In that same year at the

college, some students did not like my involvement in this Christian ministry, so they began to throw stones during the evening prayer times. But they saw my determination. Later they sent a letter indicating that they were giving me one week to leave town, or I would be killed. I spread the letter on the floor and presented it to God in prayer for protection. Two weeks passed and nothing happened. The Lord put a hedge around me.

Healing: My wife was having a bleeding problem. A doctor told her that she needed an operation. Both of us prayed and finally I laid my hands on her. The second day, a mass of clotted blood fell into the basin. From that day onward, there was no more bleeding.

Guidance: After graduation from university, I was assigned to go to the eastern part of the country as a high school biology teacher. After five years, I sensed that I had to leave and move closer to Addis Ababa. Two months later, a friend told me that I should apply for a teaching position at the Bible Academy, a Mennonite boarding high school. My wife and I prayed about it. I applied and was accepted to teach there. Moving into Nazareth and

the Bible academy opened a wide door for ministry. I joined the Meserete Kristos church and began to serve the Lord there. This was in 1976.

Providence: I have experienced the providence of the Lord in every aspect of life. In 1982, after the nationalization of the Bible Academy where I was teaching and living, we did not have a house to live in. We prayed and the Lord provided us with 500 square meters of land the government was giving to persons who wanted to build their own houses. Because I anticipated a call from the Lord to full-time ministry, I did not want to go to the bank for a loan. I decided to build the service quarter and wait until the Lord provided for the big house. For 11 years we prayed. Finally the Lord provided the money through friends, and today we are living in the house.

Empowerment for ministry: The Lord has been faithful in empowering me for ministry—to preach, teach, lead, administer, or give counsel. I present my case before him, and I feel his presence, not only during ministry but even when I am not ministering. His presence has been a source of empowerment.—*Bedru Hussein, Ethiopia, MWC Vice-President*



Sometimes I feel God's presence. Sometimes I feel like I am talking into a vacuum. But because God's Spirit resides in me, I know that God has heard me.

—Bedru Hussein

I prayed for my sister, picturing her healthy and smiling. Her doctor says she has never seen so complete a recovery.

—Miwako Katano



In 1986, a doctor diagnosed my sister with depression. Twelve years later, my sister and I began to live together at her request. I prayed for her, using my imagination, picturing her healthy and smiling as she used to be. Gradually changes happened. She began to work, opened herself to others, and came to church.

Now she is married and taking no medication. Her doctor said that she had never seen a patient with such a serious depression recover as completely as has my sister.—*Miwako Katano, Japan, Courier Asia continental editor*

What joy when my son was finally able to read his Bible. Now he is healed.

—Sibongile Ncube

There is nothing as powerful and as far-reaching as talking to God about every concern of our lives. My maternal grandmother, who raised me, was a great prayer warrior. I owe what I am to her. I am the fruit of some of the hours she spent on her knees.

My earliest memories of prayer were my grandmother's voice in conversation with God at the break of dawn. Though I was not aware of it at the time, she provided me with an insight into the life of an intercessor. Her teaching and the example of her life should have helped me to choose the Christian life, but I wandered far away from God and only came back when I had gone through the emptiness of life under the direction of my own understanding.

The message of my grandmother's death came to me on a day when I had gotten a letter from her urging me to read Matthew 24. Somehow that hit me. I started searching for a way to relate to God. The urgency to restore a broken relationship with God was overwhelming. My search, until I landed at Lobengula Brethren in Christ Church, could only have been guided by God because, though I knew that there was a church called the BICC, I did not know where it was or what it taught.

I believe in prayer and have seen the hand of God in the way he has dealt with me. He healed me of a weak heart and brought peace and contentment to my life, even after a broken marriage. I have three sons. My eldest, who now lives and works in South Africa, partially lost his sight when he was young, but it was restored in a divine and mysterious way. Here is how God answered the pleas of a desperate and broken mother.

One day my son was brought home from school with very sore eyes. I was told that he had been hit by another child during play. The pupils of his eyes were discoloured, and he was in a lot of pain. I rushed him to Richard Morris Eye Hospital. Apparently he was given the wrong medication because by the next day his condition had deteriorated, and he could barely see.

When I took him back to the hospital, the Sister in charge was shocked at the medical error, but she and others on duty begged me not to reveal their

mistake to the higher authorities. It never occurred to me to pursue the issue of carelessness at the hospital. I was more concerned about seeking relief for my son.

The next few months were a daze. I had to keep up my job at a hair salon and also care for my son. My resources were depleted. One doctor, whose fees were too high for me, mocked me, asking why I wasn't using my body to make extra income to meet the medical bills. I realized then that my help would have to come from God.

My boss at work was no longer patient with my frequent requests for time off work to take my son for treatment. I risked entrusting my son to total strangers, putting him on an Emergency Taxi and paying extra for the driver to take him home when I had to rush back to work. We couldn't go on like that; surely there was help elsewhere.

Then I remembered how my grandmother talked to God about everything. I talked to my son and we together resolved to turn the situation over to God. We believed in healing and spent more time in earnest prayer, reminding God of the promises he has given us.

I set Monday as a fast and prayer day. Sometimes my son and I prayed until 2:00 a.m. We stopped going to the hospital or doctors and just depended on prayer. My son learned to care for his needs in my absence, and he developed good hearing. We prayed and did not give up.

The healing process was slow. Towards the end of the eighth month, my son started reporting change. At first he depended on his hearing to identify individuals and his hands to identify objects, but eventually he started seeing "human shapes."

After some weeks, he started seeing newspaper headings. Our joy was immeasurable when he was finally able to read his Sindebele Bible. Now he is completely healed. We praise God for this answer to prayer.—*Sibongile Ncube, Zimbabwe, as told to Doris Dube, Courier Africa continental editor. Sibongile Ncube, a single mother of three, is a member of the Africa 2003 Zimbabwe prayer committee.*

For several years, I have pursued being a disciple through prayer. 1 Thessalonians says, "Pray continually." I experience prayer in my life each day. I am convinced that prayer is essential to being God's child.

By praying to God, many things are transformed, and my life is strengthened. Prayer includes praise, thanksgiving, intercession, petition, meditation, and confession. Continually, I learn to live in attentiveness to Jesus and to struggle with all things that trouble my heart.

My husband (who passed away years ago) and I had nine children. After my husband died, seven of our children passed away too. I didn't understand why God took back the children he had given to me, but, through prayer, I realized that God didn't abandon me just as he hadn't abandoned Job.

I advise Christians to pray each day and each night. They will see God's hands at work among them, because "the Lord is faithful. He will protect you from the evil one. The Lord will make you strong" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). Tell God all that is in your heart. Tell him your troubles so that he may comfort you. Tell him your joys, so that he may sober them. Tell him your



I advise Christians to pray each day and each night. Then they will see God's hands at work among them.

—Mama Rebecca Makeka Natala

problems so that he may solve them.

There is no way in which the Christian could find a solution without God's intervention. His intervention happens when we pray. I share with my brothers and sisters in Christ how God intervenes when I take to him in prayer all my problems and troubles. Prayer is God's power. —Mama Rebecca Makeka Natala, Congo

Mama Natala, mother of Pakisa Tshimika, MWC Associate Executive Secretary for Global Networks and Projects, died in early May soon after writing this testimony. At her memorial service on May 12, Pshimika gave the following tribute to his mother:

My mother was a woman of prayer. She interceded before God for her family, missionaries, church workers, friends, neighbors, people she knew, people she'd never met.

A month before my father's death, my brother Tshinabu had come to Congo for a visit. He recounted how one night he was awakened in the middle of the night by my parents' voices coming from their bedroom. He got up and went to their door to ask if there was something wrong. No, they said, they couldn't sleep, so they decided to sit up and pray for everyone they knew.

—Pakisa Tshimika

One of the oldest forms of Christian prayer goes back to the earliest days of the church. The Daily Office (also called "Common Prayer" or "Morning and Evening Prayer") is prayed in the morning and evening. It includes praise of God (hymns, Psalms), listening to God's word, and responding to

God with confession, intercessions, and the Lord's Prayer. The ideal is to pray this in the company of other Christians. But even apart, we can still pray together as we agree on a common theme for prayer. (This is especially desirable for Anabaptists where community is so important.)

The Office is helpful in the face of

our hyperactive culture (television, the web), especially in the West. This culture compels attention to glittering images, but faithful Office practice draws us to God's realities that are only slowly revealed. Rather than settle for trite answers, Office prayer invites us to dwell in God's mystery. Rather than offering instant solutions, the Office does not show immediate benefits but encourages patient waiting for God. Rather than distracted multi-tasking, Office prayer gives single-minded attention to God's agenda. The Office requires staying still and doing similar practices over and over again (rather than questing unrelentingly for the new).

Morning and evening prayer helps us make a priority of prayer. Prayer can fit into almost anyone's schedule, no matter how busy we think we are. It supports us, even in a culture where we often feel alone and disconnected. It



Prayer frees us from feeling so harried, controlled, and pressured. Instead, we can live into and "learn the unforced rhythms of grace."

—Arthur Paul Boers

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transforms how we experience daily reality, helping us meet God in the ordinary and everyday.

During the September 11 aftermath, many were glued to televisions. Yet it was never more important or radical not to be ruled by the media setting of priorities and portraying of realities. At such times, one of the most faithful things we can do is to immerse ourselves in worship and prayer.

Such prayer shapes and forms us. While God answers prayers, sometimes dramatically, God's greatest miracles are when we are changed. Regular prayer aligns us with God's purposes and orients us to God's reign.

A little discipline, practised faithfully over a long period of time, in the long-run makes a vast difference. Someone compared steady faithful prayer to being like sailing across the ocean from the United States. A small change of direction can mean arriving either in Africa or England! So will faithful daily prayer bring us closer to God's reign.

Prayer discipline frees us from feeling so harried, controlled, and pressured. Instead, we can live into Eugene Peterson's marvelous paraphrase of Matthew 11:29 and "learn the unforced rhythms of grace." —*Arthur Paul Boers, a citizen of Canada, currently teaches at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, USA*

Many Ecuadorians are migrating to Spain. Consequently, many families are becoming disintegrated. It is in this context that the Mennonite Christian Community in Quito has emerged with prayer as a central element of its ministry. Here is an example:

Maribel is a new member of our congregation. She shared with us with tears in her eyes that, because of unemployment and economic hardship, two years ago she and Julio, her husband, sold everything so he could travel to Spain. They thought that he would find a job in a short time and then send money home. But this was not what happened.

Maribel was desperate. She did not have money to send their children to

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Anabaptist

Petition for the brothers and sisters

**Heavenly Father,
we pray for all our brothers and sisters
in the faith,
wherever they may be,
even unto the ends of the earth,
whether assembled or scattered,
in sorrow or sickness,
in bonds or in prison for your name's sake.**

**Comfort them and us with your great love,
and keep them and us with your Holy Spirit
and in your word and your will.**

**May we all abide in your love
and not depart from the way
of righteousness,
neither to the right nor the left,
but remain faithful unto the end of our lives.**

In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

—“Die ernsthafte Christenpflicht” (original 1739), translated in *A Devoted Christian's Prayer Book* (Aylmer, Ontario: Pathway, 1984), as quoted with permission in *Words for Worship* by Arlene Mark (Herald Press, 1996).

prayers through the centuries

**Loving God,
you have baptized us into one body
and made us to drink the one Spirit.
Now grant us pure and faithful hearts
that we may serve one another
diligently in love
and find no cause
to separate or divide.
Call each of us to esteem others
better than ourselves
so we may remain together in peace
and joy.
Grant these mercies to us
and all your people.
Amen.**

—Thieleman J. van Braght, from *The Bloody Theater of
Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians*, 12th edition
(Scottsdale, Pa., Herald Press, 1979)

**God of peace,
Bless us with your peace
that we may live together in gentleness and humility.
God of patience,
Bless us with your patience
that we may endure in the time of trial.
God of mercy,
Bless us with your mercy
that we may be pardoned when we have done wrong.
God of strength,
Bless us with your strength
that we may stand firm in time of distress,
through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.**

—Bernhard Albrecht in *Manual of Worship and Polity* (Brethren Press, 1955)
as quoted with permission in *Words for Worship* by Arlene Mark (Herald Press, 1996).



The Mennonite Christian Community in Quito has emerged with prayer as a central element of its ministry. As a result families are again experiencing wholeness and integration.

—César Moya and Patricia Urueña

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school or for food. Her husband had no job in Spain and had become sick.

We prayed with Maribel. A few days later Maribel shared with us her joy that her husband had called to tell her that he had a good job. He also said that in some months he expected to save enough money to return to Ecuador to be with her and their children. This is exactly what happened.

During the first months it was hard for him to re-enter the Ecuadorian context, to readjust to his family, and to find a job. Then he started to attend our new church, where each Sunday we prayed for work for him. And this God provided.—César Moya and Patricia Urueña, are missionaries from Colombia teaching Bible and theology to aboriginal people in Ecuador.

As a young pastor, I received a visit from a woman who was going through a lot of trouble. Her husband had threatened her and their three young children with a knife and had beat them. She ran away, taking her children, going to her parents. She applied for and got a divorce. Her son was mentally retarded and eventually had to go to a special institution for the care he needed, but at that time he was still with her.

She talked about her problems with me and then said: “I would like to pray, but I do not know how to pray.” I told her: “Close your eyes to shut out distractions, fold your hands, and try to become quiet. Then let the question in your heart come into your mind. God will listen.”

Some time later we met again, and I

asked her about praying. She said: “None of my problems has been solved; I’ve heard no voice answering me; and I have not seen a vision of a less troublesome future. But when I pray, I become quiet and find rest.” She thanked me, for she had received more than she expected.

Two years ago this woman died. As I stood at her grave, I thought of this story. I knew she had never given up the practice of prayer.—Ed van Straten, *The Netherlands, Courier Europe continental editor*

Let the questions of your heart come into your mind. God will listen.

—Ed van Straten



by Eloise Hiebert Meneses

Declaring

Pray that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.—Colossians 4:3

Paul, writing from prison in Rome to a church he had never visited, said, “Pray that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ.” Though he had never met the Colossians, he asked them to pray for him. They were brothers and sisters in the faith, sight unseen! And while he was himself imprisoned, he asked for an open door to declare the gospel. His own discomforts meant little to him compared to finding an opportunity to share “the riches of the glory of this mystery” (Colossians 4:3).

What mystery? Colossians 1:27 declares that the mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The word translated as “in” can also mean “among”—“Christ among you, the hope of glory.” Jesus is both in us and among us. He transforms our lives as individuals, and he “breaks down the walls of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14) between us. He brings reconciliation with God and with one another. This is the mystery, the miracle, that we wish to declare to the nations.

We cannot imagine what God will do next! The Holy Spirit took a handful of disciples and sent them out first to Rome, then to Ethiopia, Central Asia, and India—planting churches like small wildfires as they went. Over the centuries his work spread like a roaring fire to Western Europe, Southern Africa, Eastern Asia, and even to the New World. And now, as we celebrate 2000 years of the growth of the kingdom of God from a mustard seed, we cannot imagine what he will do next! We only know that we want to be there when it happens! Leslie Newbigin has said, “The deepest motive for mission is simply the desire to be with Jesus where he is, on the frontier between

the mystery of Christ

the reign of God and the usurped dominion of the devil.”

Troubles. Yet behind that frontier we have sometimes had our troubles. Some of these have been the result of the persecution that Jesus said would come.

Let us not forget to pray for our sisters and brothers in Indonesia, in the Sudan, in the Congo, and in India! But some of our troubles have been ones we have inflicted upon one another.

Many of us remember with great pain the period of European domination we call “colonialism.” And we have such mixed feelings about this period! The 18th and 19th centuries produced a great missionary movement that will be remembered to the end of time!

Many of us received the Good News of Jesus because of this work. Yet during these same centuries a global order was set up which valued some of God’s children above others and benefited some peoples much more than others.

What about cultures? After long years of being treated as less worthy, and perhaps even believing themselves to be less worthy, the peoples of the South and the East have risen up against the peoples of the West. It is quite understandable that in the 20th century the peoples of the world have reasserted their national and cultural pride. Certainly the domination of the Western Christians over the global church must end. Happily, leadership and missionary movements are emerging now from Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as from Europe,

Canada and the United States. But it has always been the Holy Spirit who is our true leader. Our earthly leadership is never more than a temporary service performed in obedience to God’s will.

How can we Christians afford to suggest that the value of diversity of cultures should take priority over our unity in the faith? Cultures are indeed valuable. They are, like our mothers, the sources of our nourishment and growth. The diversity between them is beautiful. Still, ultimately, our cultures, like our present bodies, are of this world, which is passing away. The faith we have in Jesus, and the love we bear for one another, are eternal (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

Not just tolerance. There is still much prejudice and arrogance, even racism, among Christians in this new millennium. Perhaps we will be struggling with these sins till Jesus returns. Yet we cannot afford to lapse into the religious and cultural pluralism that has gripped the secular world, falsely promising peace with prosperity through “tolerance.” We want to love one another with a love that is only possible through the miracle of Christ in us and Christ among us. Jesus said that if we love one another, everyone will know that we are his disciples (John 13:35).

How we might best bear witness to Jesus in the new millennium? We are part of the body of Christ international, seeking the Holy Spirit’s word in our

As we celebrate some 2000 years of the growth of the kingdom of God from a mustard seed, we cannot imagine what God will do next! We only know we want to be there when it happens!

time and deeply desiring an avenue for the expression of that word to the world in which we live. Paul had only one concern: that he find an open door. He knew that only God opens such doors. Hence, Paul did not skip the most important first step in missions: to pray for opportunities to speak.

Only the Holy Spirit can give us these opportunities, and only God can enable us to “reveal the mystery clearly as we should” (Colossians 4:4). After praying, our task is to watch for the opportunities that God presents to us, and to be prepared to speak as the Holy Spirit directs. In all these things, love will be the key that opens the doors to God, to one another, and to the world.

The message, the mystery, of Christ that we wish to share is the same in the 21st century as it was in the first century. That message is that we are much loved and that the one who loves us is Lord of all (Colossians 1:15-20).

We cannot afford to lapse into the religious pluralism of the secular world, falsely promising peace with prosperity through “tolerance.” We want to love one another with a love only possible through Christ.



Eloise Hiebert Meneses (left) is a professor of cultural anthropology at Eastern University, St. Davids, Pa., USA. She presented this meditation at the Global Anabaptist Missions Consultation held in Guatemala City, July 2000.

Global Youth Summit planners call young people to Africa 2003 with the traditional Zimbabwean welcome sign (from left): Andy Brubacher Kaethler (Canada), Liesa Unger (Germany), Vikal P. Rao (India), Ronald Lizwe Moyo (Zimbabwe) and Angela Opimi (Bolivia). The Youth Summit will feature youth from 87 MWC member churches discussing faith issues.



Ray Brubacher

Youth can make a difference say Global Youth Summit leaders

Kitchener, Ont. (Canada)—When Ronald Lizwe Moyo speaks, his enthusiasm, optimism and hope captivate listeners. Coming from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, where despair, anxiety, and suffering are common, he brings an alternative perspective. He is not blind to the difficulties in his country and his church, but he believes youth have great potential to make a difference.

Moyo represents the Brethren in Christ (BIC) Church of Zimbabwe and chairs the committee plan-

ning a Global Youth Summit to precede the Mennonite World Conference Assembly Gathered in Bulawayo in August next year. Each of the 87 MWC member conferences in five continents will be encouraged to send a representative aged 18 to 25 to make up the summit's core group, but all young people may participate. This forum will discuss dreams and visions youth have for the church as well as important life issues they face.

During planning meetings in Ontario (Canada) in late

April, the committee agreed to begin to gather ideas and issues for discussion before Africa 2003 from young people in all the conferences. They hope the summit will lead to a statement and action plan youth can take back to their churches.

Moyo stressed the importance of churches listening to and understanding young people and of young people being allowed to offer their gifts to the church. He speaks from three years of experience as director of national youth programs for the BIC church in Zimbabwe. Young people make up three fourths of congregations there, he said, but many are discontented and are moving to Pentecostal or independent churches. Some feel their church leaders don't hear them.

The father of two young children, Moyo now works for an interdenominational home for children in difficult circumstances. That position has allowed him the flexibility he needs to lead the committee planning the Youth Summit.

Other committee members, all with international experience, are: Andy Brubacher Kaethler, youth minister for Mennonite

Church Eastern Canada; Angela Opimi, director of a youth service program in Bolivia; Vikal P. Rao from central India, who worked as a youth steward during the 1997 MWC assembly in Calcutta; and Liesa Unger from Germany, director of YAMEN!, an MWC / Mennonite Central Committee program for young adults.

At a reception in Kitchener, Ont., in April, committee members identified a few issues young people in each of their regions face: unemployment, loss of interest in education, media influence on values and lifestyle, substance abuse, conflict and violence, difficulty in articulating faith, a search for something new and a desire to see faith lived out.

All young people who come to Africa 2003 will have many opportunities to participate in the Africa 2003 Assembly Gathered worship and programs as well as special youth activities.

MWC administrators are inviting donations to assist with travel costs for the Global Youth Summit participants and other selected youth, particularly for those from the South.

MWC Jerusalem seminar postponed

Strasbourg, France—Escalating violence in Israel and concern for the safety of participants led MWC and Mennonite Central Committee to postpone a Jerusalem seminar in July. It was designed for French-speaking Anabaptist Mennonite / Brethren in Christ church leaders and teachers, most of whom would have come from Africa. Plans included meeting with local Palestinian Christians.

The Israeli government's pattern of denying visas to African visitors, security

issues in this part of the world, and the fact that participants would likely not be able to visit the sites needed for the seminar were all factors in postponing the trip.

Invitations had gone out to academic and church leaders in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, India, France and Canada.

MWC and MCC first initiated a Jerusalem seminar in 1999. A second was postponed last year. Alternative plans are now being considered for 2003.

Pakisa Tshimika:

Church must respond to the world's HIV/AIDS pandemic

Strasbourg, France—Forty million people are living with HIV/AIDS, including five million new infections last year. There is no cure or vaccine in sight.

In response, Pakisa Tshimika, a public health specialist and associate secretary for Mennonite World Conference, is calling on the church to rethink its mission and transform its structures in response to this pandemic which is depopulating Africa faster than any calamity since the slave trade.

Of the approximately 14,000 new cases worldwide per day, 50 percent are women and about one third are young people between the ages of 15 and 24, according to newly released statistics for 2001. Nearly 95 percent of victims are in developing countries.

Southern Africa is hardest hit— followed by India, with a rapid increase in Indonesia. Many of the areas where HIV/AIDS is prevalent are regions that have a large and growing Mennonite or Brethren in Christ population.

Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches need to get involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS, says Tshimika. He believes the church must condemn acts that stigmatize, exclude and deny the rights and dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS and be a voice of moral strength in their own communities and in the wider society.

“As the pandemic has unfolded, it has exposed fault lines that reach to the heart of our theology, our ethics, our liturgy and our practice of ministry.... Churches are being obliged to acknowl-

edge that we have, however unwittingly, contributed actively and passively to the spread of the virus,” says Tshimika. He cites the church's difficulty in addressing issues of sexuality and an interpretation of scripture and a theology of sin that promote stigmatization and exclusion.

Tshimika recently participated in two international HIV/AIDS conferences on behalf of MWC. He was one

of four Anabaptists among 916 participants from 87 countries in Washington D.C. (USA) in February at a consultation sponsored by The Samaritan's Purse and the only Mennonite among 130 people at a World Council of Churches conference in Nairobi, Kenya (Africa) in November.

“The HIV/AIDS pandemic does not recognize national, religious, denominational and socio-economic

boundaries,” says Tshimika. Victims are not just statistics, he noted, but people with names and faces whom he has met, some of them his childhood friends.

He sees strong leadership at all levels and networking to best use limited resources as key factors in the fight against HIV/AIDS and the church community as an appropriate place for suffering people to find comfort, care and love.

Food shortages challenge Malawi BIC Church

Hunger and a severe shortage of maize is affecting as much as 70 percent of Malawi's largely rural population of 10 million including many members of the Malawi Brethren in Christ Church. The food crisis adds one more challenge to a church already committed to broad-based ministry.

“Many have been unable to come here today because they are out collecting food,” Pastor Wonderford Saliva, area overseer, said to more than 150 people from six congregations gathered at Thimba. They came to share their concerns with BIC church leaders and Mennonite World Conference worker Tim Lind, who visited congregations in the Chikwawa region of southern Malawi in March.

Saliva displayed several varieties of wild grasses that people in the region harvest in the absence of the staple maize. Women in the group demonstrated the laborious process by which the tiny grass seed is collected, ground, and prepared as “famine food.” Another pastor noted that three recent

deaths within the church had been attributed to hunger.

The small southern African country is fertile, normally well-watered and able to produce enough food to feed itself and to export to neighbouring countries. This year, there has been erratic rainfall and an apparent mismanagement of food reserves.

The church has distributed maize purchased with a relief grant from Brethren in Christ World Missions and is now assessing further needs and its capacity to respond.

The Malawi BIC Church is young, vibrant and committed to a variety of min-

istries. Rev. Ephraim Disi, national director, leads the 3,000-member church with 28 congregations, an outreach of the Zimbabwe BIC Church begun in the 1980s.

The Malawi BIC Church, not currently a member of Mennonite World Conference, is looking forward to participating in the 2003 MWC Assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe August 11-17, 2003. There is a strong interest in developing closer links with other Mennonite / BIC churches on the continent. MWC Global Gift Sharing will work with this church to facilitate such relationships.



Part of the crowd of 150 people from six congregations that met the delegation at Thimba to talk about the famine.

Tim Lind

Bulawayo's ZITF site of Assembly Gathered

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe—A pleasant city. Clean air and safe drinking water. Wide boulevards with busy traffic but minimal congestion. Lively outdoor markets. A relaxed, open atmosphere. Friendly people.

This is Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the "City of Kings," a city that will delight thousands of international Mennonite and Brethren in Christ visitors attending Africa 2003's Assembly Gathered August 11-17.

Venue for the six-day event is the 17-hectare Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) complex near downtown. This

exhibition centre has several large halls which seat from 3,500 to 9,000 people, and numerous smaller venues for performances, story-telling, group meetings, and offices. The large halls will provide space for worship, mass meetings, and the "Global Church Village" exhibits. The final worship celebration may spill into an outdoor arena the size of a soccer field.

Dining halls with catered lunches, dinners, and teas will be an easy walk across "the hub" from the meeting halls.

The exhibition site has developed over 41 years as a renowned trade fair facility. It is neither primitive nor exotic but clean and comfor-



Larry Miller

Wide pedestrian walkways encircle and radiate from a central hub at ZITF, site of MWC's Assembly Gathered.

table. There are plenty of washrooms and lots of phone lines. Electronic communication is not always dependable, but "we'll do our best," say MWC officials.

While walking is encouraged, local committees plan to arrange shuttle service from hotels and numerous privately operated "lodges" (bed and breakfasts) where most registrants will be housed. Public transportation—buses, vans and taxis—is another option. It's a 20-minute walk to the city core.

With a population of about one million, Zimbabwe's second largest city has many of the benefits and few of the problems of larger African cities. It has been said that Bulawayo "grows on a person." For Africa 2003 participants, six days will hardly be enough.

Zimbabwe committee organizes Africa 2003 prayer groups

The church in Zimbabwe is already in prayer for MWC Africa 2003. God knows and answers our prayers before we ask him. Despite all that is happening in our country, we are not discouraged. We are looking to God for guidance and we know he will lead.

As a Prayer Committee, we have felt that it is important for the whole church to be mobilized to pray for all the activities, preparation, and people who are working from now to the time of the conference and beyond. This is how we are doing it:

In urban churches, a representative has been chosen in each congregation to lead the prayer group and put a systematic

way of prayer in place. In rural churches, a representative has been chosen within the existing structure under each deacon to form a prayer group.

We will pray for MWC and Africa 2003 as we are informed of the needs. For now, this is our list:

- Pray for peace and stability in our country and for all people to have the fear of God.

- Pray for Bishop Danisa Ndlovu as he leads the church in preparing to welcome the Executive Committee in 2002 and the assembly in 2003.

- Pray for international coordinator, Ray Brubacher, and national coordinator, Dothan Moyo, as they carry out their responsibilities.

- Pray for MWC staff and officers responsible for handling the finances of Africa 2003.

- Pray for all the committees: transport, catering, accommodation, local tours, children's program, information and guest services, facilities, and medical.

- Pray that God will reveal areas of need to those praying.

—Africa 2003 Zimbabwe Prayer Committee: *Ethel Sibanda, coordinator; Neddie Dlodlo, Rev. Luke Sibanda, Benson Nyathi, Rev. Cornelius Ngwenya, Rebecca Ncube, Sibongile Ncube*

Woza! Come! God has something here for you!

Africa 2003 registration forms—along with tour options and Assembly schedules—were mailed to North American congregations and conferences in June and to other continents a few weeks later. Ask your pastor for a copy. Or contact MWC at 50 Kent Ave., Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1 CANADA Tel: 519-571-0060. Email: kitchener@mwc-cmm.org

A Call to Prayer

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.—James 5:13

- Glenn Witmer, a Mennonite Church Canada WITNESS worker in Jerusalem, facilitates dialogue between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He also attempts to help Mennonite congregations better understand the situation in Israel and Palestine. To this end he has begun a MennoLetter from Jerusalem. "Pray for Glenn and his ministry," writes Coordinator Steve Plenert; "pray for Israelis, pray for Palestinians, pray for Canadians, and pray for yourself that God might shape us into the people of God's own choosing."
- The Center for Anabaptist Resources in Latin America (CLARA), Bogotá, Colombia has released a Spanish edition of the book "Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and in Churches," by Carolyn Holderread Heggen. The need to address the issue of domestic violence is especially clear in the context of the Colombian civil war. Pray about all forms of violence—in Colombia and around the world.
- MWC Global Gifts Sharing Program facilitators are holding workshops throughout Latin America. Recently, training sessions for facilitators were held in Asia. In the second half of 2002 the focus will shift to Europe and North America. Pray for this relatively new work of Mennonite World Conference.
- Repeated torrential rains have accentuated the human drama in Argentina, writes Eunice Miller of the Mennonite Church in Buenos Aires. "Incredible numbers of people in our country, including those of the traditional middle class, are becoming wretched survivors of a wicked economic system." Pray for this country and its people, for the government's efforts to pull the country out of this recession, and about foreign policies which are also responsible for this situation.
- Pastor Luis Lumibao, chair of the Board of Missions of the Integrated Mennonite Church of the Philippines, died on June 8, 2002 at the Premiere Hospital, Cabanatuan City, Nueva Ecija, Philippines. Pray for God's comfort and provision for his family and church.

Mennonite congregations in profile:

Manika Mennonite Church of India

Editor's note: Each issue of Courier will feature an Anabaptist-related congregation from around the world.

The Manika Mennonite Church of India was started in November 1999 by Ramjee Mehta. A graduate in theology, Mehta works as a clerk in Nav Jeevan Hospital (a Mennonite hospital) at Tumbagara, 12 kilometers west of Manika.

Pastor Mehta met a Christian, Suchit Minj, a teacher from Manika who came to the hospital for treatment. Suchit told Pastor Mehta about some Christian families of different denominations living at Manika and working in schools, in offices, in the hospital, and with the police. There was no church and no pastor in Manika.

Pastor Mehta started visiting the families. Eventually they formed a Mennonite congregation with Pastor Mehta caring for their pastoral needs.

In the beginning, one or two families attended, but now there are nine

families with 16 baptized adults and 14 children. The congregation meets for Sunday worship in one member's rented house, since they have no church building.

The families live among non-Christians and are in close contact with them. People are attracted to the Christian fellowship they see in the congregation. But there are also opponents. One threatened the congregation and asked them to leave the rented house. But the owner, a non-Christian, strongly supported the congregation, saying Christians were good and had every right to worship God as they chose.

Apart from Sunday worship, the Manika Mennonite Church conducts prayer meetings from time to time. While there are only 2-3 young people, the congregation plans to start a program soon for its growing number of children.

The immediate need of the congregation is a church building. Members are looking for a suitable place from



Part of the Manika Mennonite Church . Pastor Mehta is in the center (with Bible).

which a community health service and a school can be run. They have found a piece of land with a mud house for about \$5,000 US.

The congregation is looking to make the nearby village of Mahuatand a focus for its mission. There is no Christian community within 20 kilometers of this village. Illiteracy, poverty, backwardness, and illness are high in the area. The Manika Mennonite Church asks the MWC family to pray that this endeavor will bring people to Christ and his kingdom.—*Emmanuel Minj, secretary, Bihar Mennonite Mandli*

Prayer is about good taste

by Ray Brubacher

During the several Slavic worship services that I have attended there have been moments during which my spirit soared within me, especially when the priest and choir conversed musically. After one service, I asked the priest what he hopes will happen during worship.

Somewhere in the middle of the service he said they try to give the worshippers a “taste of heaven.” Suddenly I understood why my spirit soared. As the Psalmist said in chapter 34, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Prayer is about good taste.

During a worship service in a Brethren in Christ church in Zambia, Larry Miller (Executive Secretary of MWC) requested prayer for the infant of friends in Canada. The infant was very ill. Immediately the youthful choir director launched into a passionate appeal to our Heavenly Parent to save this child’s life. The appeal was so fervent that I recall looking at my watch to see if the child was healed at that very moment.

The child died, but the parents and extended family experienced the miracle of communal support and the healing presence of God’s Spirit. The taste of this prayer? Passionate.

The day before the election of MWC’s next president-elect, a brother from Congo shared the vision he had received during personal prayer that morning. He said that in his culture it was very important to share a vision before the event lest skeptics think the vision was invented after the fact. One of the candidates for election was a woman. In his vision, he was told that the next president of MWC would be “the sister.” Nancy Heisey was elected the next day. The taste of this prayer? Prophetic.

During prayer at an MWC gathering, a pastor from the

Philippines exalts the name of Jesus and praises God for personal salvation. And suddenly he switches gears and prays that the USA will stop sending guns to his country, because guns kill and destroy. But for him this was no switch of gears, from conservative to liberal, but the same gear. The gospel is one. The taste of this prayer? Holistic.

A Nigerian friend by the name of Samson gathered us together for prayer. He asked that God would grant us a safe trip back to America. As we drove to the airport, through the darkness of a midday harmatan sand storm, my daughter asked what that prayer would mean if the people he prayed for died in a crash. A tough question. Perhaps, I responded, the purpose of prayer is more about the relationship than it is about the success of the request itself.

Upon returning to Pennsylvania, my daughter jumped into her little Festiva and took off for Ontario. It was January. At the end of the day, she called to report on her trip. In upper New York, during a blinding snow-storm, a huge truck whooshed by and the wind sent the little car into a spin and into the ditch. Within moments a snow-plow was on the scene and pulled her back onto the road. Then I remembered Samson’s prayer. The taste of his prayer? Gratitude.

In prayer, we taste and discover constantly that the Lord is good!

Ray Brubacher, Kitchener, Ont., Canada, is MWC associate executive secretary for events and administration. He is also international coordinator for Africa 2003.



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