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A change in lifestyles for Christians

by Nzuzi Mukawa

In today's world, several races are despised, the poor are exploited in many places, people of some cultures are marginalized, and there is still widespread discrimination against women. Can we pretend to follow Jesus and not pay heed to these social issues?

The prophet Micah tells us we cannot worship God and forget about social justice. He was speaking to a people in the 8th century B.C. who, like us, were enjoying great prosperity and great wealth. Two classes had emerged—the wealthy and the poor. There was a huge gap between them.

In Micah's time, wealth and power were exclusively held by a small group of merchants and judges. This class exerted great oppression upon the lowly ones. In Micah 2:1-2, we are told the poor were deprived of their fields. Their houses and their labour became the object of business transactions.

This exploitation had spread to northern Israel, too, triggering the protest of the prophets Hosea, Isaiah, and later Jeremiah. The great imbalance amounted to nothing less than gross injustice.

What was happening was a serious violation of the alliance that God, up to

that point, had with his people. This alliance was supposed to prevent exploitation of the poor by the powerful.

Micah critiques this emerging social structure and says it can't continue if the people want to live. He charges them with violating the Sinai alliance, telling them how ungrateful they were by forgetting how God had delivered them out of Egypt, sheltering them from the curse.

God was fed up with their many offerings, their feigning of worship, which included sacrificing their own children. Micah calls them to repentance, specifically asking them to practice justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.

What did Micah mean by practicing justice? In that setting, it meant that everyone's interest had to be safeguarded for there to be harmony in the society. The fundamental rights of everyone had to be respected. God's people all belong to the community of the alliance, and as such are called to experience a great solidarity with others. Yahweh, reminded Micah, insists that his justice is practiced to sustain this alliance. For everyone to belong to the community there must be social cohesion, a standard of justice between individuals.

Exploiting the poor breaks the community apart and violates the alliance. God is not happy about this, says Micah, because justice is the very nature of God. Justice is what God does. The people need to restore their broken harmony.

In order to reverse this fragmented

community, Micah calls for a renewal of "loving mercy," a new demonstration of grace and pardon. This implies that Israel should focus its attention on the poor. This is all about material poverty. According to the law in Deuteronomy, there shall be no poor among God's people.

Where there is a poor person, all the others should try and lift that person up from that condition. Again, this implies that Israel should focus its attention on the poor. All necessary help should be brought to them. Micah tells both Judah and Israel that they have profited from the weakness of the poor by exploiting them. But this is contrary to the harmony of the alliance. The poor should be protected. God insists they should not continue to be ignored but be brought into the decision-making process of the society.

In turning from their exploitative ways, God's people are given a new standard of conduct within the community: walking humbly with their God. There has to be a new standard of compassion and humility that lifts up the poor rather than forcing them into a lower class. Obeying this new standard is equal to walking with one's God, getting into lockstep with a God who is just and whose interest is in the betterment of all, particularly the poor.

So what does this mean for us as followers of Jesus in today's society? In a world that is very similar to Micah's Judah, the church must respond to the same call for repentance, for loving mercy, and for walking

With this issue, Courier-Correo-Courier begins a series of articles from the sermons and the Bible studies at Assembly 15 in Asunción, Paraguay, in July 2009, meeting under the theme, "Come together in the way of Jesus Christ." In this issue we carry the sermon by Nzuzi Mukawa and the Bible study by Elfriede Verón on Wednesday, July 15, both of which center on the sub-theme, "The way of Jesus Christ."

—Editor

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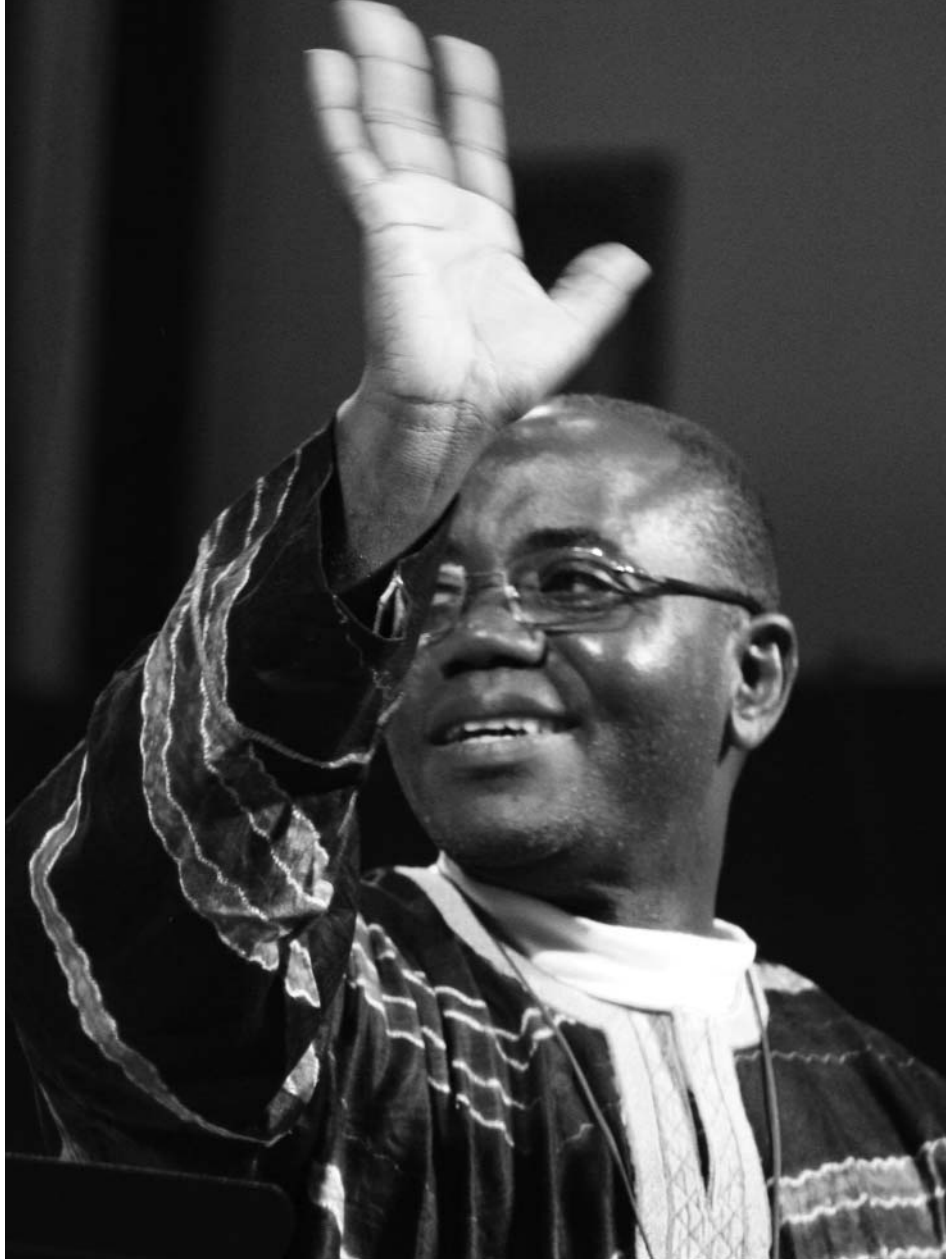


photo by Lowell Brown

Nzuzi Mukawa emphasizes a point in his sermon on Micah 6:1-8 at the Wednesday evening service at Assembly 15.

ity we can achieve God's harmony, especially when in the church there's a handful that lives in comparative wealth while the rest, the majority, live in poverty?

Here are some of the issues that illustrate this disparity:

International debt. Several African countries are currently facing the option of either paying debts or supporting their population. My own homeland, the Democratic Republic of Congo, is required to pay \$50 million monthly on its foreign deficit and so finds itself unable to invest in health and education. This is injustice because it will foster pauperization of the debtor countries.

The international (global) trade system operates to the detriment of poor countries. Sometimes, only rich countries have access to international trade by means of imports and exports while poor countries must be subject to duties and quotas that keep them from gaining access to world commerce. This is unfair.

Global warming. This issue has far greater consequences for poor countries, which depend on their green surfaces (forests) for their livelihood. Rich countries, however, exploit their green surfaces. So rich countries should pay damages to poor countries because they

humbly before God. We need to be reminded that God is still a God of justice, that he cannot tolerate exploitation of the poor. Like Judah, God opposes any religion that doesn't pay attention to injustice.

Following Jesus clearly means we have to follow his path of justice. Proclaiming God's justice must be a part of our worship, our discipleship, and our mission. The church must practice justice from within. We tend to think justice is elsewhere and often fail to see how it is falling short within our own structures.

For instance, in the succession of leadership, members not belonging to majority groups have a difficult time becoming leaders. Members from the lower class have a hard time being accepted in some congregations.

Minorities often don't have access to the church's assets. In some churches, women cannot fully participate in all ministries, especially in pastoral leadership. This is contrary to God's word; the Apostle Paul says that in Christ we are neither man nor woman but one with him.

The inequality in the distribution of resources globally is an issue the church should be concerned with, if it is to "love justice." We know that only eight percent of the world's population utilizes 36 percent of all of the world's resources. This is to say that over half of the global population lives in utter poverty, i.e., lacking basic items for living, such as water, electricity, health care, education, lodging, and employment.

Do we think that with such a dispar-

Cover: The Youth Task Force met for the first time in France in late February to formulate vision and structure for the future of MWC global youth work. Members are (back, from left) Ayub Omondi Awich, Kenya; Marc Pasqués, Spain; (front) Kristina Toews, Canada; Melani Susanti, Indonesia; and Carlos Alvarez Woo, Colombia. For more on the work of this group, see page 11.

Photo by Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

are the ones who have greatly polluted the air and have destroyed the ozone layer. Rich countries should be required to compensate poor countries for the loss of wealth and their livelihoods.

Homeless children. There are an estimated 100 million children living on the streets of the world's major cities. Projections are that this number will climb to some 800 million by the year 2020. It is about time the church awakens to this social plight and stands up for these children.

With this injustice rampant on a global scale, I am calling the church, like Micah, to work alongside the poor in helping these children by promoting drinkable water, vaccination, education, literacy programs, and new technology for preventing recurring diseases.

There needs to be a change in lifestyle for Christians.

Capitalism teaches people to spend their own money and become greater and greater consumers. The materialism of Northern Christians is marked by luxury, where, for instance, people want big mansions and big vehicles. By continuing this way of life, we are destroying the other social classes. The ideal would be to invest for oneself but also for the others in order to achieve social equilibrium.

The church must implement business projects with micro financing enterprises that help the poor support their families. The next step is to assist them in marketing their products.

As a church, we must follow the path of him who loved us and who gave himself for us. He is the one who urges us to be salt of the earth and light to the world by living in justice and by practicing it. When we do so, there will be peace, justice, and mercy in the world.

Nzuzi Mukawa is the academic dean and a professor at the Missiology School in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, and associate pastor of Batela Mennonite Brethren Church of Kinshasa. This article was adapted from his Assembly 15 sermon by the Canadian Mennonite.

Your attitude should be like

by Elfriede Verón

How to follow Jesus Christ and his example is outlined well for us in Philippians 2:1-11. This passage can be divided into three parts: (a) verses 1-4, which urge us to seek unity; and (b) verses 5-11, which show us Christ's example; verses 9-11, God's rewards for being faithful.

A. Seeking unity (vv 1-4)

Jesus' church here on earth has suffered many defeats; instead of fighting together against a common enemy, we have devoted ourselves to fighting one another, allowing the sins of jealousy, rivalry, selfishness, quarreling, and anger to prevail. By contrast, Paul places special emphasis on the unity that should be present among Christ's followers.

To have unity, we must first experience Jesus Christ in our lives. Then we must give ourselves up to the work and presence of the Holy Spirit (v 1).

All who have responded affirmatively to Christ's love are part of God's family. The Holy Spirit constantly speaks to us, urging us to give up our sinful lives and follow Jesus with faithfulness, to love our brothers and sisters and to help everyone, especially the needy.

Once we have experienced Christ's love and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul urges us to be united—to "make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose" (v 2). We should be united in soul, in feeling, in thought, and, above all, in love.

Two things are essential in order to achieve unity among Christians:

(1) *Humility*: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves," Paul writes (v 3).

Selfish and boastful people do not see others as being better and to be respected. Rather, they see them as persons to be used and exploited for their own benefit and their own ends.

By contrast, humility is revealed through our relationships with others. A humble person appreciates others and sincerely values their gifts and abilities. In this sense, one considers others better because one sees, admires, and appreciates the virtues that others possess and that one perhaps lacks. (One does not feel jealous or envious.)

(2) Seeking the wellbeing of others:

Paul calls on us "to look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (v 4). This does not mean that we cannot look after ourselves or seek our own well-being or that of our family, but it does mean that we should also seek the well-being of others. And this is expressed in the context of the church by following Jesus' example.

B. The example of Jesus Christ (vv 5-8)

"Your attitude should be like Jesus Christ's," Paul says. That is, Jesus must be the example we want to follow in our daily life. Through his example he showed us the way we should follow. If we are Christians, then it is Christ whom we must imitate, and we should follow his example in the way we are, think, speak, and act.

Which of Jesus' attitudes or thoughts should we follow or imitate?

(1) *Abnegation or self-sacrifice*: Jesus, "being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to hold on to," Paul writes (v 6).

Jesus did not hold on to his glory in heaven but gave it up to come to this earth, not to be served as a king or a president or a rich man. Rather, as the Bible says, "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich."

Jesus did what Paul says we should do: He sought the interests of others and not his own interests and convenience. He gave up his heavenly glory, his position of authority and prestige, because of his love for us, seeking our well-being, our salvation, and a plentiful life for us.

Jesus Christ's

We must have the same attitude. We should not think just about ourselves, but rather think also of the well-being of others: those around us, our families, those in our workplaces.

In today's world, many "selves" are in fashion: self-esteem, self-achievement, self-sufficiency, self-acceptance. I am not saying that on certain occasions it is not important to emphasize these. But, in general, it is in communion and in relation to others that we fulfill ourselves. By giving we receive.

Seeking the well-being of others generally returns to affect our own well-being. If we seek the well-being of others and they are happy, this will also bring us joy—as, for example, in a marriage or in the church.

(2) *Humility and service:* Another way we are to imitate Jesus is through his expression of humility and service. Jesus "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (v 7).

Jesus decided to come and live here on earth, taking the nature of his own creation: a human being. Jesus identified himself with the pain, suffering, and feelings of human beings. He felt joy, anger, hunger, thirst, and was tempted to do evil.

Jesus' humility can also be seen in his willingness to die for his creation—sinful and rebellious human beings.

The humility of Jesus is also reflected in his readiness to be a servant. He, who was God for all eternity, who is God by nature, by essence, accepted another nature, another essence. He became a servant (the same word which can also be translated as slave).

Jesus came to serve humanity. Working for others, preaching, teaching, and healing made him weary. How many lepers, lame persons, and paralytics did he heal! He served others all

day; he even knelt in front of his disciples to wash their feet.

Jesus not only had the external appearance of a servant; it was the essence of his being as well. He voluntarily decided to be a servant. He adopted the nature of a servant. He did not serve in order to be seen, as did, for example, the Pharisees.

Sometimes human beings serve others with the intention of appearing big-hearted, but deep down there is a desire to obtain fame and recognition. So when no one else is interested or talks about the good we are doing, the service project is abandoned.

But Jesus served others, no matter whether there were others around, whether he received recognition, or whether his service was appreciated.

Throughout history, Mennonites have been characterized by our service towards others, through hospitals, schools, care for the needy, and humanitarian aid in times of disaster. May we continue to follow in Jesus' footsteps and also follow the example of our forbearers: the way of service to others.

(3) *Obedience:* A third aspect that characterized Jesus was his obedience to God, his father. "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (v 8).

On many occasions, the devil tempted Jesus no longer to be the humble and obedient servant of God, to think a bit about himself and not just about others or God.

For example: When he told his disci-

photo by Lowell Brown



Elriede Verón leads a Bible study on Philippians 2:1-11 at the Wednesday morning worship at Assembly 15.

ples that he was going to Jerusalem to die, the devil said to him through Peter: this doesn't have to happen; you need to look after yourself. A similar temptation existed even on the cross: "He saved others, but he can't save himself."

Because of his love for us and his obedience to God, Jesus accepted his death on the cross like a criminal. He accepted to be punished in our place for our rebelliousness and our sins.

The Bible urges us to have the same attitude: absolute obedience and submission to the will of God. Day by day, with our family, in relating to others, in our business, may we be obedient to the teachings of Jesus. "Your attitude should be like Jesus Christ's," Paul writes.

C. Rewards for faithfulness (vv 9-11)

And here comes the best part: God always rewards faithfulness and obedience. Jesus was obedient until death on the cross, but the story does not end there. "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name."

Christ resurrected. With his death and resurrection, Jesus defeated both death and Satan and made possible our salvation. Through his humility, sacrifice, commitment, and total obedience to God, he was exalted to the utmost position, which means above everything else. In Jesus' name, titles such as Savior, Messiah, King, and Lord are all combined.

"That, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." One day, all shall kneel before him and all tongues will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The way Jesus showed us entails a life of self-sacrifice, service, humility, and unconditional obedience to God. God will reward us. May the Lord help us to continue to go together in the way of Jesus Christ and to follow the example that he has set.

Elfriede Verón teaches biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, Greek, and New Testament at the Instituto Bíblico de Asunción, a regional campus of the Universidad Evangélica del Paraguay.

'We had hard times,

by Paul Schrag

Immigrants clearing trees and plowing with oxen needed strong faith and a positive attitude.

Henry and Mary Entz of the Sommerfeld Colony in eastern Paraguay had both—and still do. As teenagers in 1948, they arrived here with 1,600 others from Manitoba to start a new life.

Today, in their upper 70s, they live in Sommerfeld Colony's Altenheim (home for the elderly) with no regrets.

"God has been very good to us," Mary Entz says. "We had hard times, yes, but they've been worth it."

The first years were the hardest. They began with disappointment.

"We were told it was open land, but when we got here we found it was forest," Mary Entz says. "We put a tent up. That was our first home."

Disillusioned, about 440 of the Mennonite immigrants returned immediately to Canada. But the Entzes were among those who refused to look back.

"The first couple of years we worked with oxen," Henry Entz says. "I was used to tractors in Canada. That was quite a setback."

He helped clear the trees and build the colony's first roads with a spade and ax. But now he chooses to dwell on the positive side of that, too.

Paraguay 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.

In this issue we continue our focus on Assembly Scattered with this report of a visit to the Sommerfeld Colony in eastern Paraguay.—Editor



photo by Paul Schrag / MWR

Mary and Henry Entz of the Sommerfeld Colony in eastern Paraguay: "God has been very good to us."

"I was a boy," he says. "I had lots of company. We could take life with a smile."

He and Mary got married, farmed, and raised six children.

"We had to travel a long way to meet each other," she says. "I'm glad we came."

Driving economic force. The Entzes' adult life spans the 60-year history of Sommerfeld Colony, a Low German-speaking community whose farms and industries contribute to the Mennonite colonies' role as a driving force in Paraguay's economy.

Sommerfeld accounts for about 3,200 of Paraguay's Mennonite population of around 60,000—or 1 percent of the country's 6 million people.

Sommerfeld and its sister colony, Bergthal—two of the nation's 15 Mennonite colonies—consist of farms and more than two dozen villages scattered over a 109,000-acre tract in eastern Paraguay, halfway between Asunción and Brazil.

(On the other side of landlocked Paraguay, in the northwest, are the more famous colonies of the Chaco, where Mennonite immigrants who

yes, but they've been worth it'

began arriving in 1927 settled a frontier even more inhospitable than the east.)

The Sommerfelders and Bergthalers both trace their ancestry to Chortitza, the original Mennonite colony in Russia. After about 70 years in Manitoba, they moved on to Paraguay after World War II, hoping to avoid the acculturation they feared was overtaking their communities.

In these tradition-minded colonies, change does not come easily. For instance, in 2007 there was conflict over whether to permit loudspeaker systems in church services.

As a result, progressives have chosen to break away. A group that left Bergthal formed the Tres Palmas Colony in the 1970s. And in 1994, Sommerfeld Älteste (bishop) Jakob Heinrichs led the formation of the Evangelische Mennonitengemeinde (Evangelical Mennonite Church, or EMG), a reform group whose members remain part of Sommerfeld.

The EMG now has 380 members—about 700 people including children, Heinrichs says. It has introduced Sunday school, catechism before baptism, and instrumental accompaniment for church music.

The EMG operates a school, with classes through grade 12, adjacent to its large church building. It sponsors numerous outreach ministries, including a hospital, *Luz y Vida* (Light and Life).

"There was a need for a good hospital," says Fernando Friesen, administrator of the 18-bed hospital, which opened in 2000. "It was an opportunity to preach the gospel, not just with words but with acts."

The Hilagro Hildebrand mill produces 90,000 kilograms of flour a day, plus pasta and animal feed. The Sommerfeld and Bergthal colonies are the country's largest center for flour production.

In the 15 years since the EMG was founded, tensions over the split with the older Sommerfeld churches have eased.

"Relations have become much better, and we are happy for that," Heinrichs says.

Mills and dairies. Economically, Sommerfeld contributes to the Mennonites' role as national leaders in flour milling and dairy production.

An estimated 80 percent of Paraguay's dairy products come from Mennonite colonies. The Mennonites' *Lactolanda* brand of milk, ice cream, and yogurt is known throughout the country. Together, the Sommerfeld and Bergthal dairies process 91,000 gallons of milk a day.

In an environment much wetter than the arid Chaco, farmers triple-crop soybeans, corn, and wheat. Flour milling is the leading industry, making the Sommerfeld and Bergthal colonies the country's largest center for flour

production, says Henry Thiessen, a colony businessman. The Hilagro Hildebrand mill alone produces 90,000 kilograms of flour a day, plus pasta and animal feed.

"One can certainly say that the Mennonites have become the breadbasket for Paraguay," says Edgar Stoesz, a former Mennonite Central director for Latin America who wrote *Like a Mustard Seed, a history of Mennonites in Paraguay*.

The hard work of immigrants like the Entzes, and those who followed them, has proved the critics wrong.

"At first, Paraguayans said these people would be a drain on Paraguay, and certainly the opposite is true," Stoesz says.

That includes Henry and Mary Entz of the Sommerfeld Colony.

Paul Schrag is the editor of Mennonite Weekly Review, Newton, Kansas, USA, from which this article is reprinted by permission.

photo by Paul Schrag / MWR



Gifts boost projects of member churches in

Fresh, clean water from a new well in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, is a source of joy and hope. The well is at the heart of the “Women & Water for Life” project of the *Kanisa la Mennonite Tanzania* (Tanzania Mennonite Church) in the Eastern Diocese of the national church.

A \$10,000^{USD} gift from the MWC’s Global Church Sharing Fund (GCSF) early in 2010 is helping to make this project happen. The church and the local community raised an additional \$3,000.

The new water system with its 30,000-litre storage system will provide clean water to 1,000 people in 250 households. This system will reduce water-borne diseases among children and free women from labour related to a lack of easily accessible, safe water. Sale of water from the new system will also generate income to support social services, including an orphanage.

Access to a better water supply will also allow a small dispensary to expand to become a more adequate Health Centre. Construction on the building began in February.

“Women & Water for Life” is just one example of projects in the southern part of the globe made possible through funds from GCSF.

Other gifts have recently been approved or are in process.

- A \$10,000 grant is helping to train pastors and church leaders in Honduras. The San Marcos de Ocotepeque Mennonite Church there has also developed a relationship with Mennonites from Millersburg, Ohio, USA, over the past five years. The Ohio group helped build the Koinonia Mennonite Center (see story at right).

An application currently being processed by GCSF staff comes from the Mennonite church in Pimpimso, Ghana. The congregation says its building, constructed more than 45 years ago out of mud, is on the verge of collapse.

- The Bible Missionary Church in Myanmar began construction of a church building in January 2010. The building will also house the mission board head office. The church raised \$12,500 which, along with the \$10,000 gift from MWC, allowed the project to proceed.

- In Jamaica, the Good Tidings Mennonite Church proposed expanding its building to accommodate enhanced community outreach and youth ministry as well as renovating its worship space. The church has raised \$18,000; it still needs to raise \$2,000 to add to the \$10,000 GCSF gift to complete the project.

- In Zambia, the Kabwe Brethren in Christ congregation originated in 1984 but died out in 1991. It has since revived and now has 34 baptized members with 58 people regularly attending services. But there is no church building. The congregation has received a plot of land and has paid the required development fees. But building must proceed within a required time frame or the land will be reclaimed. A gift from GCSF will make this possible. Members are prepared to do much of the hands-on work.

In the past 18 months, MWC has

also sent Jubilee gifts from GCSF of up to \$10,000 each to churches in Vietnam, Congo, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Honduras, and Columbia—totaling \$94,600. Funds have been used by MWC-related churches for translation of the MWC Shelf book, *What We Believe Together* (Vietnam), church construction (Ghana), education seminar (Congo) and an assessment of the agricultural capacity of church lands (Zimbabwe).

Contributions to GCSF come from many sources. Some churches—such as the James Street congregation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA—contribute a tithe related to their own building or renovation projects. A church in Elkhart, Indiana, USA, is considering a gift of \$10,000 designated for the approved church building project in Myanmar.

MWC established the GCSF in 1997 at Assembly 13 in India. Initial contributions came from individuals and from organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite Mutual Aid, which together gave an initial contribution of \$1 million. In the spirit of biblical “Jubilee” (Leviticus 25), these funds were to be shared with



n global South

Anabaptist-related churches in Africa, Asia, and Latin America for ministries that advanced the life and mission of their churches.

In 2009, GCSF was reconfigured into two accounts:

(a) a Deacons Account, available for response in disasters and other emergencies. For example, in the wake of the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, MWC's Deacons Commission is working to decide how funds from this account would be most helpful to devastated MWC-related churches in these areas.

(b) a Jubilee Account, from which funds are dispersed based on applications from member and associate member churches in the global South. Requests, normally not exceeding \$10,000, must be approved by the official decision-making body of the church. Usually, some funds for the project are raised locally.

Applications to the GCSF must describe how funds will be used and progress reports on what was accomplished and how the project has had an impact on the life of the church are required. The office of the MWC general secretary administers the GCSF and recommends applications for approval by the Executive Committee. In special circumstances, officers may make the decision.

Since the GCSF began, close to \$1 million has been given to various church projects in the global South. Churches have used these funds for scholarships; translating, publishing, and purchasing church supplies; upgrading computer systems; community service projects like water systems; purchasing vehicles, including bicycles for evangelists and church leaders; purchasing land and constructing and repairing church buildings; pastors salaries and endowment funds for pastors' retirement.

More information, with instructions on how to contribute, are available at www.mwc-cmm.org.



photo by Roy Miller

Members from the San Marcos de Ocotepeque Mennonite Church in Honduras and from congregations in Ohio, USA, work together to build a training centre for pastors and other leaders in the Honduran community.

GCSF helps build Ohio-Honduras relationships

Five years ago, a group from Millersburg Mennonite Church in Ohio, USA, went to Honduras to help construct a training centre for pastors and leaders and to begin to develop a relationship with the San Marcos de Ocotepeque Mennonite Church.

Since that first 10-day visit, the Ohio church has sent a group to Honduras almost every year. Participants pay their own way, and they also help fund scholarships and provide educational materials for schools and Mennonite literature for pastors and leaders. They have also helped in various building projects for other Mennonite churches in the region.

The project—now called the Koinonia Mennonite Centre—received a \$10,000 Global Church Sharing Fund grant from MWC. Additional funding comes from local Honduran churches and from congregations in the United States and Canada.

During the past five years, close to 60 people from east central Ohio, USA, have participated in the Honduras program. Roy Miller, a medical doctor from the Millersburg Mennonite Church, serves as coordinator.

This exchange is a positive experience for both the Ohio and Honduras churches, say Ovidio and Jovita Flores, church leaders in Honduras. "The North American groups always say they have received a lot from the local churches in Honduras and return home with a renewed faith and more consciousness that happiness doesn't come from material richness," says Ovidio.

Training programs conducted so far at the Koinonia Mennonite Center, which the Ohio volunteers helped build, have included two peace education events (attended by 50 people) and seminars for pastors, church leaders, and persons working with young people.

MWC's new Mission Commission aims to inspire partnership to stimulate outreach among Anabaptist-related churches

Strasbourg, France—Plans for the work of MWC's Mission Commission began to take shape here in a meeting at the end of February. The commission's sub-committee, Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) planning group, also met during the week, and the new MWC Youth Task Force joined the commission for some sessions.

"We look forward to working together to stimulate global, continental, regional, and local partnerships in outreach among Anabaptist-related church

and mission groups everywhere, especially in places where people have not yet had opportunity to meet Jesus," said Richard Showalter, chair of the commission and of the sub-committee. "As a new team, we bonded in Christ, working together with transparency, trust, and love."

The new commission is helping to facilitate and support regional mission gatherings already planned. African mission leaders will gather in August and Europeans in November. Events in other

regions are still in planning stages.

The commission is not creating new structures, says Showalter, but more intentionally connecting with existing groups engaged in mission and outreach. It plans to provide resources for mission electronically via the MWC website:

www.mwc-cmm.org.

The commission has allocated funds to develop a Mission Commission section of the website. This section will post information on mission events and provide a way for groups in all countries to stay in touch with each other. GMF will also have a sub-section of the

Mission Commission website.

GMF is laying plans for its next meeting, to be held in 2013 in Asia.

César García, Colombia, began serving as Mission Commission secretary in March 2010. He succeeds Eric Olfert, Saskatchewan, Canada, who also served as planning assistant for the GMF since February 2007.

"I enjoyed being part of the larger MWC team and very much believe in the MWC 'fellowship' vision of networking and consultation," said Eric, who continues to work for Mennonite Church Canada Witness, the mission arm of the conference.

New commission, new leadership



Richard Showalter

MWC's new Mission Commission begins with two new leaders to carry out its mission.

Richard Showalter, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA, is the new chair of the commission. Richard has served as president of Eastern Mennonite Missions since 1994. Prior to that he was president of Rosedale Bible Institute in Plain City, Ohio.

Richard and his wife Jewel have served as missionaries to the Middle East for Rosedale and also as church planters in Ohio. They are the parents of three married children.

The new secretary for the commission is César García, Bogotá, Colombia. César has been the Colombia representative with several international mission and service organizations. He attended Assembly 14 in Zimbabwe in 2003, his first connection to MWC.

César is currently working toward an MA in theology at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in California, USA. Following that degree, he hopes to pursue a PhD in theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, then return to Colombia to work in leadership training.

César and his wife Sandra Báez are the parents of two teenage daughters.

César García



What is the Mission Commission?

Bringing together the Anabaptist world to talk about mission was first explored at a consultation in Guatemala in 2000. The birth of the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) followed in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, three years later. Then in March 2006, in Pasadena, California, USA, MWC proposed forming a Mission Commission to bring together Anabaptist groups engaged in international or cross-cultural mission.

At the same time, GMF decided to move towards becoming the new Mission Commission, a decision that was approved in principle by the MWC Executive Committee in 2007 with final approval by the General Council in 2009. GMF will continue to function as a sub-section of the Mission Commission.

The commission's mandate is to prepare issues or materials for consideration by the General Council (GC), to give guidance and propose resources to MWC and member churches, and to facilitate an MWC-related network or fellowship to work together on matters of common mission interest and focus.

The commission is composed of up to 10 GC members with up to five selected for continental representation. The GMF will select up to five specialists from the GMF Planning Committee, subject to approval by the GC. MWC and GMF members together named Richard Showalter chair of the new commission.



photo by Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

Meeting at the same location at the same time, two new MWC teams—the Mission Commission (MC) and the Youth Task Force (YTF) held a joint session to explore how they might collaborate in their work. Back (left to right): Barbara Kärcher, Germany, member of AMIGOS, MWC's former youth group, a consultant at the meeting; César García, Colombia, MC secretary; Adolph Komuesa, DR Congo, MC member; Ayub Omondi Awich, Kenya, YTF member; Melani Susanti (in front of Ayub) Indonesia, YTF member; Hermann Woelke, Uruguay, MC member; Edgardo Docuyan, Philippines, MC member; Larry Miller, France, MWC general secretary; Marc Pasqués, Spain, YTF member; Carlos Alvarez Woo, Colombia, YTF member; Kristina Toews, Canada, YTF member; Ofelia García, Mexico, MC member. Front: Richard Showalter, USA, MC chair; Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, Singapore, YTF staff; Eric Olfert, Canada, former MC secretary; Agus Mayanto, Indonesia, MC member; James Krabill, USA, MC member. Insets: Max Wiedmer, France, MC member; Don McNiven, USA / Canada, MC member.

Two new MWC teams explore collaboration

Strasbourg, France—The newly formed MWC Youth Task Force (YTF) and the Mission Commission (MC) of the MWC General Council met here on February 27, 2010, to explore working on joint initiatives.

"This meeting between two MWC teams to seek collaboration is exemplary," says Larry Miller, MWC general secretary. "Face-to-face conversation between working groups within MWC is indispensable in order to develop the most creative projects and the most holistic program."

The meeting updated each team on upcoming events, explored how young people could be more involved in MWC-related decision-making

and information-gathering processes, and talked about how to facilitate better involvement of young people in mission and exchange programs.

"Other than the possibility of working together, we also discussed the importance of young adult representation in MWC—not just as token participation, rather as being actively involved in discussions, planning, and decision making," said Kristina Toews, YTF representative from North America.

"One way we could start is to provide the Youth Task Force with meeting agendas and with questions on the things we want to discuss in upcoming meetings, thus inviting feedback from

young people for consideration in our meetings," said Richard Showalter, MC chair.

In addition to joint commission meetings such as this one, MWC will hold a joint commission leadership meeting during the annual Executive Committee meeting. There chairpersons and secretaries of commissions can update each other on events and initiatives to avoid duplication. They will also seek ways to work more closely together as one family of faith.

The first joint commission leadership meeting will take place in Ethiopia in August this year in connection with the next meeting of MWC's Executive Committee.

—Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

Youth Task Force looks toward future

Strasbourg, France—A new Youth Task Force (YTF) began envisioning future agenda for MWC youth and young adults at meetings here February 22-28. It was the first meeting of this team.

YTF is the continuation of AMIGOS, the earlier MWC youth committee which worked from 2004 - 2009. YTF's mandate is to formulate the vision, focus, structure, and programs for global youth and young adults, based on feedback gathered during the Global Youth Summit in Paraguay in July 2009.

"MWC Executive Committee members affirmed the formation and personnel of the new YTF in Paraguay last year. This was, in fact, the new MWC Executive Committee's first decision, an encouraging sign that executive members see connecting with youth as a high priority," says Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, former AMIGOS chairperson who now serves as staff person for YTF.

"During AMIGOS' six-year tenure, the strong desire in MWC to listen to and to involve young people in decision making was very encouraging. At the same time, there was increased eagerness from young people to be more connected both with their peers and with churches around the world. Transforming this momentum into a sustainable movement is top priority for MWC," says Larry Miller, MWC general secretary.

This envisioning team will present a first draft of its proposal for the future of MWC work with youth and young adults to the Executive Committee in July 2010.

—Elina Ciptadi-Perkins

Auto crash claims life of Zambian church leader

Choma, Zambia—Esther Kalambo, a member of the Zambia Brethren in Christ church and a leader among the African Anabaptist Women Theologians, died in an auto crash on January 21, 2010, at the age of 54.

Esther served as a chaplain at the BIC Hospital in Macha, Zambia. Also killed in the same accident were Douglas Haadinke, a Macha employee; Edith Mwiinga, a former employee; and Doris Mudenda, Esther's older sister.

Esther was a member of the continental committee of African Anabaptist Women Theologians since its creation in 2002. She attended MWC world assemblies in Zimbabwe and Paraguay, and had close connections to Mennonites in many parts of the world.

News of Esther's death brought the following message from Mennonite women in Guatemala:

"On behalf of the women theologians of Guatemala, we send these words of soli-

darity and comfort to the African women theologians and to the family of Sister Esther. We extend to each one of you our love and affection in these difficult times, and we will be praying for you with the love that comes only from God. We hope that you feel God's presence through the love of all the sisters and brothers who surround you."

Esther was one of the women featured in a documentary, "Living Water,



Esther Kalambo, 1956-2010

Living Faith: Mennonite Women of Color," produced by Pat McFarlane and Linda Christophel. In the video, Esther reflects on the transitory nature of life experienced by the patients with whom she worked, saying: "Everyone is journeying toward death, some more quickly than others. I am here now, but I know that I am on a journey. I am not here forever. All of us are passing by."

In addition to her work as a chaplain, Esther was also trained as a peace-builder. At the time of her death, she had just returned from an assignment of training eleven BIC Copper Belt pastors and leaders in peace-building. Esther was scheduled to teach a short course in peace-building to Sikalongo Bible Institute third-year students.

Known for her hospitality, Esther provided graciously and bountifully for anyone at any hour of the day or night.

She is survived by her husband Mukuwa, sons Chilobe and Michelo, and daughters Mutinta and Sibajene.

It was estimated that close to 2000 people were present at Esther's funeral, which took place at the Macha church on January 27.—
compiled by Tim Lind from reports by Esther Spurrier and Mennonite Women USA.

Dutch Mennonites voice views on war and peace

Strasbourg, France—Dutch Mennonites are expressing their views against participation in war in a variety of ways.

"The board of *Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit* (ADS) is convinced that it is the task of the church to witness about the peace of Christ and not to give the government arguments to prolong involvement in any war," says Henk Stenvers, MWC General Council delegate from The Netherlands.

Henk was part of a delegation of the Dutch Council of Churches that spoke with government representatives in 2007 when the government was contemplating prolonging the Dutch presence in Afghanistan. The government did decide to prolong its mission, but only until 2010.

In 2009, the government faced pressure to extend the mission further. Before the delegation could plan how to challenge the government to keep its promise to end the mission in 2010, the government fell and an interim government was put in place.

The ADS board also decided to suspend its mem-

bership in IKV Pax Christi, (Church Peace Council) after its director published an article in support of prolonging Dutch involvement in the war in Afghanistan. The board felt the stance of this organization implied agreement with the concept of "just war."

"We Mennonites are convinced that war never brings peace," says Henk.

Letter to MC USA.

Dutch Mennonite Church leaders also sent a letter to Mennonite Church USA in December 2009 expressing their concern about President Barack Obama's call for the U.S. military's escalation of troops in Afghanistan.

"The letter was meant as a sign of solidarity with the search for peace of Mennonite Church USA," says Henk.

"We send you this letter to share with you our deep and sincere concern about this decision," the Dutch leaders wrote. "We feel convinced that many of you deplore the useless and dangerous continuation as much as we do

and believe that Christ shows different ways of ending conflict."

Ed Diller, MC USA moderator, responded with a letter of appreciation, saying, "Along with you, Mennonite Church USA is deeply concerned about military build-up in Afghanistan." Ed included resources MC USA made available to conferences and congregations as well as a copy of an advertisement churches could place in their local newspapers. Ed asked the Dutch Mennonites to "pray that we may be bold in proclaiming Christ as the Prince of Peace."

Speaking out. Dutch Mennonites have tended to express their views through ecumenical organizations, but it is difficult to be heard. Henk says he thinks Dutch Mennonites could follow the example of MC USA in encouraging congregations to speak out and be more active in expressing opinions to the government.

Dutch Mennonites have also launched a Dutch branch of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Reports for 2009 show MWC to be in good financial health

Kitchener, Ontario, Canada— MWC is in a healthy financial position, says Karen Martin Schiedel, Director of Finance and Administration. This is true both for the ongoing MWC budget and for the Paraguay assembly.

For the unrestricted or operations budget, MWC received total income of \$781,695^{USD} and had expenses of \$699,809.

The charts below show the various income sources and how these funds were spent. The third graph at the bottom shows the income and expenses for designated—restricted—funds.

Financial reports for the 2009 global assembly in Asunción, Paraguay (bottom right), show that revenue from various sources (\$2,004,000) covered all

expenses (\$1,699,000). The surplus will be used by MWC to plan for future assemblies and for other programs.

“The number of international participants at the assembly exceeded expectations, generating strong registration fee income,” says Karen. Donations, especially from within Paraguay, also exceeded expectations.

Karen notes that MWC’s annual operations are funded primarily through “fair share” contributions made by member conferences and by contributions from individuals. MWC projects, such as the global assembly, are funded by participant fees and designated contributions from individuals and congregations.

“In spite of the recent global recession, donors offered MWC strong support

in 2009,” Karen notes. Individuals contributed 44% of MWC’s income for the year.

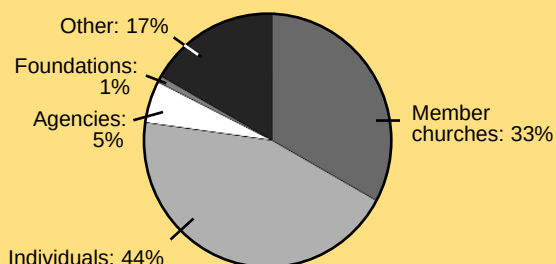
Ernst Bergen, MWC’s treasurer since July 2009, says:

“Projects like the assembly in Paraguay require careful planning of finances and logistics over several years. Factors like changes in expected levels of participation and fluctuating exchange rates can dramatically affect income and expenses.

“MWC is grateful for the many people who participated in the assembly. Above all, we are grateful to God for blessing our global church with rich fellowship and with a staff and volunteers who are hard at work to keep our global community in touch with one another.”

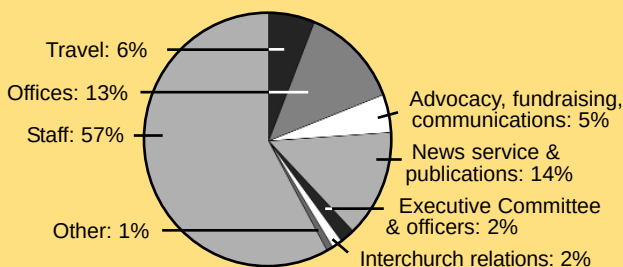
2009 UNRESTRICTED INCOME

\$781,695^{USD}



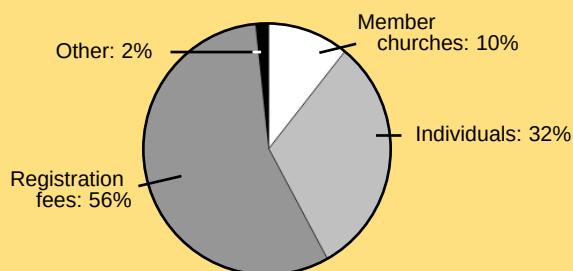
2009 UNRESTRICTED EXPENSES

\$699,809^{USD}

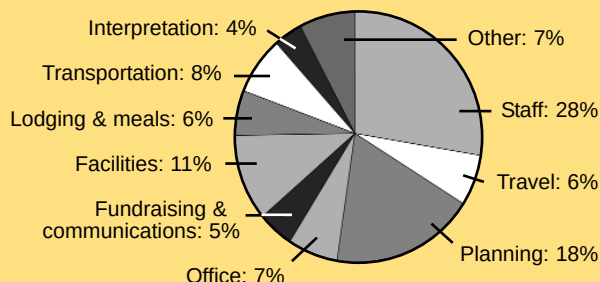


2004-2009 PARAGUAY ASSEMBLY

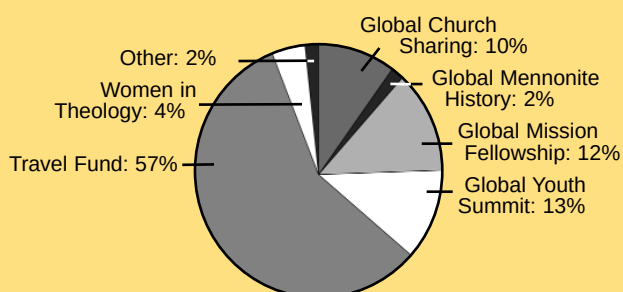
Income: \$2,004,000^{USD}



Expenses: \$1,699,000^{USD}



2009 RESTRICTED INCOME & EXPENSES for projects (non-assembly): \$872,322^{USD}



'What we believe together'

Vietnam church publishes first legal Mennonite work

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam—The Vietnam Mennonite Church has published MWC's study guide, *What We Believe Together*. Distribution began in late 2009.

This was the first legally published Mennonite work in Vietnam since 1975. Approval by the government's Committee on Religious Affairs assures that the book can be used anywhere in Vietnam and will not be confiscated by the police.

What We Believe Together was written simultaneously in Spanish, German, and English by Alfred Neufeld. It was published by MWC as a study guide for the "Shared Convictions" statement approved by the MWC General Council in March 2006.

When Pastor Sang, general secretary of the Vietnam Mennonite Church, received an English copy of the book,

he immediately recognized its value for Vietnam. The English language text was simple and would be easy to translate into Vietnamese.

Tran Thi Phuoc Ly, a professional translator with many years of experience interpreting, translating and teaching English, was invited to translate the book. Ly had become familiar with Mennonites at the Mennonite Student Center in Saigon when she was a university student in the early 1970s. In recent years, she has served as interpreter for visiting Mennonites in Vietnam.

After Ly finished the translation, she said, "This is excellent for all new believers in Vietnam. We don't have anything like this yet! Print 5,000 copies."

The initial run, however, was 2,000 copies, funded in part by MWC Global Church Sharing Funds.



Leaders of European Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches who held their annual meeting in Sicily, Italy, for the first time.

Mennonite leaders of Europe discuss active peace, youth work, cooperation

Palermo, Italy—For the first time, European Mennonite and Brethren in Christ conference leaders held their annual meeting here on the island of Sicily in late November 2009.

The meeting was held at Centro Agape Mennonite Church. Being a peace church, working with youth, and having churches work together more were prominent agenda items.

Martha and Francesco Picone, Italian Mennonites,

challenged the group to put peace in action, not only into words. Several conference delegates noted that currently, when asked identity questions, they rarely mention peace.

Swiss delegates reported they are working on renewing their peace position. In Holland, a teaching position on peace and reconciliation is being established at the Free University of Amsterdam.

Delegates worked with the MWC Global Anabaptist Shelf book, *A Culture of Peace*, as they faced the challenge of putting peace into action.

Andrea and Sheila Crocivera from the Centro Agape congregation told the group working with youth is a challenge for Italian Mennonites, since many young people are unemployed and often fall into the hands of the Mafia.

The Crociveras asked the group for support as they launch a "Youth for Christ" type program in Palermo.

European Mennonites are also looking to coordinate their work in missions, relief, and peace. Several leaders will be meeting in November 2010 to consider how this might be done more effectively.—Markus Rediger

Spanish Mennonite pastor recognized for social action

Madrid, Spain—José Luis Suarez has been named the first individual recipient of the Diaconia Award by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Spain (FEREDE). The award recognizes outstanding work in evangelical social action.

José Luis Suarez



José Luis is well known for his work in the field of peace. He has coordinated and encouraged evangelical social action in churches and organizations in Cataluña in his role as president of the Catalan Diaconia from 1997 to 2006. Currently, he is the head of social work at Catalunya Consell Evangélic and also a member of the executive committee of the organization.

Since 1984, José Luis has been pastor of the Barcelona Evangelical Mennonite Church. He was president of the national conference, *Asociación de Menonitas y Hermanos en Cristo en España* from 1990-2008 and the

church's representative to MERK (European Mennonite Regional Conference). The national church is an MWC associate member.

José Luis earned a B.A. in Theology and has completed a postgraduate course on a Culture of Peace at the Barcelona Autonomous University.

José Luis received the Diaconia Award on December 9, 2009, designated as Evangelicals for Social Action Day in Spain. This day was an initiative to join evangelical churches and organizations involved in social work in Spain and to raise awareness of their work.

Suffering and hope:

The cry of the people of eastern Congo

by Pastor Mukambu
Ya'Namuisai

In this article, a Congolese Mennonite pastor and peace activist describes what God's people, including Mennonite families, in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu are experiencing. He challenges the Mennonite churches of Congo, of Africa, and of the world to remember and support these suffering people.—Editor

Since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the provinces of North and South Kivu in the Congo—with their capital cities of Goma and Bukavu—have known intense armed conflict. At the present there are

numerous groups fighting each other over the abundant mineral wealth in this part of the world. Among these are coltan and gold.

The region was also renowned previously as fertile agricultural lands producing beans, potatoes, and meat. But today, the two provinces have become theaters for military operations with huge negative consequences: hunger, massive displacement of the inhabitants toward the mountains, enlistment of child soldiers, abandonment of vulnerable groups such as widows and orphans, and increased unemployment.

As a result, much of humanity in this part of the world is in an unacceptable state of misery and poverty. This in spite of the fact that they, like all of us, are created in God's image (Genesis 1:26).

There are many armed groups in this region. Among them are: the FDLR (primarily Rwandans of the Hutu ethnic group), the CNDP (Congolese ethnic Tutsi), the Mai-Mai (local militia groups); the Rwandan army; the Congolese army—government forces; and forces from the United Nations. If the Congolese army, supported by the United Nations, attempts to maintain the integrity and sovereignty of the state, the other forces bring misery to the citizens through extortion and looting.

The recent bilateral military cooperation between the Rwandan and Congolese armed forces was meant to

stop the FDLR, but the arrest of the deposed general Laurent Nkunda raised a lot of questions in the minds of the Congolese people. Can peace in these eastern provinces become a reality? Or is peace merely a utopian idea?

There would be reason to ask whether it is possible for human beings to continue living in this region, from which only news of new atrocities comes. Nevertheless, the Bible declares that God's "mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22).

Local and international non-governmental organizations and churches are attempting to re-establish peaceful coexistence between people and to assure genuine development. This has already created a degree of liberty of movement in the cities of Goma and Bukavu.

The Mennonite churches of west Congo have established a mission field in south Kivu and planted a young peace church with more than 500 members. Many families from western Congo live in this region because of this evangelistic outreach and for work.

However, today, because of the cost of transport and because of security concerns, these Mennonites are cut off from those in the west. They are now in dire need of spiritual, moral, material, and financial support.

In the face of these difficulties and this suffering, the church has a message to give. The Mennonite church needs to be present to begin

and support concrete humanitarian and peace building actions in eastern Congo. The church should raise its voice to reject all forms of violence that are perpetuated in this region.

This work should be done by peace builders from the east and west alike, by church leaders and by international Mennonite teams. These teams need to be involved in prayer, lobbying, trauma healing and rehabilitation, and humanitarian assistance.

Men, women and children in eastern Congo are suffering, yet they have hope. What will we do, we who live in freedom, with our faith, the Bible in hand, a full purse, and the power to speak to political authorities in Congo, Rwanda—as well as to countries such as Great Britain, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Canada and the USA? If we do nothing, we contribute to the problem.

The cry of a people in distress is heard in Goma and in Bukavu, a little paradise created by God. The Mennonite church, an historic peace church, has a role to play in Congo, where a young democracy is in the process of developing. At the same time, a lasting peace is needed in order to have real development and reconstruction in eastern Congo.

Pastor Mukambu Ya'Namuisai is a member of the Council for Peace and Reconciliation in Congo and a senior pastor of the Mennonite Church of Congo; translation by Timothy Lind



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Larry Miller
Publisher

J. Lorne Peachey
Editor

Ferne Burkhardt
News editor

Eleanor Miller
Communications assistant

Sylvie Gudin
French translator

Marisa & Eunice Miller
Spanish translators

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www.mwcc-cmm.org

Strasbourg, France—The latest MWC global map, released in November 2009, shows that Mennonite, Brethren in Christ, and related churches (national conferences) can now be found in 80 countries around the world. Baptized membership has climbed to slightly more than 1.6 million.

- Africa, 592,106, or 37% of all global Anabaptists;
- North America, 523,969, 32%;
- Asia, 265,447, 16%;
- Latin America and Caribbean, 169,864, 11%;
- Europe, 64,740, 4%.

Africa has been the top continental region in global Anabaptist membership since 2003.

- USA, 387,103;
- Democratic Republic of Congo: 220,444;
- Ethiopia, 172,306;
- India, 156,922;
- Canada, 136,866;
- Indonesia, 88,458.

Congo (216,268); India (146,095); Canada (131,384); Ethiopia (130,731); and Indonesia (72,624).

Indonesia, increasing by 15,834 new members, ranks third, India with 10,827 new members and Canada

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia with 172,299 members is still the largest national conference globally. Until 2005, Mennonite Church USA was the largest national conference. In 2009, it reported 105,941 members, making it the national conference with the second highest membership.

Among the churches
included in the 2009 global

- Igreja Irmãos em Cristo em Moçambique (5,650 members);
- India: Gilgal Mission Trust (Mennonite Church; 1,900 members);
- Hôi Thánh Mennonite Việt Nam (4,022 members);
- Myanmar: Bible Missionary Church (1,012 members).

The global map is available for download at www.mwc-cmm.org. Hard copies are available at \$8^{USD} or 5€ from any MWC office.

