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The biblical foundation of service

by Ronald J. Sider

Service to others is grounded in at least six biblical and theological principles. The first three of these six have to do with service to all people everywhere.

Service to others is grounded in:

1. God's love for us. God's love prompts us to love others. God has loved us immeasurably in sending Christ to die for us. In gratitude for this love, we love others. In addition, because God commands it, we love others.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love God. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. If you love your neighbor, you must serve your neighbor.

And if you love your neighbor as yourself, your service will not be just giving whatever they ask. It will mean doing whatever is in their best interests.

2. Every person is made in the image of the living God. Every person is immeasurably precious. Every person must be loved and served in a way that helps them toward the wholeness the creator intends.

3. The nature of persons. We know that persons are both body and soul, a unity that is made for community. That tells us something very important about

how we serve our neighbor. Since each person is both body and soul, real service responds to both material and spiritual needs.

Furthermore, each person lives in community. Therefore, we will love and serve in a way that respects that community. We will also seek to correct whatever is unjust in that community.

Three additional principles for service have to do with serving those within the body of Christ:

4. The gospel of the kingdom. If the gospel were just forgiveness of sins, then we could embrace that gospel and be forgiven and on the way to heaven without that affecting how we treat other people.

But Jesus' gospel is good news of the kingdom. The messianic kingdom long promised by the prophets is now breaking into history. We get into that kingdom by the forgiveness of sin. But in that kingdom, old things are being made new. All things are being restored to the wholeness intended by the Creator.

That means all social relations are being set right: wrong relations between men and women, between Jews and Gentiles, between rich and poor.

The church is the visible presence of this dawning kingdom. The church should be a little picture of what heaven will be like.

The church must be a visible model

of a new set of right relationships between all its members. We must serve each other in the body.

5. We serve because of the cross. In Ephesians 2, we are introduced into two hostile racial / ethnic communities—Jews and Gentiles—who hated each other. Both got accepted with God on exactly the same basis. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of Jews and Gentiles, for the sins of all of us.

We are justified by faith alone in the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross. The cross brings one new humanity in Christ Jesus, one new body that overcomes all the old world's sinful dividing walls wrongly separating men and women, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor.

In that one new humanity, created by the cross, we are one. So we must serve each other. The cross is a central foundation of service in the church.

6. We serve each other in the church because we are the one body of Christ. All who confess Jesus Christ and open their hearts to him become one body. We are one organism. Just as the hand and the leg and the eye and the ear all serve all the other parts of the human body, so, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, all Christians are part of Christ's body and we must serve each other.

Paul points to several aspects of service in the one body:

a. When one rejoices, all rejoice; when one suffers, we all suffer.

Cover: Paulus Hartono of Solo, Indonesia: "Ever since the MWC assembly in Calcutta, India, in 1997, I have been thinking about how Mennonites in Indonesia can serve our society. And I found the answer is in what I called transforming diakonia." See page 4.

Photo by Eleanor Miller

Courier / Correo / Courrier (ISSN 1041-4436) is published quarterly by Mennonite World Conference, 8, rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. Publication office: *Courier*, 616 Walnut Avenue, Scottdale, PA 15683-1999, USA. Periodical postage paid at Scottdale, PA. Printed in USA.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Courier*, 616 Walnut Ave., Scottdale, PA 15683



Ronald J. Sider at the service consultation: "Anything less than dramatic, sweeping economic sharing in the worldwide body of Christ today is flatly unbiblical, scandalously disobedient, heretical."

seven years. There were also laws about gleaning grain. And every third year, the tithe went to care for the poor.

Economic sharing is even stronger in the New Testament. When Zaccheus came to Jesus and discovered salvation, he gave away half his wealth as a result. Jesus' disciples also had a common purse for at least some of their financial needs. Acts 4:34 tells us the early church shared so widely—giving generously, selling property—there was no need among them.

Economic sharing was not by one big common purse. The Greek word implies continual action. When the church discovered that racial discrimination had crept into its midst and the Greek widows were being neglected while the Hebrew widows were being cared for, they appointed deacons—all of them from the minority community—to care for all the widows equally. In Acts 6:7, we see that the result of this economic sharing was that the word of God spread and the church grew rapidly. Their economic service to each other had a powerful evangelistic impact.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is furious when he discovers that in Corinth some rich Christians are coming to the Lord's Supper and feasting while poor Christians in the same congregation are going hungry. In that setting, Paul says, they are not really celebrating the Lord's Supper at all. They are defiling it. Why? Because they do not discover the Lord's body, i.e., they do not understand that the body of Christ is one and therefore rich members and poor members must live out their oneness through economic sharing.

Then we have Paul's great intercontinental offering, as described in 2 Corinthians 8:9 and in other parts of Paul's letters. Paul spent a couple of years of his life working on it. In fact, his arrest in Jerusalem and eventual death happened because he insisted on accompanying the offering to Jerusalem.

The church in Jerusalem was very

poor and needy. So Paul took up a collection in the churches in Greece to help the poor Christians in Jerusalem. 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 states the principle: that there may be equality, the abundance of the churches in Greece should supply the need of the poor Jerusalem Christians.

Notice that this is an intercontinental and inter-ethnic offering. Non-Jewish Christians in Europe gave to help Jewish Jerusalem Christians in Asia.

N*o other way.* The New Testament is crystal clear: joining Christ's one body means becoming one with all the other members in many ways, and that includes finances, money.

I see absolutely no reason why we dare limit this economic sharing to our own congregation—or our own country. All Christians everywhere in the world are members of one body, one family of Jesus Christ. They must be treated as sisters and brothers. That demands economic sharing. Anything less than dramatic, sweeping economic sharing in the worldwide body of Christ today is flatly unbiblical, scandalously disobedient, heretical.

What would that mean currently? The statistics say that 25% of the Anabaptists (those in North America and Europe) own 95% of all the Anabaptist wealth in the world. Furthermore, we all know that substantial numbers of that other 75% are tragically, destructively poor. These people lack adequate education and health care. They are frequently hungry. They suffer from malnourishment; some starve.

The rich 25% are so rich that we are bored, overweight, increasingly materialistic. At the same time, we give less. Average Christians in the United States today give 2.6% of their income to their church. Mennonites and Brethren in Christ are better; they give maybe 5-7%. But most American Christians should be giving 15%, 20%, or even 30% of our income to kingdom work. Think of the impact on our world if average U.S. and Canadian Anabaptists gave 20% of their income to the church and if one-fourth of that went to economic sharing in the worldwide

b. There must be mutual accountability for spiritual growth. Galatians 6:1 tells us that if one person is overtaken in a fault, other brothers and sisters are to restore that person. "Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." Serving the other members of the body includes mutual discipline, even church discipline.

c. Being part of one body includes economic sharing. This is a point that must be emphasized. At the heart of God's plan of salvation is the truth, found in both the Old and New Testaments, of a new people, a new community called to live the way God wants people to live. And one central part of how God tells this new community to live is economic sharing.

T*he Bible and economic sharing.* In the Old Testament we have examples of true sharing. Land was to be distributed so that every family had enough. In the concept of Jubilee, the land was to lie fallow every 50 years. The idea of sabbatical also included the release from debts every

body of Christ. Only when we model in the church what we are saying to the larger society does our witness have integrity.

The New Testament is perfectly clear that dramatic economic sharing is one essential, un-negotiable part of what it means to confess that all believers in Christ are part of Christ's one body. That truth is especially important at times when the poorer parts of that one body are experiencing destructive poverty and deadly disease that economic sharing could heal.

I do not have a specific model to propose, but I do have a suggestion.

If it is true that

(1) there is great discrepancy of wealth and poverty in today's global Anabaptist family—including widespread destructive poverty in many places, and

(2) the biblical doctrine of the church as Jesus' new kingdom community and the one body and family of Christ demands major economic sharing;

then let's covenant to have a major process of dialogue and exploration between now and Paraguay 2009. Together let's pray, explore the biblical doctrine of the church, talk and experiment, expecting that by 2009 the Holy Spirit will lead us to embrace new, dramatic, effective ways to live out this biblical understanding of the church as the one body of Christ.

I believe MWC should take the lead in developing concrete programs of sweeping economic sharing in the worldwide Anabaptist community that bring partnership, not paternalism, and empowerment, not dependency. That is not just a nice idea. That is a theological demand that flows directly and inevitably from the biblical understanding of the gospel, the cross, and the church as the body of Christ.

Ronald J. Sider teaches at Palmer Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. He is also the author of several books, among them Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger and Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience. This article was adapted from a presentation Sider gave at the consultation on service in Pasadena, California, USA, prior to the MWC General Council meetings in March 2006.

Service that transforms values

by Paulus Hartono

Ten years ago, I attended the Mennonite World Conference assembly in India. What impressed me was the motto, "Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches." Ever since, I have been thinking about how Mennonites in Indonesia can serve our society. And I found the answer is in what I call "transforming diakonia."

Transforming diakonia is based on three principles:

Principle 1. Transforming diakonia must be done in the spirit of Jesus.

Jesus told Martha to learn from Mary. It was Mary who was trying to capture the spirit of Jesus before she became involved in service activities. Transforming diakonia has to capture the spirit of Jesus before it can be effective.

Recently 250,000 people died in the tsunami in the Aceh region of my country. Before the tsunami, 99% of the people were Muslims who did not like Christians, Chinese, or Javanese.

After the tsunami, a Chinese Christian doctor came to the region to serve in the spirit of Jesus. Empowered with the spirit of Jesus, he worked very hard. People were surprised. Here was a Chinese and a Christian who was a doctor serving for

Jesus. It made quite an impression.

One night I was invited to dinner at a home in Aceh. It was dangerous to go because of a civil war going on at the time. When I arrived, I was invited to the second floor and told that if we heard shooting, then we should lie on the floor. If there was fighting, it would likely be in the backyard. Transforming diakonia may ask us to go into a dangerous area because we believe the Holy Spirit can lead us into this area so that something dangerous can become something good.

Principle 2. Transforming diakonia meets both spiritual and physical needs.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, the disciples first of all wanted to have the people go and find their own food. But Jesus told them, "No, you must feed them." When we are aware of a need, we must do something about that need. The church cannot meet just the spiritual needs; it must also meet physical needs.

On the other hand, when the church only gives and gives, it creates dependency. The challenge is to transform the situation and thereby transform poverty. Poverty creates lots of problems, such as child abuse, lack of nutrition, and lack of education.

Churches should promote the transforming values of love, justice, righteousness, and peace.



With the help of Paulus Widjaja (left) as interpreter, Paulus Hartono tells his story of peacemaking in Indonesia through “transforming diakonia” at the consultation on service held in Pasadena, California, USA, in March 2006.

Principle 3. Transforming diakonia must also transform values.

Churches should promote the transforming values of love, justice, righteousness, and peace.

In Indonesia, the majority of people are Muslims, and Christians are oppressed. One day I said to Jesus in prayer, “What can I do about this oppression and this hatred?”

I believe the Holy Spirit told me to build a good relationship with a radical Muslim who was the leader of 600 soldiers. So I started building a relationship with him. When his group began closing churches, I called him and asked for a meeting between him and leaders of the church. He agreed. More than 200 leaders attended that meeting, and we could talk with this Muslim leader heart to heart.

Later I asked him to go to Aceh with me to help the people there assemble radio receivers after the tsunami. And we ate together and slept together as we worked in Aceh. One day, when a group of North American church leaders, sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee, came to see our programs in Aceh, this man broke into tears. I thought the Holy Spirit was working in his life and asked him why he was crying.

“I don’t know,” he said. “It just came up from my heart. I see the Christians come to Aceh and help my brothers and sisters. If only I knew you five years ago, I would not have gone to war against the Christians.”

Now he is very hesitant to close the churches.

Service not only meets people’s needs. It also transforms their values.

Paulus Hartono, Solo, Indonesia, is a pastor active in peacemaking work. This article is adapted from a presentation he made to the joint MWC-MCC consultation on service held in Pasadena, California, USA, in March 2006.

The day joy came into my life

by Kazuko Ono

I was learning to walk again after being in bed for two years. In a downtown park, I saw a tent and heard singing inside. When I stopped to listen, a young man invited me in.

“Please come in,” he said. “We’re Christians.” I had no reason to refuse.

Inside the tent a young woman said, “I want you to know that I found a big joy when I saw Jesus.”

Joy was a word so foreign to me. My familiar words were pain, suffering, and despair. I don’t remember what the speaker said that evening, but the woman’s radiant face stuck with me.

I began attending a church, a hard walk up a hill. A hunger in my soul drove me to that church. For a girl who could hardly walk, I had no hope, nothing to believe in.

I had been taught that the emperor was god, but he said he was human. All the values I had respected before the war seemed to have been destroyed.

The missionary in the church turned out to be a pacifist. I was stunned when I learned that he refused to participate in the war and had spent years as a conscientious objector. He didn’t hate Japan, he said. The God he believed in loves enemies.

I found the missionary’s home full of smiles, warmth, and thoughtfulness. If God could help build this kind of home, I thought, he must be real.

I began studying the Bible. Gradually I came to know who Jesus was. One day I said to the missionary that I wanted to accept this Jesus as my Lord and join his disciples. But I was afraid. Could I really live a Christian life?

The missionary began to sing, “Only trust him.” The next day I received baptism. That was January 26, 1958.

This story is one of many collected from General Council members at their Pasadena meeting. Kazuko Ono, from the Honancho Mennonite Church, is a General Council member from Japan.

Show your cards!

by Phyllis Pellman Good

How does the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) General Council, a disparate group of 129 delegates from 53 countries—representing 96 member churches and speaking numerous languages—make meaningful decisions together?

That was the question facing the General Council when it met for nine days in Pasadena, California, USA, in March 2006. That group faced both “bureaucratic” and “spiritual” decisions:

- Were they ready to accept a three-year program plan proposed for the organization?

A disparate group of 129 delegates from 53 countries speaking numerous languages can make meaningful decisions together.

- Could they agree on appropriate ways to extend diakonia (service) to each other?
- What concerns and commonalities do they share with Pentecostalism?
- Was it possible to agree on a list of seven “Shared Convictions?”

In addition to cultural, theological, and language differences, the council also had limited time. The agenda was full of weighty matters with infinite complexities. Yet decisions needed to be reached with as full participation as possible by council members.

As a way of achieving both, MWC officers and staff brought the method of “Making Decisions by Consensus” to the group.

The process depends on providing adequate background in advance to the issue being reviewed, then planning for discussion time in small groups in which all persons can speak. With that preliminary work, council members come to plenary sessions ready to move forward.

It worked in Pasadena. After a proposal was presented to the whole group,

Decision making by consensus allows participants to show their opinion of a discussion or proposal while it is being presented. Timotius Katrisno, Indonesia (foreground) expresses his opinion during the last General Council sessions.

and after discussion and debate had followed, the chairperson checked whether the group was nearing consensus by stating a summary of the proposal.

General Council members each had two 4”x 6” cards—one orange and one blue. They used orange cards to indicate support (warmth) for a proposal or the chair’s summary of a discussion; blue cards to show considerable ambivalence or opposition (coolness).

Repeatedly throughout the days of meetings, the chair asked council members for their opinions about the issue on the floor: were they in favor of the direction a proposal was moving?

The process became a kind of constant way to take the temperature of the group’s opinions without stopping for votes or even impassioned debates. On the other hand, the chair could quickly recognize concern, serious questions, or lack of support. A preponderance of blue cards, when raised, stopped the movement forward so that those unable to go along with the proposal’s shape at that point could speak.

The card system found legs. Presenters paused frequently to ask for a “showing of cards—orange or blue.” If few cards were shown, the chair repeated the request, asking all council members to raise one card or the other.

The method helped pace discussions appropriately—keeping them from stalling in hopeless debate, but also preventing too speedy treatment of an issue. Participants in the council could see at a glance how their fellow members were feeling about the discussion.

Consensus-by-way-of-cards got its greatest test during the council’s review





Kazuko Ono of Japan joins with other General Council members to show her card in approval for a point being made during discussion of the MWC Shared Convictions statement. (For Ono's conversion story, see page 5.)

of the "Shared Convictions" statement. This seven-point paper had been prepared by MWC's Faith and Life Council after it had systematically gathered confessions of faith from MWC member churches. While the statement looked deceptively simple—with "points we might be tempted to take for granted," commented MWC Vice President Danisa Ndlovu—the discussion proved otherwise.

As the chair recognized those holding blue cards, they came to mikes to voice the particular concerns of their member churches.

Ndlovu said: "Persons would stand up and say, 'In my country, this phrase would be understood in this way,' and then we all saw the statement in ways we hadn't before. First, the theologians were debating and discussing, but then the delegates from the churches began

to talk about the statement so they could own it."

Those who raised blue cards needed to be prepared to articulate their discomfort or concern, rather than simply objecting. Once their point of view was expressed, and the chair requested a show of support or dissent, the one speaking, as well as the whole room, could immediately see the sentiments of the group. Were they a minority, perhaps a lone voice, or were they expressing a broadly held, but not yet articulated, opinion?

The consensus approach, with the colorful cards, worked well, too, for a multi-lingual group. Rather than allowing native English speakers to dominate the floor, and even the forming of opinions—because of their greater facility with the language—those with other first languages could signal their opinions clearly.

This process imposes a discipline of responsibility on a group. To work well, it requires a chairperson who operates fairly. In Pasadena, the method gave room for the presence of the Spirit, as well.

President Nancy Heisey, who led an intense discussion of a Shared Convictions statement about who Jesus is, says, "Knowing how many splits the nature of Jesus had caused through the centuries, I was suddenly aware of a cloud of witnesses filling the room and saying, 'This should not divide you.'"

Consensus. It is a way to make decisions that worked for MWC's General Council, persons from various language groups representing the widely scattered Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches around the world.

Phyllis Pellman Good, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, is a writer and editor who, with her husband Merle, is also the owner of Good Books. Phyllis and Merle are also communication consultants for MWC.

We host this assembly out of gratitude

An interview with Alfred Neufeld, chair, National Coordinating Council

Mennonite World Conference's next assembly will be in Paraguay in 2009. Why did Paraguayan Mennonites offer to host this large gathering? How are they going about preparing for the event?

Those were some of the questions put to Alfred Neufeld, chair of the National Coordinating Council for Assembly 15, at the General Council meetings in Pasadena, California, USA, last March. Alfred, also a member of the faculty at the Universidad Evangelica del Paraguay, was interviewed by Marcus Shantz. Marcus

Shantz worked for MWC as special projects coordinator from 1995 – 1997 leading up to and including Assembly 13 in Calcutta, India.

Marcus: Hosting a Mennonite World Conference assembly is a big undertaking. Why did Paraguayan Mennonites offer to do this?

Alfred: Well, we sure did it with mixed feelings, because, as a matter of fact, this is a very big project! But I guess it is out of gratitude.

The international Mennonite community has always been very

supportive of Paraguay from the time Mennonite refugees settled there. Since then, there has been a strong network of support from Mennonites around the world, through Voluntary Service, through Mennonite Central Committee, through co-operation with the First Nation settlements.

So we host this assembly out of gratitude, and we do it because we think it may have a positive impact on our churches and on our public presence and witness.

In Paraguay as in other places, Mennonite churches are trying to redefine their vision and mission. They are asking what God's vision is for their churches.

Assembly 15 to be held during Paraguay's winter

Asunción, Paraguay—MWC Assembly 15 will be held here July 13 - 19, 2009. The National Coordinating Council, in consultation with MWC officials, made that decision at a recent meeting in Paraguay.

"The July 13 - 19 dates were selected because those are the choice of the hosts," said Ray Brubacher, MWC associate secretary for events and administration. "The two options were the long school vacation in January and February or the shorter July vacation time.

"July is Paraguay's winter and could mean cold, but not freezing, weather. But January and February

are unbearably hot and not a good time for international participants.

MWC holds a global gathering about every six years. Assembly 14 was held in August 2003 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

"There is a striking difference between Zimbabwe, where one Brethren in Christ conference with 30,000 members hosted the assembly, and Paraguay, where the eight host conferences together have 22,500 members of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds," said Brubacher. "This diversity is exciting and challenging. Everyone is eager to make this collaboration successful."

Marcus: How many different MWC member churches from Paraguay will be involved in hosting Assembly 15?

Alfred: The Mennonite picture in Paraguay is very diverse. There are at least three major cultural groups that will be hosting the assembly. Three of the MWC member churches belong to the First Nation peoples that began to join the Mennonite faith at the end of the 1940s.

There are also three conferences of immigrant background that still speak German in their churches: the Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Brethren Church, and the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood. They all immigrated to Paraguay at

ASUNCIÓN, PARAGUAY



Alfred Neufeld with tea and cookies during a break in MWC's General Council sessions in Pasadena, California, USA. "We think [Assembly 15] will have a positive impact on our churches on our public presence and witness," he says.

Marcus: *Have Paraguayan Mennonites had the opportunity to co-operate to this extent in the past?*

Alfred: This is new and exciting for eight different conferences to work together to host a major Mennonite event. But there has been a high level of inter-Mennonite co-operation in the history of Paraguay. And I would also say there has been a low amount of conflict in our history.

Nearly all of these groups emerged out of missionary work in specific ethnic communities or from immigration. As far as I know, none of our Mennonite groups have emerged from a split or a conflict in Paraguay. So we have to understand that Paraguay is a country of refuge for a very wide mosaic of different Mennonite groups. Service has helped to unite us and has provided a platform of encounter for us.

The German-speaking immigrant groups have co-operated with each other on several levels—with MCC, Mennonite Voluntary Service, the leprosy mission, and in several theological education efforts.

The First Nations conferences are culturally very distinct from each other. They communicate with each other in Spanish because they have different indigenous languages and cultural traditions. In the past, they even sometimes communicated with each other in Low German! They have co-operated with each other in social work and Bible school, but they have not worked before with the Spanish or German-speaking Mennonites in an effort like this.

The Spanish and German-speaking groups have some links with each other, primarily within their

the same time 75 years ago, and they have had a fraternal relationship.

In addition, there are two member conferences from the majority Spanish-speaking culture. They are the Paraguayan Mennonite Church and the Paraguayan Mennonite Brethren Church.

There are also several groups that are not MWC members but with whom we have a fraternal relationship. There are also two new emerging First Nations groups and Old

Colony Mennonites who immigrated from Mexico. They have not been eager to establish a closer relationship with the other Anabaptist churches, but we will look for comfortable ways for them to be involved in the assembly.

Finally, there are some other emerging groups that have been doing missionary and outreach work. They are not yet officially part of MWC, but they will be very supportive of the assembly.

own denominations. For example, the Spanish-speaking Mennonite Brethren and the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren run a lot of institutions together. The same holds true for the Spanish and German-speaking Mennonite conferences.

Marcus: *What are your biggest concerns in hosting the assembly?*

Alfred: My first concern is the essence of the assembly itself: Of course it can be a wonderful family reunion. But it needs to be more. There must be content that brings us together and provides us with a shared vision.

Preparing for the assembly will require much cross-cultural fellowship. The coordinating council is as culturally diverse as you can imagine. The social, educational, economic,

and cultural differences among us are remarkable. And we will need prayer and wisdom to make this a joyful experience.

Marcus: *What time of year will the assembly be held?*

Alfred: July 13 - 19. It will be winter in Paraguay. The weather will be unpredictable. If the wind blows from the South, it can be cold—very cold, actually. If the wind comes from the North, it will be as hot as summer. So our visitors will have to prepare for all kinds of weather.

Marcus: *Will there be Assembly Scattered visits?*

Alfred: We expect so, but we haven't planned them yet. We really would love visitors to learn to know

Paraguay, to visit tourist sites, and to learn to know our local churches. If possible we would like visitors to stay with families in local congregations to get into their day-by-day reality.

Marcus: *Do you expect the government to be supportive of the assembly?*

Alfred: Several Mennonite church members in Paraguay hold high governmental office. The First Lady is a member of one of our churches. However, we have to be clear that this is an independent invitation from Paraguayan churches—it is not intended to be a political gathering.

The public and the government will be very supportive. Paraguay is very hospitable, very visitor-friendly. There will be large positive support from the public. I am sure about that.

Ernst Weichselberger named Assembly 15 coordinator

Strasbourg, France—Ernst Weichselberger, Asunción, Paraguay, has accepted MWC's invitation to be the National Coordinator for Assembly 15. Weichselberger began his duties on August 1, 2006.

The National Coordinator will oversee and direct in-country planning, including the work of numerous committees, communication and

publicity within Paraguay, and risk management. He will work closely with Ray Brubacher, MWC International Coordinator for MWC, and will report to the National Coordinating Council, made up of representatives from the eight hosting conferences.

Weichselberger is the son of an Austrian Catholic pacifist who migrated to Paraguay

in the 1930s, where he married a Mennonite woman who, in 1929 at age 16, fled from Russia with her family. Weichselberger is a member of the Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden von Paraguay (sometimes known as General Conference).

Trained as a teacher, Weichselberger spent seven years teaching and in youth work followed by 17 years directing Mennonite Voluntary Service for all the German Mennonite conferences in Paraguay.

In 1975, the Mennonites appointed him to serve with Trans World Radio Communications (RTM) in Paraguay. Currently, Weichselberger is the director of RTM, but he will retire from that position early next

year, moving toward working full time as National Coordinator for MWC's next assembly.

Weichselberger is a graduate of the Mennonite Seminary in Montevideo, Uruguay, and earned a masters in peace studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana, USA.

Since joining the Mennonite Church, Weichselberger has been active in Sunday school, youth work, missions, and preaching.

"The Lord has given me many opportunities to serve at national and international levels. My transcultural and transdenominational experiences have been important [and] my roots are deep in my church: Mennonite," said Weichselberger.

He lives in Asunción with his wife Anni. They have three adult sons and one grandchild.

Ernst and Anni Weichselberger. Ernst has been appointed National Coordinator for MWC's next assembly.



Indonesian church mobilizes to help earthquake victims

Jogjakarta, Indonesia—Victims of a massive May 27 earthquake are receiving help from a new organization in this country.

Aristarchus Sukarto, moderator of the GKMI conference—one of three Mennonite conferences in the country—and Paulus Widjaja, MWC's Peace Secretary, have set up Mennonite Diakonia Service (MDS) to coordinate assistance for GKMI members affected by the quake.

MDS has a command centre in Pundong, Bantul County, the area hit hardest by the quake.

Following the disaster, MDS first identified "refugee cluster points" where it focused its response, including medical treatment, food, blankets, used clothing, and personal care items.

MDS is also offering "trauma healing" for adults through village gatherings and various activities such as cleaning up debris. Children can come to two "Happy Tents," safe havens where they can play for two hours mornings and afternoons.

Coconuts and rice.

Long-term goals include reconstructing homes for 100 families and schools destroyed in Pundong and providing economic assistance so that victims can re-establish a livelihood for their families. MDS plans to buy coconuts and rice harvested by quake victims for its food distribution program.

The Mennonite church in Pundong has 80 adult members and 55 children in 41 families. The quake damaged all their homes. MDS is also offering assistance to the society at large around the command centre.



In addition to music, drama, pictures, and singing, the first-ever European Mennonite Festival featured a time for delegates from the various countries to pray for each other and their churches.

Spain hosts European Mennonite Conference for first time

Barcelona, Spain—On Ascension weekend, May 26-28, 2006, more than 400 Mennonites from 11 European countries and other continents met for MERK (Mennonite European Regional Conference). This marks the first time MERK has taken place in Spain.

There are currently five Mennonite churches with a total of 300 members in this area. The theme for this conference, chosen by these young, local churches was "Freedom is commitment; living God's will."

"We are being taken into account and heard," said church leader Jose Luis Suarez. MERK is a big event for the Protestant church in Spain, just as the Mennonites are an important voice for the Protestant church in Spain."

Suarez expressed his joy to be in communion with the brothers and sisters from Northern Europe: "We have lots to give. We need one another in the same way an old tree with deep and strong roots needs new shoots, growth and strength in order to survive. In a similar way, our community of

faith is made of new and old branches."

The Mennonite church in Barcelona started 28 years ago. It currently has 50 members involved in work with the elderly and handicapped as well as in mediation.

The MERK 2006 program, translated into five languages, included 30 workshops on various themes, such as the renewal of the church community and land mine clearance. The main focus followed the common theme: "Freedom is / means difference—means grace—means Commitment."

Grace and responsibility. In his sermon on "Freedom means grace and responsibility," Antonio Gonzales noted that the message of the Anabaptists is more relevant than ever in today's Spain. Anabaptists always considered freedom to be grace but also responsibility, leading to the free choice of putting into practice what one had recognized and accepted.

Doris Hege, MERK program coordinator, said, "Freedom and commitment are two sides of the same coin. Whenever we are able

to live our lives in freedom and commitment, we are fulfilling God's will."

On the last evening, the first European Mennonite Festival reflected the joyful and festive lifestyle in Spain. Participants from all regions and community, featuring both recent and more traditional songs, theatre, pictures, and music.

MERK first met in 1975 in Switzerland. The following seven conferences took place alternatively in Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland. The conference usually meets every 4-6 years between MWC's global assemblies.

MERK's purpose is to create links between European Mennonites by strengthening their Christian faith and by seeking answers as Anabaptist communities to current questions of concern.

The next MERK gathering will take place in 2012 in Switzerland, three years after MWC Assembly 15 in Paraguay.—*Markus Rediger, MWC Executive Committee member from Switzerland*

'Two cancer patients needing each other'

Congolese Mennonite pastors initiate new relationship with North American congregations

Elkhart, Indiana, USA—The messages of two Congolese Mennonite pastors—Adolphe Komuesa Kalunga and Matthieu Shimatu Kapia—have preoccupied David Moser since he met them last March.

Moser, pastor at Southside Fellowship, met Komuesa and Shimatu during a meeting exploring new models for relationships between African and North American congregations.

Materialism and poverty.

"I heard North American pastors speak of a cancer called materialism that has metastasized and is tearing congregations apart," Moser said. "I heard the Congolese pastors share the challenges of surviving the cancer of 'screaming poverty.' We are two cancer patients who need each other." Moser said.

Moser believes North

American congregations desperately need the spiritual nurturing that Congolese congregations can offer. "They know what it is like to have nothing left but God. We would do well to embrace this richness," he said.

Komuesa and Shimatu visited North American Mennonite congregations following Mennonite World Conference's General Council in Pasadena, California, USA, in March 2006. Their visits were sponsored by Mennonite Church USA, which has set as a high priority increasing awareness of the global Mennonite church among its constituents.

"We want to develop a new relationship between Mennonite churches in the Congo and the United States that is not built on old assumptions," said James

More than 200,000 Mennonites are members of one of three groups in Democratic Republic of Congo. *Communauté Mennonite au Congo* (Congo Mennonite Community), begun by Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission workers in 1912, has 100,000 members. *Communauté des Eglises de Frères Mennonites au Congo* (Community of Mennonite Brethren Churches in Congo), dating to 1920, has more than 95,000 members. *Communauté Évangélique Mennonite* (Evangelical Mennonite Community) has approximately 21,000 members; it was founded in the 1960s when Mennonite refugees fled east.

Adolphe Komuesa Kalunga, the national president and legal representative of the Congo Mennonite Community, is a pastor and a theologian who teaches at the Christian University of Kinshasa.

Matthieu Shimatu Kapia, national vice president of the Evangelical Mennonite Community, is a pastor and the former general secretary of the Congo Inter-Mennonite Organization (CONIM) that includes the three groups listed above.

Schrag, Mennonite Church USA executive secretary, in welcoming Komuesa and Shimatu to a meeting in Kansas.

Seven Congolese church leaders had been invited to speak in various congregations. However, an unexpected complication arose when

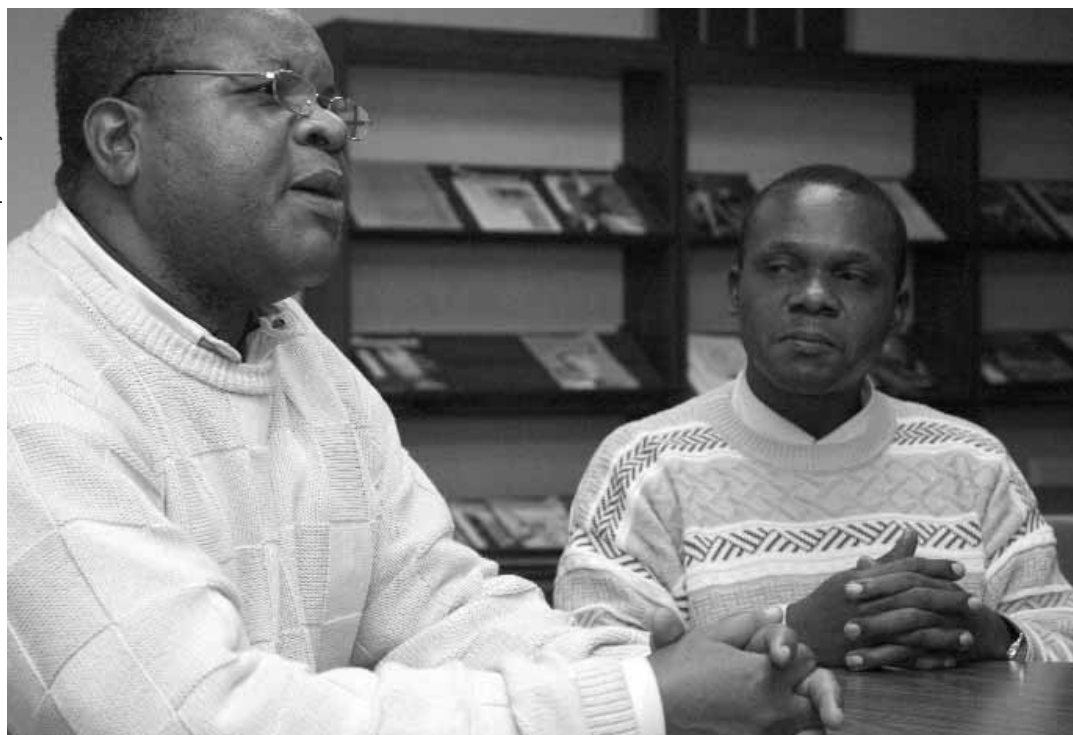
the United States government denied visas to all Congolese delegates to the Pasadena meetings except Komuesa and Shimatu. Although their speaking schedule was modified, these two pastors valiantly tried to accomplish the work intended to be shared by five other colleagues.

"Each moment was the best one," Shimatu said of their three-week visit, making special mention of the message on a culture of peace that he heard in Pasadena.

Tolerating differences.

For Komuesa, being physically surrounded by members of the global Anabaptist church throughout his travels—and observing how they could "tolerate theological differences"—was a learning experience.

Matthieu Shimatu (right) listens while Adolphe Komuesa makes a point during one of numerous presentations the two made in North America, this one in northern Indiana.



Mennonite Missions Network photo by John D. Yoder

Komuesa and Shimatu noted that Congolese believers feel abandoned by North American Mennonites. Currently, there are no mission workers from the United States or Canada serving the Congo Mennonite churches.

“In Ohio, a woman said, ‘I didn’t even know there was a Mennonite church in Congo,’” Shimatu said. “How can she not know about us? Congo has one of the largest Mennonite populations of any country in the world. It seems North American Mennonites are asleep.”

Buildings and hunger.

While insisting that they didn’t want to judge North American Mennonites, Komuesa and Shimatu did point out the discrepancy between the magnificent buildings that house congregations on one continent and Mennonites who die of hunger on another.

“We know that culture dictates the way people worship, so it is understandable that people in a culture of abundance worship in costly surroundings,” Komuesa said. “However, please, listen to those of us who live in miserable conditions. We celebrate our global Mennonite community, but there is still a lot of work to do.”

Jim Bertsche, an Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission worker in Congo for 25 years, described the visit of the Congolese church leaders as “a little window through which [Americans] glimpse a world so very different from our own—a world of radical dependence on Jesus and exuberant joy in the midst of chaos, poverty, insecurity and hunger.” —*Lynda Hollinger-Janzen. This story was adapted from a joint release by AIMM, Mennonite Mission Network (USA), and MWC.*



Eastern Mennonite Missions photo by Jonathan Charles

International leaders visit Lancaster Mennonite Conference. Following the MWC General Council sessions in Pasadena, California, USA, last March, several Mennonite leaders from around the globe were the guests of Lancaster (Pennsylvania) Mennonite Conference at its annual “Celebration of Church Life.” Pictured above being welcomed to the assembly by Ernest Hess, Lancaster’s fraternal representative to Africa, are

(from left): Tewodros Beyene and Mulugeta Zewdie from Ethiopia; Matiku Nyitambe, Steven Mang’ana, Jeanette and Joseph Nyakyema from Tanzania; and Joshua Okello from Kenya. Richard Showalter, president of Eastern Mennonite Missions, and Keith Weaver, moderator of LMC, look on. Danisa Ndlovu, MWC vice-president from Zimbabwe, was also present but not shown in this photo.

Lancaster Conference urges ‘Jubilee’ sharing

Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA—Leaders of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference (LMC) have challenged members to donate up to 2% of their annual income to their faith family in the global South. Keith Weaver, LMC moderator, and Richard Showalter, president of Eastern Mennonite Missions, made the recommendation in response to the visit by several global Mennonite leaders to the conference’s Celebration of Church Life (see above).

The recommendation also came as the result of awareness that MWC’s Global Church Sharing Fund (GCSF) needs continued infusion of new money to sustain and expand this “Jubilee” ministry.

MWC established GCSF

in 1997 as a step towards greater economic parity in the global Anabaptist church.

Inspired by the biblical teaching of “Jubilee,” GCSF money is distributed to Anabaptist churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America according to a “fair share” formula to assist them in their ministries. Initial individual and group donations came to \$1 million.

Uses to date. Churches in the South that receive GCSF money decide how they will use the gift. Funds have helped translate and publish materials, trained leaders, paid pastors’ salaries, bought land, constructed, repaired and equipped church buildings, purchased bicycles for evangelists, and promoted Anabaptist identity and belonging.

“These sisters and brothers give us many gifts, renewing the life of the global church while extending God’s kingdom. They are the ones who will lead in determining what it means to live as Anabaptist Christians in the 21st century,” says Larry Miller, MWC General Secretary.

Currently, however, 95% of the financial wealth of Anabaptists remains with North Americans (88%) and Europeans (7%) while at least 60 percent of the 1.4 million baptized believers in 13,000 local churches in 200 national conferences are in the global South.

Lancaster leaders hope to help MWC to continue GCSF by encouraging members and congregations to contribute 2% of their annual income.

World Lutherans, Mennonites work toward closer relations

Strasbourg, France—Better understanding and closer relations between Mennonite and Lutheran churches was the focus of the second meeting of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission. The meeting took place June 5-9, 2006, at the Institute for Ecumenical Research here.

According to MWC General Secretary, Larry Miller, Lutheran confessional writings contain doctrinal condemnations which contributed directly to the persecution, torture and killing of Anabaptists during the 16th century Reformation.

These condemnations do not figure prominently among Lutherans today, except among scholars. They have, however, been deeply imbedded in the memory of Anabaptists.

The commission's task, according to Miller, is to consider what it means for

Lutherans to continue to have these condemnations within their confessional writing. It is also to find ways of removing obstacles to good relations between the two faith groups.

Last year the commission heard and discussed papers on the historical meaning, purpose, and effect of the condemnations of Anabaptists in the Lutheran confessions.

At this year's meeting, the commission focused on the condemnations in their theological context, paying particular attention to baptism in Article 9 of the Augsburg Confession and civic affairs in Article 16. These articles are seen to contain serious theological differences between the two traditions.

The Study Commission is sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Co-secretaries are Larry Miller, MWC General Secretary, and Sven Oppegaard, LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs.

Mennonite commission members are: Rainer Burkart, co-chair (Germany), Claude Baecher (France), Hellen Biseko Bradburn (Tanzania) and John Roth (USA).

Lutheran members are Gottfried Seebass, co-chair (Germany), Litsietsi M. Dube (Zimbabwe), Theo Dieter (France), Annie Noblesse-Rocher (France), Timothy J. Wengert (USA).

The commission will meet here again June 18-22, 2007.

Hellen Biseko Bradburn, a member of the Mennonite delegation, at work during the June 2006 consultation.



Second-graders at Kern Road at their table of baked goods.

Child sparks fund raiser for the Congo

South Bend, Indiana, USA—Last March, Eric Streeter, a second grader at Kern Road Mennonite Church here, set a goal of raising \$100 to help with one surgery in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He had heard physician John Martens, who grew up in the Congo and returns regularly to provide medical assistance, talk about needs in that country.

Eric started with his own savings. Soon other second graders decided to help. They raised more than six times the amount of Eric's goal by staffing a table of

baked goods, which generated \$625 for the Congo.

Kern Road Mennonite Church is one of a number of North American Global Church Congregations, an initiative introduced by MWC before the mini-assembly in March 2006.

Global Church Congregations helped fund international delegates to the assembly and also invited them to visit their communities. Kern Road hosted Adolphe Komuesa of the Communauté Mennonite au Congo.

—*Andre Gingerich Stoner*

Visa denials send leaders to Washington

Washington, D.C., USA—The interpretation of regulations related to immigration have become more rigorous in the USA since 9/11. Every applicant for a U.S. non-immigrant visa between ages 14 and 80 is now required to be interviewed and is assumed to be an intended immigrant. No amount of documentation provided by an agency or a U.S. political leader will suffice to gain visa approval.

These revelations both stunned church leaders and helped explain recent visa denials when a delegation met here with Julie A. Furuta-Toy, director, Office

of Public and Diplomatic Liaison / Visa Services on April 26. That delegation included Nancy Heisey, MWC president, and Larry Miller, MWC General Secretary.

The meeting was arranged after more than 10 percent of delegates to meetings of the MWC General Council in Pasadena, California in March were absent because the American government denied them entry visas.

Since the consultation, MWC has joined other agencies in sending letters of concern to U.S. President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.



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Volume 21 • Number 3

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Courier / Correo / Courier, published quarterly by Mennonite World Conference in English, Spanish, and French editions, is available free on request. Send all correspondence to C/C/C, MWC, 8 rue du Fossé des Treize, 67000 Strasbourg, France. Email: Strasbourg@MWC-cmm.org.

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Requests for prayer from MWC churches around the world

- Pray for the National Coordinating Council in Paraguay, and for Ernst Weichselberger, the recently appointed National Coordinator for Assembly 15. Pray also for Ray Brubacher, International Coordinator for the July 13-19, 2009, event.
- Pray for wisdom and peace for Mennonite Brethren in Canada. A new resolution to allow churches to appoint women as pastors will provide new opportunities to reach Canada with the message of the gospel.
- Canada has many aboriginal groups who struggle more with substance abuse, loss of identity and personal well being, suicide, and other social ills than does the rest of the country. Pray that the Mennonite church may be able to make a difference in helping individuals and communities among these national groups.
- Pray for the Congo in the aftermath of national elections in that country. Mennonites there believe that a strong chain of prayer throughout the world can help bring a solution to the crisis in their country.
- More churches close than open in North America. Pray that God will send a revival among his people in this part of the world. Pray also that they will grow in being more just and more fair with people in the rest of the world.
- Thank God for good attendance and successful meetings of the Mennonite European Regional Conference (MERK) last May in Spain (see page 11).
- Thank God that most of the objectives of the Anabaptist-Mennonite Consultation of Central America (CAMCA) and of the first meeting of Central American Mennonite Women Theologians—held in Costa Rica last July—were achieved. “The Holy Spirit was ministering all along,” says Juan José Chinchilla, president of the Honduras Mennonite Conference.
- Pray for an end to the violence that is destroying so many lives in the Middle East. Pray for safety and protection for all those in harm's way; for food, water, and medicine for those that need it; for strength, courage, and persistence for peacemakers. Pray for a diplomatic and negotiated solution to the crisis.

‘From Anabaptist Seed’ available in Amharic and Vietnamese

Strasbourg, France—Translations of *From Anabaptist Seed* by C. Arnold Snyder in Amharic and Vietnamese have been completed.

The Amharic translation was released in April by Meserete Kristos College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The book was translated under the supervision of the office of the college's academic dean, Woudineh Endayelalu.

Brana Printing Press in Addis Ababa printed 5,000

copies. The college will use the book as a text and local churches will use it as reference in teaching from an Anabaptist perspective.

The Vietnamese translation by Pastor Hoa Van Chau, Formation Council, Mennonite Church Canada, and Ngan Van Tang, Winnipeg (Canada) Vietnamese Mennonite Church, is scheduled for release in October 2006.

Five thousand copies of

the Vietnamese translation are scheduled to be printed in Vietnam and will be distributed there as well as among Vietnamese Anabaptists in North America.

From Anabaptist Seed was the first selection for MWC's Anabaptist/Mennonite Shelf of Literature, inaugurated in 2002. The book is now available in 15 languages: English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, German, Japanese, Chinese, Korean,

Indonesian, Hindi, Italian and Telugu—in addition to the two new translations. The book's presentation of basic Anabaptist doctrine and principles of identity and faith has become a popular choice for study groups around the world.

“Interest in the book remains strong” said C. Arnold Snyder, as yet another printing of the English version was being bound at Pandora Press in Canada.

Perspective:

Who will pay the bill?

by Pakisa Tshimika

‘**T**hat’s an excellent idea, but who will pay the bill?’ How many times have I heard that question during the past 25 years. So many that I’ve come to ask, What does it mean?

The question could be an honest inquiry about the sources of funding needed to accomplish an idea. But more often it means: I admire your idea, but don’t forget that I am the one holding resources, and your ideas are only good if I decide to release the resources.

Why raise this question now when we had such a wonderful consultation on service in Pasadena, California, USA, last March, one that ended on a very positive note? Because the Pasadena meeting was only a starting point. What we accomplished was honorable in light of the fact that this was not an easy topic to deal with. But we were able to come together to raise the issue of economic disparity within our global family of faith, and we lamented the impact of racism, tribalism, and other systemic discrimination among us.

Furthermore, we were able to listen to each other without fear, and we heard a call to greater advocacy on the part of Anabaptist churches in North America and Europe on issues such as unfair trade, armed conflicts (e.g. Congo), the drug question, immigration, and visa issues on behalf of Anabaptist churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The listening group also outlined several next steps to facilitate greater communication and information sharing among member churches: development of a study guide from an Anabaptist perspective on the biblical / theological foundations of diakonia / service; creation of a permanent forum on diakonia / service; and organizing regional service consultations. All well and good, but I have received mixed responses to my enthusiasm about what took place in Pasadena as I have shared these ideas with friends and colleagues. The old question comes up: “Pakisa, these are all great ideas, but who will pay for them?”

I guess we did not go far enough. We didn’t address why the majority of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ from the South are so poor they are unable to put roofs on their church buildings, pay for their tickets to global gatherings, or purchase simple furniture and supplies. Why? The closest we got was to raise the unfair trade, armed conflicts, immigration, and visa issues. Even then we failed to call it *sin*.

In some ways, these issues are easy to condemn because they are very far removed from us in terms of decision making. What’s harder to condemn and call sin is the economic disparity between us in the church. If we want to become a global community of Anabaptist-related churches, we must call for further accountability between us regarding our resources.

A first step would be to call our member churches to celebrate a year of Jubilee. Not the kind of Jubilee in which we think it is a nice thing to do or where we share a little bit of the money we might have. Rather, we celebrate Jubilee by taking time to repent, to forgive, to share, and to relinquish power and control.

Jubilee was established in the Bible, not as a nice thing to do, but as a mandatory part of life in community. As a people with radical reformation heritage and legacy, we can no longer find excuses for not going to the roots of the economic disparities among us and work to find ways to deal with them.

Who will pay the bill? The bill will be paid by the radical transformation of our lives in a year of Jubilee.

—Pakisa Tshimika

As MWC associate secretary for networks and projects, Pakisa Tshimika was one of the organizers of the MWC consultation on service last March.



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