



www.mwc-cmm.org

# *courrier . correo* *courrier*

2010 / 1

Conférence Mennonite Mondiale •

Mennonite World Conference •

Congreso Mundial Menonita

**2** Assembly 15 ends  
with positive  
balance

**4** Panama Mennonites:  
**All things big  
and beautiful**

**7** Women theologians:  
**A great spiritual  
festival for God**

**8** Indigenous gathering:  
**The story of one  
tribe is the story  
of all**

**10** Assembly 15 reflections:  
**Something much  
bigger than us**

**13** Major MWC changes:  
**Global South  
center of attention**

**15** Lutherans express  
'deep regret' for  
persecution



*Assembly Scattered:*

**1,300 visit Mennonite Hospital at Km 81**

page 3

## Assembly 15 ends with positive balance

*St. Jacobs, Ontario, Canada*—At their first gathering since Assembly 15, held here in November 2009, MWC's officers and senior staff learned that the Assembly Fund has a positive balance of \$325,340.

Larry Miller, general secretary, attributes this to strong international registration for the assembly, robust donations from Paraguayan Mennonites, and careful cost control by staff.

The officers—MWC's president, vice-president, general secretary, and treasurer—decided to set aside \$125,340 of the balance for costs related to preparing for the next assembly. MWC will also give a \$50,000 gift to Paraguayan member churches in gratitude for their great hospitality in hosting the global church for the July 2009 assembly.

Officers reserved an additional \$150,000 for use in building the capacity of the Africa, Asia, and Latin America continental caucuses and for the development of MWC representation in each continent. Both initiatives were approved by the General Council in Paraguay in July.

Assembly offerings totalled \$27,824. These have been placed in the Global Church Sharing Fund. MWC dispenses money from that fund to help member churches, primarily in the global South, with special needs or approved projects.

**P**araguay 2009, MWC's global church gathering in July 2009, took place in two parts:

- Assembly Gathered, held in Asunción, Paraguay, July 14-19.
- Assembly Scattered, held in various locations in Latin America, either before or after the Asunción event.

*Last issue (2009-3&4) we reported on Assembly Gathered. This issue we focus on Assembly Scattered as well as on several meetings held in conjunction with Paraguay 2009. We also include reflections from some of those who were involved in planning and carrying out Assembly 15.*

—Editor



Photo by Wilhelm Unger

**Record-holder.** Ruthild Foth, 75, of Ludwigshafen, Germany, is believed to have attended more MWC assemblies than anyone else. Assembly 15 in Asunción, Paraguay, was her 11th consecutive. Ruthild attended her first in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1952. At the next one—1957 in Basel, Switzerland—she served as a volunteer interpreter, which she continued to do until Calcutta in 1997. “If I didn’t get paid, then I couldn’t say no,” she says.

## Officers and Executive Committee in discussion about frequency and location of next MWC assembly

*St. Jacobs, Ontario, Canada*—Discussion continues to percolate about future MWC assemblies, including at the meeting of the officers and senior staff held here in November 2009.

The officers and staff noted that there is anxiety in some quarters about holding assemblies less frequently than the current pattern of every six years. Treasurer Ernst Bergen said he hears that assemblies are important and the frequency should be continued.

On the other hand, some voices have raised concerns about the high cost and the significant carbon footprint left by travel related to holding a global assembly.

However, noted Danisa Ndlovu, president, “There is a push that something be done to know where and when the next assembly will be.”

General Secretary Larry Miller proposed consideration of three possible options:

- keep the current pattern (assemblies every six years);
- gather every nine years;
- gather every eight years, with General Council meetings every four instead of every three years.

With either of the last two options, continental meetings could be held in intervening years.

Officers and senior staff agreed to complete a comparative staffing, financial, and environmental cost analysis of all meeting options by May 31, 2010. Officers will then make a recommendation on the future of assemblies, including when and where the next assembly should be held, for deliberation by the Executive Committee at its next meeting, scheduled to be held in July 2010 in Africa.

*Courier / Correo / Courier* (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, Scottsdale, PA 15683-1999, USA. Periodical postage paid at Scottsdale, PA. Printed in USA.

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

At Km. 81 Mennonite Hospital:

## *The benefits of hosting 1,300*

by Carlos Wiens & Adelina Fehr

Several months before Assembly 15, we faced the challenge of preparing well for this event at Km 81 Mennonite Hospital. Through the Internet and from various reports circulating from around the world, we realized that many MWC participants were coming, interested in getting to know our hospital.

That turned out to be true. We received around 1,300 visitors, in 60 different groups. Most came from North America, but there were also many from Europe, Central and South America, and some from Africa. One day, a total of six large buses came to the hospital.

In the guided visits carried out by our staff in English, German, and Spanish, our visitors had the opportunity to learn about the disease called leprosy, the orthopedic shoe store, the chaplain's work, the Mennonite volunteer work, and, above all, what the Paraguayan Mennonite churches attempt to convey in a concrete way through this hospital: "Serving with Love" (*Im Dienste der Liebe*).

Most of the visitors expressed great interest in getting to know our work. Some were appreciative of the explana-

tions we gave about Hansen's disease (leprosy):

- how Hansen's bacillus destroys skin nerves and patients lose sensitivity in various parts of their bodies if they don't receive appropriate treatment;
- how sensitivity is never recovered in the affected parts even after treatment;
- how today leprosy is curable, only requiring a simple, 6-to-12-month treatment if patients start their treatment before the bacillus destroys the nerves (without early treatment they can become severely disabled in their eyes, hands, and feet);
- how leprosy, though contagious, is much less so than usually believed;
- that there are 400 new leprosy patients in Paraguay every year.

When we explained that we combine the medical with the spiritual, many asked whether the patients were open to the message of God's Word. We responded that the majority were very open and receptive.

At 9 o'clock every morning, we preach to the people who are waiting to

see the doctor, and afterwards people sometimes approach the chaplains to ask questions or make comments. The patients are also grateful when the chaplains visit their hospital rooms to talk with them and pray for them. At the hospital there have also been people who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour, which is always cause for joy and gratitude.

Most of the visitors also expressed great interest in the work of the volunteers. Every year 40 to 45 persons come to do volunteer work for 3-6 months, some also for a year. The majority are young, single people, although there are some couples and families as well. Most of them work in the kitchen, laundry, yard, do maintenance, or look after the cattle.

From the beginning, the churches that helped to establish the hospital have been committed to sending volunteers and to fund raising to maintain and develop it.

Several groups of visitors also had the chance to eat in our kitchen. The

*The Mennonite Hospital at Km 81 was established in 1951 by the Mennonites in Paraguay as a way of thanking this country for welcoming them and allowing the religious and educational freedom they desired. After assessing the needs, they noticed that people with Hansen's disease (leprosy) were often neglected and decided to open a hospital on a 900-hectare tract of rural land in East Paraguay.*



Cover: Kenat Wiebe, Km 81 Mennonite Hospital shoemaker, shows how he makes shoes for patients with leprosy and clubfeet. On the left is Adelina Fehr, hospital secretary, who led many of the tours for the 1,300 who visited the hospital as part of Assembly 15.

Photo by J. Lorne Peachey



*A nurse at Km 81 talks with patients and their families about health care prior to their visit with a doctor. Chaplains also talk with those assembled about their spiritual needs and the Word of God.*

main cook commented that, “despite the additional work involved, it was a great privilege to serve *borscht* [soup] to so many visitors. I dare say that most enjoyed the food and showed their appreciation by singing beautiful hymns.”

Our visitors blessed us with their great interest and encouraging words. Several groups and individuals also left donations.

Perhaps best of all, getting ready for our visitors challenged us to ask ourselves once again, “What is it that motivates me to work here, at Km 81?” We wanted to be sincere and to discern whether the work had become just mere routine or whether we were truly motivated and joyful as we served the Lord.

In the process of answering questions such as this, we became clearly aware that God was the true founder of this work, and that God continues to have great and marvellous plans for us. We were able to appreciate once again how faithful and kind our Creator has been so that the hospital could become what it is today.

*Carlos Wiens is medical director and Adelina Fehr secretary at Km 81 Mennonite Hospital. Both served as guides for many of their 1,300 visitors.*

With Mennonites in Panama:

## *All things big and beautiful*

by Liesa Unger

Everything is much bigger and more beautiful in Panama, says a German children’s book. With that in mind, my husband Wilhelm and I—along with Christine Fehrle—signed up for the MWC’s Assembly Scattered tour to Panama.

A welcome team greeted us in Panama City, then took us to the harbour town of Chepo. Among our hosts was Lochi, our captain for the next few days. We learned that all 13 Mennonite Brethren (MB) churches in Panama are either Wounaan or Emberá churches, most of them located in the jungle of Darién.

But because of the difficulty of getting to the Darién jungle, we spent our time visiting churches in the Pacific coast villages. Piloted by Lochi, we went along a river for an hour, another hour along the coast, and 30 minutes along another river to the village of

Platanares, our first stop in the jungle.

Church members and children welcomed us and led us to a stilt house with a palm thatch roof. It was the home of Hermes Barrigón, MB conference chair, and our captain, Lochi. Our host family invited us to relax; eat fish, rice, plantains, and mangoes; get to know people in the community; play with children; swim in the river; and learn about life in a Wounaan village.

At an evening worship service at the local MB church, we shared our experiences at Assembly Gathered, sang assembly and German songs, and brought greetings from our churches back home in Germany. We also learned worship songs that our Wounaan brothers and sisters love. The service ended with prayer for each other.

Next morning we got to know a church elder who, until recently, was the town’s mayor. His wife is one of the best hunters in town, and she has a pas-

### **How big a family we are in Jesus Christ!**

When the MWC office contacted us about our churches hosting Assembly Scattered visitors, we had no idea what this was all about. What we only knew for sure was that people from Germany would come to visit us and our churches in the jungle. About that we felt happy.

Many of our church members could not be at the MWC assembly in Paraguay, but the opportunity to have the Mennonites from Germany share with us all the good experiences from the assembly was a blessing. This helped us to understand how big a family we are in Jesus Christ.

As a result of the visit, we have a better understanding now of how important it is for our churches to commit to pray for all our faith family around the world. As family, we have different needs, blessings, difficult times, and happenings. It is good to know each other and talk to our eternal Father about the situations in different countries and churches.

Even though we have different languages and cultures, we were happy to have these visitors from Germany with us. Thanks be to God!—*Alina Itucama and Obdulio Isaramá, MB National Conference leaders*





*Liesa and Wilhelm Unger (right) with their Panama hosts, Obdulio Isaramá and Alina Itucama and their son Andres on their visit to the Panama Canal.*

church leader, and Obdulio, a business man, sell Wounaan and Emberá art. Obdulio teaches the artists how to promote and sell their products. As a church leader, Alina also participates in gatherings of the Latin American Women Theologians.

Our days in Panama were filled with many great encounters. Today, the *chunga* basket we received as a farewell gift for our church back in Germany reminds us to pray for our brothers and sisters in Panama.

And, yes, the German children's book was right. Everything is much bigger and more beautiful in Panama.

*Liesa and Wilhelm Unger are co-pastors of the Mennonite church in Regensburg, Germany. Both were involved in cataloguing and storing more than 13,000 photos and videos of Assembly 15.*

sion for weaving *chunga* baskets. We learned how the community deals with conflict and about the role of elders as judges and mediators. Wounaan communities manage life without prisons or capital punishment.

After visiting another village, Rio Hondo, in the afternoon, early the next morning we travelled back to Chepo and Panama City. On our way we stopped to watch ocean birds and enjoy the scenery. Back in Chepo, we listened in on a Wounaan Council meeting at the house of our host, Leonides Quiróz. He is the first Wounaan lawyer, working on Wounaan territorial rights.

The church we visited in the evening belongs to a community of Wounaan artists who create and sell their art in the city. We got to know the Wounaan MB hymnal, with most songs in Woun Meu and some in Spanish. Singing is important in the worship services, and we heard a lot of it.

On Sunday morning we worshipped with a church in Panama City. This church was started many years ago as a place for students to live while attend-

ing school. Today many students and professionals attend. We enjoyed the community, the sharing, the singing, the worship band, and the lunch of traditional food after church.

Later that day, we visited Bible translators Chindío Peña Ismare and Ron Binder. Ismare, a native speaker of Woun Meu, and Binder, a Wycliffe missionary, have worked together on Bible translation and literacy programs in the Woun Meu language since the early 1970s. They published the Woun Meu New Testament in 1988. Today both put time and effort into literacy programs, publishing several books to teach children and adults how to read and write in Woun Meu.

On our last day in Panama, with our hosts Alina Itucama and Obdulio Isaramá, we visited city sites and the Panama Canal. Alina, an artist and

*Serving as the Unger's captain and guide along the rivers of the Panama coastal jungle was Lochi, who is also a worship leader at the Mennonite Brethren church in Platanares.*



photo by Wilhelm Unger

**Inter-cultural exchanges in Brazil:**

## *This experience blessed us all*

by Hans Gerhard Peters

Planning and organizing an MWC Assembly Scattered experience is a challenge that one rarely has. Since Brazil is neighbor to Paraguay, we of the *Aliança Evangélica Menonita* were asked to do so.

Since we had only three days, we couldn't show everything, so we organized a tour of Curitiba and its neighborhoods, where most of the Mennonites in Brazil live.

We had the pleasure of receiving two groups. One was made up of 15 people, including 13 young people, from Canada and the USA.

The second group was from Mozambique. This group was made up of six pastors plus the Brazilian missionary from a project that our conference has in Mozambique.

Both groups came to Curitiba at the same time. We talked to the North American group, and they agreed to have the group from Mozambique join their tours, since there were enough seats on the bus we had rented.

As a result, we felt like one big family during those two days. The Mozambique brothers were hosted in houses of members from our local church, a very good experience for our members.

Unfortunately, one of the Canadians developed a case of the swine flu and had to stay in the hotel during those days. We did take him to a health center for examination and medicines.

Besides learning a bit about the city of Curitiba, the two groups also found out about some of the Mennonite churches, their projects with children,

and the Mennonite Colony at Witmarsum. We also took them on a train ride, despite the rain, to a typical small Brazilian town 70 kilometers from Curitiba.

One of the difficulties in organizing such an assembly event is to calculate the cost accurately one year in advance. As a result, the fees paid by the North Americans were more than enough to cover our costs. Before they left, I told them that there was some money left, since we had received excellent prices for the hotel and the bus we rented. I told them too about the financial situation of our brothers from Mozambique.

So the group agreed to offer the extra money to their brothers, who

used it to pay the excess baggage fees for their return to Africa; they had received so many things, especially clothes, from their Brazilian brothers. Even so, there was money left over, and this went to fix the mission car in Mozambique.

Assembly Scattered was undoubtedly a very good experience for all of us. We praise the Lord for the way he brought us together, for the sharing we experienced in love, joy, and material goods. Certainly, this experience blessed all of us.

*Hans Gerhard Peters, Curitiba, Brazil, serves as president of the Aliança Evangélica Menonita, a conference of 33 congregations with 2,700 members.*

**In the Mennonite colonies of the Chaco:**

## *Soon we were not strangers*

by Susi Schmidt

When our congregation was asked to host guests for Assembly Scattered, I said to my husband, "Of course we will take part. We know English." So I prepared everything and had a friendly face as a welcome. But when it was almost time for the bus to arrive, I had some misgivings. What if our guest was strange?

I need not have worried. While our designated guest was not on the bus when it arrived, we were introduced instead to a young woman from Kansas, USA. We soon found common ground. My husband's parents had come from Kansas, and our guest had attended the same school that my husband had attended! So soon we were not strangers.

After supper we took her to the

craft exhibition set up in Filadelfia to show some of the work in our colony. Sunday morning we went to church, where, unfortunately, there was no English translation. But she was happy to observe and hum along with the hymns. After the service we visited the nursing home to show her how our seniors are treated.

Later, at home we had *tereré*, the national drink. Our guest liked it so well she later bought the necessary equipment to take home with her. In the afternoon we took her to a family reunion, where she felt quite at home because some could speak English.

Our time together was soon over. We did meet our guest again during Assembly Gathered.

Assembly Scattered was a wonderful experience. The two of us have remained in contact by email with each other.

## Women theologians:

### *A great spiritual festival glorifying God*

With those words Martha Basualdo of Paraguay described the first-ever transcontinental gathering of Anabaptist women theologians held prior to Assembly 15.

More than 130 women from 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries, six African countries, Canada, and the United States met at the Iglesia Cristiana de la Paz and the Mennonite Brethren Bible Institute in Asunción for sermons, seminars, workshops and discussions.

The theme for the event, conducted primarily in Spanish with English and French translation, was “Jesus’ liberating message for women and men.”

Ofelia García from Mexico said in the opening session, “Getting to this point has meant challenging boundaries.... There is still a long way to go, but we are prepared. And we are not alone.” She noted MWC’s support.

Addressing the two-day gathering were Ofelia García, Mexico; Alix Lozano, Colombia; Elizabeth Soto, Puerto Rico / USA; and Rebecca Osiro, Kenya.



photo by Linda Shelly

*Women theologians listen to a presentation during a two-day gathering of those who have studied or are studying biblical, theological, religious, or pastoral courses. Among the 130 women attending the “spiritual festival” were also some who are serving as pastors. At right is Elizabeth Soto, Puerto Rico / USA, who spoke to the gathering and also preached the Friday evening sermon at Assembly Gathered.*

In small groups, participants studied New Testament passages that included women and talked about reading the Bible from women’s perspectives, not simply repeating what has sometimes felt like a “male model,” which has contributed to discrimination. Ideas included designating a day to pray for women and proclaiming the years 2010 to 2020 “The Decade of Women.”

The women approved a declaration developed from participants’ contributions. It called on women to take leadership roles in their churches, to denounce injustice, to proclaim hope, and to assume lifestyles that speak for the values of the kingdom of God.

The declaration states that Anabaptist women and men constitute

an interdependent community. It proposes dialogue to foster equality. It calls for discernment, unity, the liberating practice of Jesus, and re-reading the Bible through the eyes of women. It also lists ways in which women can support each other in using their gifts.

“Our meeting with Latin American sisters encouraged me,” said Nellie Mlotshwa from Zimbabwe after the meeting. “Our prayer and wish to be fully involved in the work of the kingdom [in Africa] was also theirs, we discovered.”

Elizabeth Herrera, Costa Rica, said she received enthusiasm to work harder for peace, unity, love of neighbors and to strengthen work with women in the community. “I am more committed and willing to perform the tasks the Lord has entrusted to us, to give thanks for the grace I have received, and to be a multiplier of the wonderful teachings we experienced.”—*Ferne Burkhardt with reports from Milka Rindzinski, Patricia Burdette, and Linda Shelly*

*The women theologians honored Milka Rindzinski, Montevideo, Uruguay, leader among Latin American Anabaptist women, who served MWC for many years as editor of Courier-Correo-Courier and as a translator.*



photo by Linda Shelly

## Indigenous and Native Americans:

# *The story of one tribe is the story of all*

by Patricia Burdette

There is no question that Indians are the poorest of the poor among populations of USA, Canadian, Paraguayan, and Argentinean citizens.

That was evident to the North American Indigenous delegation visiting Indigenous communities and churches in Paraguay and Argentina following Assembly 15.

We stayed most of the time in Yalve Sanga in the Paraguayan Chaco. In the resident girl's school, there was no running water; we drew what we needed from a shallow well, filled buckets and carried them to a bath house, and had cold showers.

Likewise, we used out-houses and had no heat in

*From this kitchen one woman prepared three meals for two days without running water for 30 Indigenous visitors.*

photo by Patricia Burdette



the facility. There was a cook who prepared three meals a day for 30 people; her meals were delicious.

Our delegation received the gracious hospitality that Indigenous people are known for everywhere we visited. But many of us were shocked at the living conditions we saw. It was moving to see such abject poverty in the midst of Mennonite affluence, yet there was respect and complete lack of resentment on the part of the Indigenous.

One 96-year-old Paraguayan Indigenous man told us there are two worlds:

"The rich are in the other world," he said. "We saw them at the [Mennonite World] Conference."

It was difficult to see these extremely poor conditions. I also saw how little most people, even other Indigenous people, know about one another's history.

After our gathering, the North American Indigenous people agreed that the story of one Indigenous group, no matter where they live, is the story of all Indigenous groups. As one woman put it, "They [Chaco Indigenous] are going through what our

people went through in the early 1900's. The Mennonites are still trying to get them to assimilate. I don't know if I will ever attend a Mennonite church again."

Yet forgiveness is a powerful force. We all return to our Mennonite churches grateful and enriched for what we have learned through this visit.

*Patricia Burdette is a Native American from Elkhart, Indiana, USA, who edits the magazine, Timbrel, for Mennonite Women USA.*

## *'If human beings get to know one another*

*What follows are impressions from some who hosted the gathering of Indigenous nations following Assembly 15.*

It was very impressive to meet despite our diverse languages and customs. Our visitors told us they testify to the same faith that we have. They said that their identity is expressed by their clothes, their food, their singing.

We told them how we live in the Paraguayan Chaco. We have a special worship service every first Sunday of the month; then, each congregation holds its own programs on other Sundays. There is

nothing special about our clothes, we wear whatever we find!

We expected to see Indigenous people from other countries with the same color of skin as ours. Yet, a person from North America who spoke had a different color of skin. The Nivacle noted that this person did not look Indigenous. Yet, when speaking and singing, he showed us that he was truly Indigenous.

—Victor Pérez, *Convención Iglesias Evangélicas Hermanos Menonitas Nivacle*

The meeting with Indigenous people from other countries was very pos-

itive for the Nivacle. We shared questions, suggestions, and proposals. We talked about the anthropological aspects of our cultures and the spirituality of our churches.

If humans get to know one another, they could become friends and everything could turn out well. People must learn to get along well with others.—  
*Marcos Moreno, Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Nivacle Emanuel*

During the visit of the Indigenous people from other countries, we held a baptism celebration in one of the congregations, Buenas Nuevas Church in Yalve



photo by Patricia Burdette



Ramona Welch, a Native American of the Southern Cheyenne tribe in the USA, stands in front of the welcoming sign at Yalve Sanga, a residential school for the Indigenous in the Chaco.

## Ashamed yet hopeful in Christ

by Janet Plenert

Usually I take pride in being a Christian. Occasionally, I hang my head in shame at what the church has done.

During the Indigenous learning tour, I experienced both.

As the conversations deepened between Métis, Ojibway, Cheyenne, Cree, Shawnee, and Lakota from North America; different tribal groups from Guatemala, Panama, and Peru; Toba Qom and Mocoví from Argentina; and Enlhet, Nivacle, and Guaraní from Paraguay, common themes emerged.

I learned that every single group continues to experience the effects of an attempted obliteration of their cultures. Each struggles with their sense of peoplehood, with being the victims of repression, oppression, laws that marginalize them. Each continued to experience the effects of all forms of abuse at the hands of colonizers, governments, and yes, even the church.

I found myself both impressed by the consistently gracious spirit of all the groups—and increasingly sickened by the role of the church in committing what some call cultural genocide. The church has had a huge role, both as accomplice and as perpetrator, of the systematic degradation, devaluation, and near obliteration of indigenous cultures, traditions, and sense of peoplehood of Indigenous people.

Yet, as I listened to the conversations, I was in awe at the hope they showed, and the grace and forgiveness they embodied. In spite of the church, here we were at a global church event. In spite of the degrading treatment from the church, we could all join hands to pray and sing praises to God. In spite of struggling to pass on their language and music, they welcomed and accepted me a non-Indigenous sister.

In that there is hope.

*Janet Plenert, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, is the vice-president of Mennonite World Conference.*

## er, ... everything could turn out well'

Sanga. More than 20 young people were baptized that day.

We felt united by the Holy Spirit on this occasion, despite language and cultural differences. We greeted each other with a handshake as if our guests had always been among us. It was an honor to host international visitors in our churches.—*Juan Ramos, Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet*

It was very interesting and impressive to have visitors from the United States, Canada, and Peru come to us. They told us how they work with the Indigenous in their communities. We could

tell that they were very advanced spiritually.

Unfortunately, the visitors came during the north wind season, so, as usual, it was very windy, and there was a lot of dust in the Chaco. But they didn't seem to mind.—*Federico González, pastor, Jerusalem Church; and Evencio Fröse, secretary, Campo Largo Community*

Our visitors asked us how we had accepted the gospel. The answer is through the missionaries. The Mennonites reached out to the Indigenous, preaching in the name of a Saviour, of Jesus Christ. The Indigenous did not grasp the gospel

right away; the missionaries made a big effort to reach the Indigenous, until they accepted and were converted.

Another question they asked was if the missionaries are still with us. We responded that they are here only half time to help facilitate the pastors' travels.

The pastors and members of the church were happy to have visited with Indigenous people from other countries, to have shared with churches from other countries because we are one in Christ.—*Walter Ortiz, Iglesia Éfeso, Yalve Sanga; announcer, Radio ZP-30*

God's church in the world:

## *'Something much bigger than us'*

by Phyllis Pellman Good

Mennonite World Conference assembly planners do not go looking for the most appealing convention center, set in a neighborhood with intriguing restaurants, unusual entertainment, and irresistible shopping. Rather, MWC assemblies tend to spring up where no one has ever before considered convening a global church conference.

Ray Brubacher, international coordinator for Assembly 15, explained how the process begins and typically progresses.

"While we were at the last assembly in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003, we received two invitations from member churches for the 2009 assembly. Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, and I did an assessment of both invitations in late 2003, trying to sort out whether there was an adequate meeting facility and enough lodging and food capacity in each place.

"After our visits, we agreed, yes, Paraguay could swing hosting the assembly, based on meeting at a large sports club in Asunción. The huge church where we finally met was only a rumor then!"

Paraguay did—thanks to a local staff who put in very long hours. "The average age of the Asunción staff, who worked on the ground in advance of and during the assembly, was 24!" Ray said.

Despite their youth, the need to work in multiple languages—most are fluent in Spanish, German, and English—and the stress of managing a multi-faceted world gathering of nearly 6,000 people, the young staff were gracious, extraordinarily helpful, and adept problem-solvers.



photo by Ray Dirks

*Ray Brubacher (right), international coordinator, consults with Ernst Weichselberger (left), national coordinator, and Ryan Toews, chief operating officer. Assembly 15 was Ray's last MWC major responsibility before his retirement in October 2009.*

"I'm paid to worry," smiled Ray. And plenty of practical issues did face the assembly staff. "I've lost count of the number of budgets we had," he said, "as the economy shifted and as we reduced our registration estimates in turn.

"We had certain constants: the rental of the *Centro Familiar de Adoración* [CFA—the multi-story church where the assembly was held], the shuttle buses needed to carry attendees to and from their hotels and camps, translation equipment, and the cost of food and its preparation.

**T**he economic meltdown put us through a lot of soul-searching. We relied on the Paraguayans for wisdom and fairness. One local man said, 'We sometimes peg wages to the price of beef. If it's paying high, we pay higher; if it's low, we pay lower.' That framework was helpful.

"But without the amazing generosity of the people of Paraguay, finances would have been quite difficult. Together, the Mennonite colonies and

cooperatives, the church conferences, and the business community supported the assembly with \$750,000US."

Brubacher admitted to other heart-stopping moments along the way. "In January, the CFA had no seats in the 10,000-seat auditorium, nor had they been ordered. Then swine flu developed. About six weeks before opening day, a senior official in Paraguay's Ministry of Health told us that they were considering canceling all major gatherings scheduled for July, the height of their flu season.

During the week leading up to the assembly, Asunción was deluged with rain. We weren't sure if or how the Global Church Village tents could be set up. But thanks to a bed of sand and gravel—and committed volunteers—the village took shape."

Ray cites Ernst Weichselberger, national coordinator, as key to building interest and financial support within Paraguay. He also credits Ryan Toews, a barely 30-year-old Mennonite from Asunción, who was appointed chief

operating officer to make the whole event work.

Ryan stepped into his position in July, 2008. "I made an organigram to figure out what we needed staff-wise," he said. "We saw some gray zones, so we created new teams. We've been about 200 people, mostly volunteers.

"There were some scary moments. But we never thought, 'This can't work.' We thought, 'This is getting bigger. We have to figure out how to work this through.'

"Paraguay is a small market, so we

had no chance to test all our systems and re-do them if there was a problem.

"We got all the permissions we needed—from renting grounds from the neighbors for parking and for the kids' and teens' activities, to help from the transit police in handling all of our buses in this residential neighborhood, to assistance with security from the national police. And they agreed to our request that they use no weapons in providing security for the building complex!"

During the latter days of the assem-

bly, Ray said, "Sometimes you wonder if all of this is worth it for only a few thousand people. But when I walk into this congregation of several thousand, and I hear the international choir, and then the whole group, sing, I cry."

Ryan remarked, "Our motivation was not the salary, but the global church—something bigger than us, God's church in Paraguay, God's church in the world."

*Phyllis Pellman Good, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, serves as a communication consultant for MWC.*

## 'The organization of this event really worked!'

**A**fter attending three Mennonite world conferences—Curitiba, Wichita, and Winnipeg—I thought the chapter on global Mennonite assemblies had come to an end for me. However, when asked, I took up the challenge to be National Coordinator for Assembly 15.

That meant total commitment, along with two years of hard work. It also involved learning, opening an office, and finding the right people for the various tasks.

Other of my responsibilities included fund raising and promotion, two quite challenging areas. We were able to reach our goal, thanks to God and to the efforts of many people.

Many people and churches supported my wife Anni and me. I especially felt the support of my church, where I have been a member for the last 26 years.

God also showed me once again that the church has a future. Hundreds of young people were involved in Assembly 15, many as volunteers. Sharing the same purpose, many had their greatest personal achievement and their greatest personal satisfaction. To see lives being changed through service is to see Christ's church grow.

We can achieve the same in the broader church as at Assembly 15 if we give young people our confidence, offer them an opportunity, present them with a challenge, and provide a little supervision.

Through my responsibilities, I also learned that it was not true that in Paraguay we cannot make progress because of a lack of infrastructure. If we have a clear goal and human resources, we can create an adequate and inexpensive infrastructure. The large 5000-liter

"common cooking pot" at Assembly 15 is a clear proof of this.

To me it was great joy to see that the organization of this event really worked. Besides, the fact that there were no accidents is something for which to be grateful.

I will remember Assembly 15 with a sense of deep satisfaction for having fulfilled our mission. Our team has proved that as Paraguayans we can attain our goals. It has been a great privilege to serve as National Coordinator.—*Ernst Weichselberger*

*Ernst Weichselberger (left), backed by two of his young staff for Assembly 15—Ryan Toews, chief operating officer (center), and Cynthia Dück, coordinator for lodging.*



photo by Merle Good



## MWC installs Ernst Bergen, first treasurer from the South

*Asunción, Paraguay*—Think twice if you assume that Mennonite World Conference's treasurer is concerned only with the organization's balance sheet.

Paul Quiring, from the USA, recently wrapped up his 11-year tenure as MWC treasurer. In his final days in that position, he wanted to talk only about MWC's future and how that is already affecting its finances. He had two primary things on his mind:

- "MWC should not duplicate what other organizations are doing program-wise. Instead, it should cultivate its global brain-trust. I've been very impressed by the competency of the General Council delegates [MWC's governing body]."

- "Mennonite World Conference is not a maintenance operation. It's a growing, visioning operation. Ernst Bergen, the newly appointed treasurer, is right for that. A whole new chapter is opening in MWC."

"Many North American agencies are dealing with their own pasts," Paul added. "This organization isn't concerned with that. It's about the future, about young people and their vision. The treasurer responsibilities are going into hands of the highest caliber."

Ernst Bergen became MWC treasurer at the close of the 2009 MWC Assembly in Paraguay. In his mid-40s, Ernst has served in Paraguay's presidential cabi-

net and is now an advisor to a variety of Paraguayan businesses.

"The invitation to this responsibility was a complete surprise," said Ernst. "I started praying; I talked with my family; I talked to my pastor; I placed the matter before our church conference leadership. They all advised and encouraged me to do it. I do have enthusiasm for this and a deep internal peace about it."

"I see that the churches have a considerable love of MWC. The challenge for us in leadership is to be in tune with God and to be willing to act in accord with what we perceive God wants us to do. It is also our task to help our members to understand MWC's work, to go to them,



*At Assembly 15, Paul Quiring (left) of the USA concluded 11 years as treasurer of Mennonite World Conference. Succeeding him as treasurer is Ernst Bergen (right) of Paraguay.*

and to ask for their support."

One of Ernst's personal projects is "Good Governance," which offers chaplaincy services to

Paraguayans in public office. Upon observing Ernst's involvement with this program, Larry Miller, MWC's general secretary, comment-

## Mennonite World Conference launches search

*Kitchener, Ontario, Canada* —MWC has initiated a search process for its next general secretary. Larry Miller, current MWC general secretary, will complete 22 years of service in that position in May 2012.

During Larry's service for MWC, this Anabaptist communion has been strengthened and has met in global assembly three times in the global South: Calcutta, India, in 1997; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in

2003; and Asunción, Paraguay in 2009.

Danisa Ndlovu, MWC president, says: "Larry helped give voice to Anabaptist related churches in the global South and has represented Anabaptists well in ecumenical dialogue."

Danisa Ndlovu, Zimbabwe, is chair of the Search Committee. Other members include: Mesach Krisetya, MWC past president, from Indonesia; Karen Klassen Harder, former chair of the Mennonite Central Committee board from the

USA; Markus Rediger current Executive Committee member from Switzerland; and Elizabeth Vado Sandoval, past Executive Committee member from Nicaragua. Bert C. Lobe, MWC representative for North America, serves as committee facilitator.

The group met for the first time in July 2009 in Asunción, Paraguay. In September 2009, it sent a letter to MWC members, associate members and participant networks, agencies and institutions, inviting



ed, "This guy knows how to lead from behind."

Ernst believes that the provision within MWC's new constitution, which encourages the development of continental MWC offices, is an effort where growth and effective accompaniment can happen.

"MWC is financially sustainable and absolutely viable. I am convinced that both MWC and its funding can grow. Finances must stay in balance and proportion with MWC's activities. Money will follow MWC's presence and life."

Says MWC's new treasurer, "I need to learn a lot; I need to discover how to team up with others to do this job. We have a wonderful opportunity to move ahead with the future, as long as we sense what God wants and we follow that."

—Phyllis Pellman Good

## Global South to receive more administration, offices with General Council program plan

*Strasbourg, France*—MWC's North American offices are about to change. These changes are part of a plan which calls for shifting more MWC administrative capacity to the global South.

The changes come as the result of a call for "reshaping MWC offices and staffing," one of the goals of the Program Plan 2009-2012 approved by the MWC General Council at its meeting in Asunción, Paraguay, in July 2009, held in conjunction with Assembly 15.

**Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.** This office is scheduled to become MWC's North American headquarters. It will be headed by Albert (Bert) C. Lobe, MWC North America repre-

sentative. In this role, he will give focused time and energy to building relationships with MWC members and participants across North America.

Bert will also coordinate generating and distributing Global Church Sharing Fund resources. The fund has two accounts, approved in 2009:

- a Jubilee Account, which assists MWC churches, especially in the global South, with approved projects;
- a Deacons Account, which will be distributed as need is determined in consultation with Global Anabaptist Deacons and the Deacons Commission.

Bert will also provide staff support for the Deacons Commission as well as for the search for the next MWC general secretary.

Karen Martin Schiedel, director of MWC finance and administration, will continue in her role, and Kristen Hines will also continue as administrative assistant in the Kitchener office.

Ray Brubacher, international coordinator for Assembly 15, who worked from the Kitchener office, retired at the end of October 2009. Ray joined MWC in September 1999 to help organize the General Council meeting and the Global Anabaptist Mission Consultation (GAMCO) in Guatemala in 2000. He then provided international coordination in preparation for MWC's global assemblies in

Zimbabwe (2003) and in Paraguay (2009). Ray completed a manual to help guide the organization of future global events before he left his office. His retirement plans are still "open."

Margaret Brubacher, who also worked from the Kitchener office as an administrative assistant in planning and facilitating global assemblies, has also completed her work with MWC.

**Fresno, California, USA.** MWC's office here will close at the end of 2009. At that time, Pakisa Tshimika, who began working for MWC from Fresno in August 1999, will complete his service as associate general secretary.

Plans call for Pakisa to move from a permanent staff role to an occasional assignment as global church advocate. His immediate assignment is to lead planning for the Global Anabaptist Service Consultation to be convened by MWC in mid-2010 in conjunction with the MWC Executive Committee meeting.

Also with the closing of the Fresno office, Dennis Becker will complete his work as executive assistant to Pakisa.

MWC's goal over the next several years is to appoint representatives in each continent to strengthen relationships with and between member churches as well as with related organizations.

## for new general secretary

names of persons to be considered for the general secretary position.

The Search Committee plans to develop a short list of candidates by June 2010, in time to provide a progress report to the MWC Executive Committee, which meets in July in Africa.

Following that, the committee will conduct face to face interviews with those candidates on the final short list before March 2011. It hopes to submit its recommendation for the new general secretary to the MWC

Executive Committee in April 2011. The General Council will be asked to ratify this recommendation in early May 2011, and announcement of the appointment will be made shortly thereafter.

MWC president Danisa Ndlovu requests the prayers and counsel of the global Anabaptist communion as the committee searches for the next general secretary.

A position description is available upon request: [kitchener@mw-cmm.org](mailto:kitchener@mw-cmm.org)



# Global Anabaptists grieve loss of Cuban leader

Strasbourg, France—MWC, the International Brethren in Christ Association (IBICA), and the Brethren in Christ Church in Cuba are grieving the sudden death of Felix Rafael Curbelo. He died of an apparent heart attack on Sunday, December 13, 2009, while travelling in Germany. He was 69 years old.

A member of the MWC General Council from Cuba since 1997, Felix was elected to the MWC Executive Committee in 2009 in Asunción, Paraguay, to represent Latin America and the Caribbean.

He was also treasurer of the Brethren in Christ Church in Cuba and a member of the IBICA Executive Committee since its inception in 2006.

In December, Felix was in the Regensburg area in southeast Germany for a

week of fellowship with Mennonites after participating in an earlier meeting of the IBICA Executive Committee in Strasbourg. Early Sunday morning, suffering severe pain, he roused his hosts, Dankwart and Brunhilde Horsch, who took him to the hospital. Doctors there determined that he needed to be transferred immediately to the university hospital in Dresden. His condition worsened and he died in the ambulance en route to Dresden.

Danisa Ndlovu, MWC president who had been in Strasbourg with Felix, just days earlier, learned of his sudden death back home in Zimbabwe. In an email message, Danisa, who has known him for more than ten years, said: "I have no words to describe the deep and painful sense of loss as I

read about the death of Felix. ... He was an embodiment of a gentle, humble, and loving spirit, a good listener who spoke an appropriate word at the right time."

"We will greatly miss Felix on the Executive Committee," said Janet Plenert, MWC vice-president. "He embodied hope. ... As a Cuban church leader, he offered a rare window and opportunity for the church in Cuba to connect actively with and contribute to the global church."

"Most recently he had played an active role in helping the fledgling Mennonite Church in Cuba process their documentation to be able to send their leader to participate in MWC Assembly 15. His passing leaves a significant gap in our leadership and in our hearts."

One of his contributions to the global church was as the Latin American representative in an MWC Koinonia Delegation to Vietnam in November 2008.

"The common socio-political situations and the similar experiences of the churches in Cuba and

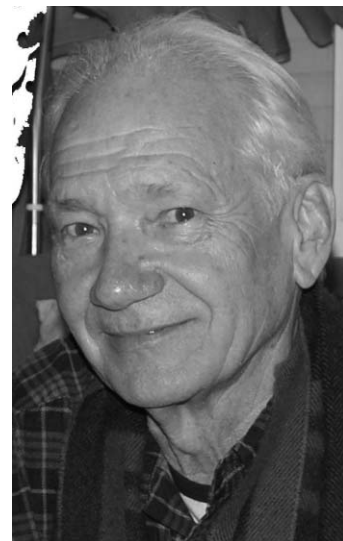


photo by Wilhelm Unger

*Felix Rafael Curbelo, Cuban and global church leader, died suddenly in December.*

Vietnam, together with his warm personality, made him a star of the delegation with valuable insights for leaders of the Vietnamese church," said MWC general secretary, Larry Miller.

"[Felix] was constantly reaching out to others in the global church, keenly interested in other peoples, cultures, and the church in other settings," commented Darrell Winger, executive director of the IBICA. "He loved the church in Cuba and worked diligently to see it strengthened."

Felix is survived by his wife, Leyda, and his son, Kenneth.

Coming soon:

## Mennonite history books in Spanish, French

Strasbourg, France—French and Spanish editions of two volumes of MWC's Global Mennonite History Project will become available in either 2010 or 2011.

Both volumes, *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, and *Testing Faith and Tradition; the Europe story*, have been available in English. Third volume in the series, on the Latin American churches, will also be published in 2010.

**Spanish editions.** Eunice Miller and Marisa Miller, both living in Argentina, are serving as translators for the Spanish volumes; all being published by CLARA-SEMI-LLA in Colombia. The Africa volume has been completed and the Europe volume will be published as

early as January 1, 2010. A distribution agreement will make the books available from a US distributor in the near future.

**French editions.** Translation of the Africa volume into French, by Elisabeth Baecher, is complete. Printing in Congo is being considered with release anticipated in 2010. A team of translators is at work on the Europe volume. Editing and design will require several months with release expected in 2011.

John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder are editors of the Global Mennonite History Project. Pandora Press (Canada) and Good Books (USA) are co-publishers.

## Help support C-C-C

*Courier - Correo - Courier* is published by Mennonite World Conference on a non-subscription basis. However, readers are invited to contribute \$35 US, \$35 CAD, or 30€ toward the costs of printing and distribution. Those with more are invited to give more on behalf of those in the MWC family who have less.

**US funds:** 2529 Willow Avenue  
Clovis, CA 93612

**Canadian funds:** 50 Kent Avenue  
Kitchener, ON N2G 3R1

**Euros:** 8 rue du Fossé des Treize  
6700 Strasbourg, France

# Lutherans expresses 'deep regret' for persecution of Anabaptists

*Chavannes-de-Bogis, Switzerland* —The council of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has taken another critical step towards reconciliation with Anabaptists.

At its October 2009 meeting, the council unanimously recommended that the LWF Eleventh Assembly adopt the statement, "Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of 'Anabaptists'," when it meets in Stuttgart, Germany, in July 2010.

The statement expresses "deep regret and sorrow" for the 16th-century violent persecution of Anabaptists by Lutherans. It asks for forgiveness from God and from Mennonites for past wrongs, for having forgotten or ignored this persecution, and for continuing to describe Anabaptists in damaging ways.

The statement also speaks to how Lutherans will remember this persecution and how the Lutheran confessional legacy will be interpreted in the future.

This action comes in response to the work of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, established in 2002. The joint commission's report—based on its work from 2005 to 2009, and the LWF council's action—will be sent to Lutheran churches for discussion and response in 2010.

Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, welcomed the action "in a spirit of celebration and prayer." He brought greetings from the 15th MWC assembly held in Asunción, Paraguay, in July.

Larry told the Lutheran council that the message Ishmael Noko, LWF general secretary, delivered was "one of the most sacred moments of that assembly." Noko's words, his conciliatory spirit, and his expression of hope to walk with Anabaptists on a path of healing and reconciliation brought the assembly to its feet. People wept.

## Honesty and care.

Lutherans are not the first Christian world communion to address the execution and persecution of Anabaptists by Christian authorities, noted Miller. "But the honesty, carefulness, and compassion with which you are doing so seems to touch the Mennonite heart in a way I have not previously seen," he said.

Noko's message in Paraguay continues to command attention around the world and is one of the assembly events most fre-



© LWF / H. Putzman Penet

*Larry Miller, MWC general secretary (right), listens as Mark S. Hanson, president, reads a statement from the Lutheran World Federation on the 16th century persecution of the Anabaptists.*

quently reported in churches and in the North American Anabaptist press.

Dominant emotions at the Geneva LWF council meeting for Rainer Burkart from Germany were joy and thankfulness "that God has brought together ... two churches that have resulted from the turmoils of the European Reformation." Burkart is the co-chair of the International Study Commission and a member of both the MWC Executive Committee and the MWC Faith and Life Commission.

Rainer sees two main differences between Lutheran and Anabaptist faith and practice: (a) baptism and (b) matters concerning church and state relations, including the use of force for humanitarian purposes. These two issues will be future agenda for MWC's Faith and Life Commission, he said.

Rainer served as secretary in the conversation between the Lutheran and Mennonite churches in Germany from 1989 to 1993. The German dialogue resulted in a declaration of mutual Eucharistic fellowship. He said that the

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden, one of two MWC member churches in Germany, does not require rebaptism when Lutherans transfer to Mennonite congregations. Other dialogues have occurred in France and the United States.

## Anabaptist response.

At a meeting in Ontario, Canada, in November 2009, MWC officers considered how to respond to the Lutheran statement.

"In the spirit of biblical forgiveness, it is important that we offer forgiveness when asked," said Ernst Bergen, MWC treasurer. General secretary Larry Miller added, "We need to address our stereotypical treatment of Lutherans and our continuing sense of victimization."

The goal is mutual forgiveness, Larry noted.

Officers affirmed the proposal of the International Study Commission to send the commission's joint report to member churches for discussion and response. That will happen early in 2010.



*courrier  
courier  
correo*

Volume 25 • Number 1

Larry Miller  
Publisher

J. Lorne Peachey  
Editor

Ferne Burkhardt  
News editor

Eleanor Miller  
Communications assistant

Sylvie Gudin  
French translator

Marisa & Eunice Miller  
Spanish translators

*Courrier - 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@mwcc-mm.org](mailto:Strasbourg@mwcc-mm.org).

[www.mwcc-mm.org](http://www.mwcc-mm.org)

MWC's new president, Danisa Ndlovu:

## *'I trust in a good future'*

by Terry Smith

**M**WC's newly-elected president is nervous about meeting journalists. But on November 5, 2009, he's pleased to see John 3:16 in Ndebele—a principal language in his country, Zimbabwe—taped to a bulletin board in the Evangelical Mennonite Conference national office board room in Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada. He says it makes him feel welcome.

Though Danisa, 52, started his term as president in July 2009, he is not new to MWC. He had served as vice president since 2003.

Nor is he new to the Christian church. He has served in various capacities and ministries within the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Zimbabwe: as an evangelist, book store manager, Bible school lecturer, and, since 2000, as bishop of the Zimbabwe BICC, which has about 37,000 members.

And he is not new to North America. While some of his undergraduate studies were done in Zimbabwe and Kenya, he studied at two seminaries in the U.S. from 1989-1992, resulting in M.A. (theology) and MDiv degrees.

**The MWC president's job.** "My role ... is to drive the ship." It is to see that the vision of MWC is pursued, to work closely with others, and "to give MWC a face."

**North-South changes.** The churches from the North and the South need to move from a mother-

daughter relationship to come to the table as equals, he says. This change is not easy, but it is important. There needs to be accountability, listening to each other, an openness to both being critiqued and to acknowledge the pains of history.

**The unconvinced.** What if people question if it is worthwhile to be part of MWC? "If you have a fruit in front of you, you really don't know how it tastes until you have tasted it." MWC is a fruit [with] a global family flavour which is unique. ... When you participate, you begin to see the benefit."

The church coming together from different nations and languages is biblical. "There is a benefit to cross-fertilization. We need to 'plant' our lives in each other and put down our defensive mechanisms as the people of God."

**The message of peace.** Since the Ndebele [Danisa's background] are linked to the Zulu, and both have reputations as brave warriors, how has the message of peace through Jesus been received by the Ndebele and other Zimbabweans?

Peace doesn't mean "being a weakling or to allow other people to walk over you. Peace is a principle of life where you are able to respond to situations in ways that enhance life and relationships."

The Ndebele have a history as warriors, but among themselves they are generally a peaceful people. Bravery and "warriorship" are in there to respond to challenges.



photo by Mark Smucker

*MWC's new president, Danisa Ndlovu, addresses the Assembly 15 audience in Asunción, Paraguay, this past July.*

**Added responsibilities.** How will he manage the additional responsibilities as MWC's president? "I don't know ... but God has always used busy people."

**The family.** Danisa and his wife Treziah have three children—who are "wonderful, supportive, and very positive."

Two teenaged children are in boarding school; another, 20, awaits college.

He and his family live with their extended family, "which is a great joy." Sadly, a younger brother, married and preparing for ministry, died suddenly in October.

**The future.** "I trust in a good future. For my family. For the church."

*Terry Smith is executive secretary of the Board of Church Ministries for the Evangelical Mennonite Conference and editor of The Messenger.*