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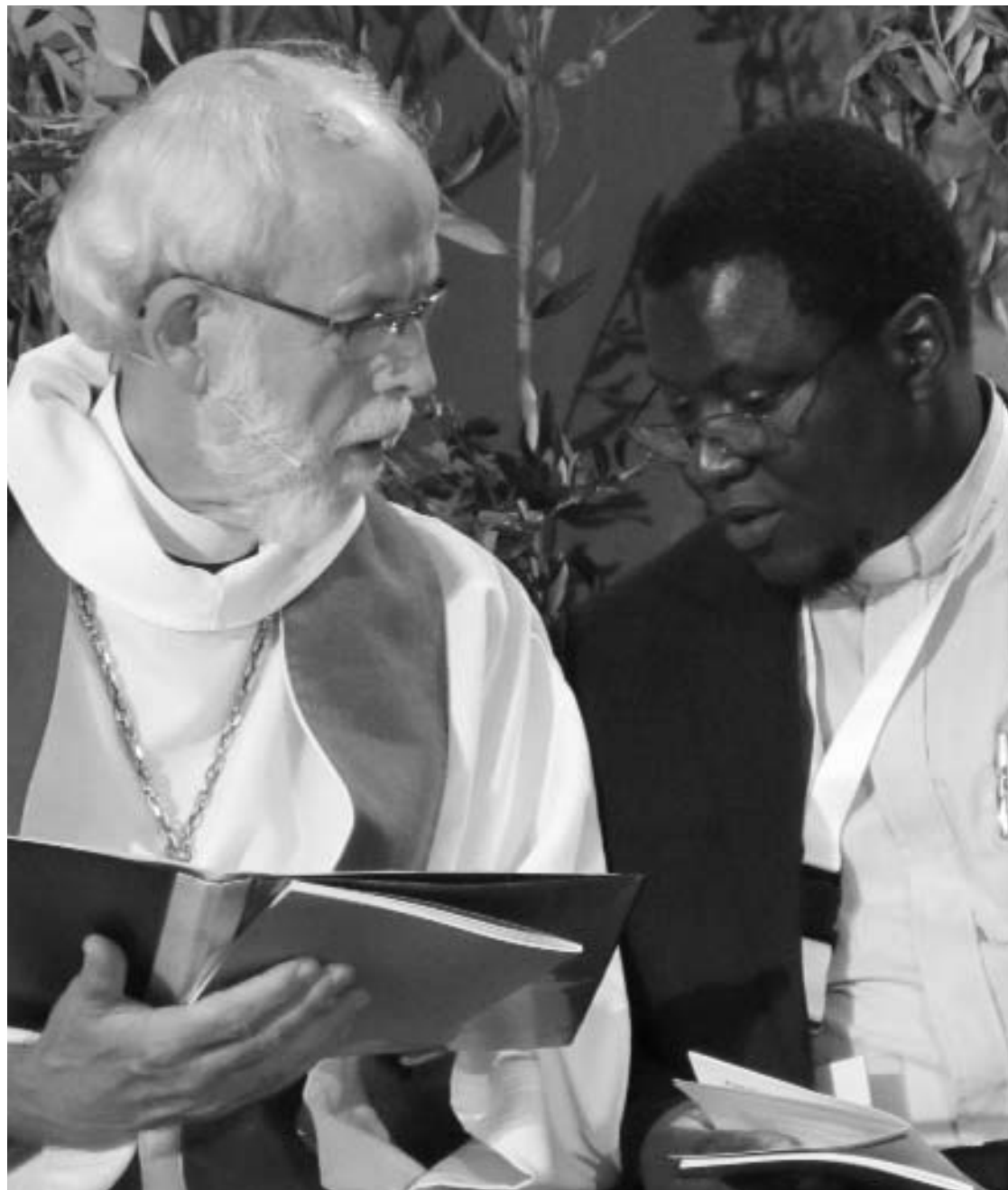
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For Lutherans and Anabaptists:

Repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation

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Lutherans and Anabaptists reconcile in service of repentance and forgiveness

Stuttgart, Germany—Almost 500 years of guilt were formally laid to rest July 22, 2010. On that day, representatives of 70 million Lutherans around the world asked forgiveness for the violent persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century and for the way negative portrayals of Anabaptists and Mennonites have been allowed to continue within their communities and theological institutions.

Representing the Anabaptist-Mennonite family, Mennonite World Conference (MWC) acknowledged their request and granted forgiveness.

The landmark action came

on the third day of the eleventh Lutheran World Federation (LWF) assembly, held in Stuttgart's Liederhall conference centre. Through the adoption of the statement titled, "Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of Anabaptists," Lutherans repented for violent persecution of Anabaptists and for the ways in which Lutheran reformers supported persecutions with theological arguments.

Some 480 delegates from around the world acknowledged "the harm that our forebears in the 16th century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring

this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day."

Four years of work. The action, which LWF president Bishop Mark S. Hanson described as possibly "the most significant legacy this assembly leaves," was the culmination of four years of work by the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission of the LWF and MWC.

On hand to witness the resolution were official representatives of MWC along with other Mennonite guests from Germany, France, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. There were also a record number of guests from other Christian groups, including Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Seventh Day Adventists, and Lutheran groups that are not part of the LWF.

Sharing the stage throughout was LWF outgoing general secretary Dr. Ishmael Noko of Zimbabwe. In his opening address to the assembly, Noko announced that the action would redefine Mennonite-Lutheran relationships. "Only by root-

ing out the violence, exclusion and discrimination in our own tradition and practice ... and by seeking to heal memories among us and between us and other church families, can we become credible and effective witnesses for peace and reconciliation in our wider societies."

In preparation for the vote, Hanson recapitulated the theme by saying the action would be "both communion-building and communion-defining" for the Lutherans. He emphasized that approving the statement was only one part of the action.

"To ask for forgiveness of God and our Mennonite sisters and brothers is most fundamentally a prayer. So for the first time at an LWF assembly we will engage in a service of repentance immediately following this plenary session."

Much to learn. In his remarks, Hanson also acknowledged the witness of non-violence of Mennonites in his native United States. "We have much to learn from you in how to be formed as communities of forgiveness."

Hanson paid tribute to efforts of the Catholic ecumenical bodies and the Reformed churches, who are also working toward a similar healing of memories with Mennonites.

Lutheran professor Joachim Track, head of the ecumenical commission of the LWF, presented the motion, which in the discussion time was given heartfelt affirmations from Argentinean, Nigerian, and Canadian delegates. Follow-

photo by Liesa Unger



During the Lutheran-Mennonite service of forgiveness and reconciliation, Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, displayed a picture of Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer who had fallen through the ice, an image that symbolizes Anabaptist ideals of loving the enemy.

ing a time of prayer Hanson called on delegates to vote by standing or kneeling. The action passed unanimously, with a number of delegates dropping to their knees.

Representatives of MWC were invited to the stage to respond on behalf of Anabaptist-Mennonites. Introduced by Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, they included Rainer Burkart, co-chair of the Study Commission; treasurer Ernst Bergen of Paraguay; vice-president Janet Plenert of Canada; president Danisa Ndlovu of Zimbabwe, and former MWC president Mesach Krisetya of Indonesia, who was part of early discussions that eventually led to the Study Commission.

In the MWC response to the vote, Ndlovu faltered with emotion as he told the assembly that Anabaptist-Mennonites cannot come to this table with "our heads held high; we also stand in need of God's grace." The response named the action as a fulfillment of the "rule of Christ," binding and loosing according to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18.

"We believe that today God has heard your confession and is granting your appeal for forgiveness. We

joyfully and humbly join with God in giving forgiveness. In the spirit of the rule of Christ, we believe that what we are doing together here today God also is doing in heaven."

Recalling the practice of foot-washing in some Anabaptist-Mennonite churches, Ndlovu, assisted by Janet Plenert, presented Hanson with a wooden foot-washing tub and a towel. Ndlovu said the tub was "a sign of our commitment to a future when the distinguishing mark of Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships is boundless love and unfailing service. We will learn to seek one another's good from a posture of vulnerability and mutual submission."

Nourishing humanity.

For many delegates, the postures of humility and service recalled the keynote address earlier in the day by Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Williams linked the assembly theme, "Give us today our daily bread," to the vulnerability God's people need in admitting their dependence on God, not only for food, but for reconciled relationships.

"Forgiveness is one of the most radical ways in which we are able to nourish one another's humanity," he said.

In his address, Williams named the action as an opportunity for such vulnerability. "For these churches to receive the penitence of



Photo © LWF / Erick Coll

Bishop Mark Hanson, LWF president (left) received a foot-washing tub from MWC president Danisa Ndlovu after the delegate action. Danisa said the tub was "a sign of our commitment to a future when the distinguishing mark of Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships is ... unfailing service."

our communities is a particularly grace-filled acknowledgement that they still believe in the Body of Christ, that they have need of us; and we have good reason to see how much we have need of them as we look at a world in which centuries of Christian collusion with violence has left so much unchallenged in the practices of power."

From action to prayer.

Immediately following the action, the general secretaries and presidents of LWF and MWC led a procession of all delegates and guests into a separate hall for a service of repentance and healing.

The service gave generous space for both Mennonites and Lutherans to share stories, prayers, and music from their heritages. A

mixed Mennonite-Lutheran choir from Ingolstadt, Germany, led the congregation in songs from both Anabaptist and Lutheran traditions. Wilhelm Unger, a Mennonite pastor and musician from Regensburg, sang a song about the cost of discipleship, from a text written by Anabaptist martyr Michael Sattler.

Frieder Boller, president of the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany (AMG), told an early Anabaptist martyr story that highlighted the call to be ready to die for faith.

Theodor Dieter, director of Strasbourg's Institute for Ecumenical Research and co-secretary of the Study Commission, deeply regretted that leading Lutheran reformers, including Luther himself, had used theological rationale to justify persecution of Anabaptists, including capital punishment.

Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, during his testimony, displayed a picture of Anabaptist Dirk Willems rescuing his pursuer who had fallen through the ice. The image has become sym-

Cover: Lutheran World Federation president Bishop Mark Hanson (left) confers with Danisa Ndlovu, MWC president, prior to a worship service of repentance and healing that followed the formal LWF action asking forgiveness for the 16th century persecution of the Anabaptists.

photo: Byron Rempel-Burkholder

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bolic of Anabaptist ideals of loving the enemy.

Miller acknowledged, however, that such stories have sometimes led Anabaptist-Mennonites to adopt the martyr tradition as a “badge of superiority.” “We sometimes nurtured an identity rooted in victimization that could foster a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance, blinding us to the frailties and failures that are also deeply rooted in our tradition.”

Olive branches. Following Scripture readings and prayers for healing, several people from the MWC community came forward and covered the purple cloth on the altar display with a white cloth, symbolizing the movement from repentance to healing. They also placed olive branches around the altar, indicating a commitment to live in peace. Delegates passed bowls of oil from the Holy Land to anoint each other with the words, “God gives you a new heart and a new spirit.”

As a way of looking to a future reconciled relationship, the worshippers were treated to another time of testimonials from the Lutherans of how they are already seeking peace.

Colombian bishop Eduardo Martinez recounted how Lutherans and Anabaptist-related churches are already working jointly in confronting the violence in that country.

Michael Martin, a Bavarian Lutheran pastor and church officer, highlighted two decades of formal relationships among Mennonites and Lutherans in Germany, and of revisions to Lutheran liturgical resources to reflect greater understanding of Anabaptists.

Susan C. Johnson, national bishop of the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in Canada shared the podium with MWC vice-president Janet Plenert. They told of joining initiatives in Canada, from growing grain together to planning joint resources for study and worship.

The timing and the location of the delegate action and worship service were heavy with symbolism. Stuttgart’s Stiftskirche, the venue for the assembly’s opening and closing worship services, was itself a sign that even in the 16th century the Reformers were not united in their persecution of Anabaptists. Johannes Brenz, buried at the church, had argued vigorously that the state lacked authority in matters of faith. As Bishop Mark Hanson said in this action, Lutherans were now “reclaiming” the legacy of Brenz.

—Byron Rempel-Burkholder

Photo © LWF / Erick Coll



The Lutheran statement:

Action on the legacy of Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists

When Lutherans today realize the history of Lutheran-Anabaptist relationships in the 16th century and beyond as it is presented in the report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, they are filled with a deep sense of regret and pain over the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutheran authorities and especially over the fact that Lutheran reformers theologically supported this persecution. Thus, The Lutheran World Federation, A Communion of Churches, wishes to express publicly its deep regret and sorrow.

Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling

the world to himself, we ask for forgiveness—from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers—for the harm that our forbears in the 16th century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day.

We pray that God may grant to our communities a healing of our memories and reconciliation.

We commit ourselves:

- to interpret the Lutheran Confessions in light of the jointly described history

between Lutherans and Anabaptists;

- to take care that this action of the LWF will bear fruit in the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions in the seminaries and other educational activities of our member churches;

- to continue the exploration of unresolved issues between our two traditions, in particular baptism and relations of Christians and of the church to the state, in an atmosphere of mutual openness and the willingness to learn from each other;

- to affirm the present consensus, gained by the experience of our churches over the centuries, in repudiating the use of the state's power either to exclude or enforce particular religious beliefs; and to work towards upholding and maintaining freedom of religion and conscience in political orders and societies, and

- to urge our international bodies, member churches, and in particular our congregations, to seek ways to continue and deepen relations with the Mennonite World Conference and with local Mennonite communities through common prayer and Bible study, shared humanitarian engagement, and common work for peace.—*Approved by the LWF Eleventh Assembly, July 22, 2010*

Left: Lutheran World Federation delegates listen to the statement acknowledging persecution of Anabaptists and asking for forgiveness.



photo by Wilhelm Unger

As a symbol of moving from repentance to healing, several people from the MWC community attending the reconciliation service covered the purple cloth on the altar display with a white cloth. They also placed olive branches around the altar, indicating a commitment to live in peace.

The Mennonite response:

Living the 'rule of Christ' together

Both Martin Luther and the Anabaptists referred to an important practice of the early Christians as the “rule of Christ.” We find this practice described in Matthew 18:18-22, one of only two places in the New Testament where Jesus uses the word *ecclesia*—“church.” Both times his subject is “binding and loosing.” More specifically, in this instance, Jesus teaches about granting forgiveness while re-establishing communion in the community of disciples. ...

Today in this place, we together—Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites—are fulfilling the “rule of Christ.”

Today in this place, we together—Lutherans, Anabaptist-Mennonites, and

other Christians—are living out a basic and essential meaning of church: binding and loosing; seeking and granting forgiveness; restoring and healing relationships in the body of Christ.

To God be the glory!

Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, you have taken this action on the legacy of the persecution of Anabaptists in which you ask for forgiveness from God and from Anabaptist-Mennonite sisters and brothers. ...

Are we worthy to receive your request?

We are painfully aware of our own inadequacy. We cannot bring ourselves to

this table with heads held high. We can only come bowed down in great humility and in the fear of the Lord.

We cannot come to this point and fail to see our own sinfulness. We cannot come to this point without recognizing our own need for God's grace and forgiveness.

At the same time, we are profoundly moved by your spirit of repentance and by your act of seeking forgiveness. And we remember the prayer of George Blaurock, the first Anabaptist—baptized on January 21, 1525, in Zurich, Switzerland; burned at the stake on September 6, 1529, in Klausen, Austria.

While in prison Blaurock

wrote: "I sincerely pray for all my enemies, O Lord, however many there may be. Do not lay their sins to their charge. Lord, I entreat this according to your will."

We believe that God has already heard and granted this Anabaptist prayer. We believe that today God has heard your confession and is granting your appeal for forgiveness.

We joyfully and humbly join with God in giving forgiveness. In the spirit of the "rule of Christ," we believe that what we are doing together here today on earth, God is doing also in heaven.

To God be the glory!

Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not only have you sought forgiveness for past acts, you have demonstrated the integrity of your initiative by making specific commitments to new action. We gratefully acknowledge these commitments.

In response:

- We commit ourselves to promote interpretations of the Lutheran-Anabaptist story which take seriously the jointly described history found in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission Report;

- We commit ourselves to take care that your initiative for reconciliation is known and honoured in Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching about Lutherans;

- We commit ourselves to continue with you deliberation on the unresolved issues between our two traditions, in a spirit of mutual vulnerability and openness to the movement of the Spirit;

- We commit ourselves to encourage our member churches, their local congregations,

and their institutions to seek fuller relations and greater cooperation with Lutherans in service to the world.

To God be the glory!

During the Last Supper, Jesus said to his disciples:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. ... By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

He also gave them a physical, embodied demonstration of this new commandment:

"Jesus ... got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him."

Some Anabaptist and Mennonite churches have maintained the practice of foot washing. This wooden foot washing tub comes from one of them. We offer it to you as a sign of our commitment to a future when the distinguishing mark of Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite relationships is boundless love and unfailing service.

We will learn to seek one another's good from a posture of voluntary and mutual submission. For it is in our vulnerability to one another that God's miraculous, transforming, reconciling presence is made visible in the world.

To God be the glory!

This is an abridged version of a response read on behalf of MWC by president Danisa Ndlovu. Full text is available at www.mwc-cmm.org.

A fresh and honest understanding of what happened in the 16th century

by Phyllis Pellman Good

The foundational Lutheran confession of faith was written with Martin Luther's approval in 1530.

Known as the Augsburg Confession, the document may be 480 years old, but it is still the most authoritative Lutheran statement of faith and one bond that unites churches in the Lutheran World Federation.

Within the confession are at least seven "condemnations" of Anabaptists, which provided theological support for punishment and even death for them, especially because of their practice of voluntary adult baptism and their reluctance to participate in government.

While those particular threats have long passed, the continuing presence of these condemnations in this actively used—and still authoritative—document have demanded honest attention in the last few years.

It began when German Mennonites were invited to join festivities honoring the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, and a Mennonite pastor pointed out the awkwardness of celebrating "our own condemnations." That led to several national dialogues (in Germany, France, and the USA) and four years of international conversation between Lutherans and Mennonites.

The intent of those international talks? "To establish a theological framework that allowed Lutheran and Mennonite insights, convictions, and concerns to be expressed to each other in such a way that each side would feel it was understood correctly by the other."

Respectfully and carefully, representatives of the Mennonites (Mennonite World Conference) and of the Lutherans (Lutheran World Federation) formed an International Study Commission to figure out what to do about their difficult histories.

Could the Lutherans acknowledge that their foundational confession of faith provided theological justification for violence against Anabaptists, including death? Could they genuinely ask forgiveness for these wrongs while still maintaining loyalty to the Augsburg Confession?

Could the Mennonites agree not to exaggerate their martyr history, and even grant that understandable historical reasons exist which partially explain incendiary Lutheran statements? Could the Mennonites readjust their martyr identity enough to offer the Lutherans true forgiveness?

Could these two churches find a future together—freed of anger and suspicion—that would allow them to see each other as full and legitimate members of the body of Christ?

Rainer Burkart, Mennonite co-chair of the International Study Commission, says, “Imagine that we’re part of a big family with a longstanding conflict, with two deliberate sides. Think about how helpful it would be if we each told our own story while the other listened!”

“It took 15 drafts of some sections of the report and a lot of exhaustion as we transformed our separate perceptions into common perspectives,” reflects Larry Miller, co-secretary of the commission and general secretary of MWC.

What has this substantial investment of time and energy brought?

“We have talked extensively about the 16th century and what went wrong there. We still differ on many important issues,” explains Rainer, “but we have found tools to deal with our differences.

“We have both agreed that we will teach about the Augsburg Confession differently than we have in the past. We have agreed that we will each teach about these troublesome condemnations in the same way. And we will stay together in conversation, especially on issues of baptism and church-and-state affairs.

Alfred Neufeld, theologian from Asunción, Paraguay, highlights what he believes is significant for Anabaptist-Mennonites as a result of these dialogues:

1. They can help Mennonites understand why the condemnations happened.
2. They have highlighted that we Mennonites have not always been as coherent as we think in our teachings and practices about how to relate to the state.
3. They point out that Anabaptists were a difficult political problem during the 16th century, challenging the very stability of society from the Lutherans’ point of view.

Another key outcome of the commission’s work, says Alfred, is that “we are now freed to treat each other as equals.

“These conversations have not changed our Anabaptist martyr history and our claim on it. Nor have they changed our view of the faith community as a non-conformed alternative to the larger world. But the Lutherans have come to better understand us because of our intensely honest conversations.

“We should get rid of our pride in our martyr history,” Alfred believes. “The Lutherans had their martyrs, too. We see them as adapters to the status quo. But we don’t have a monopoly on martyrdom and bravery. We share a martyr history.”

Rainer sees a major adjustment for the Lutherans as an

outcome of the dialogue. “On a global level, the Lutherans have become aware—and are making their congregations aware—that there are problems in the Augsburg Confession. They have identified the problem: the theological justification for marginalizing and killing Anabaptists who were part of their communities.

“They are expressing their willingness to deal very differently today with theological convictions that differ from their own.”

Says Rainer further, “I believe that we Mennonites are learning that we don’t give up our particular theological understandings when we talk with others who believe differently. We can discuss our beliefs so that we better understand our differences with others. We do not need to always take a position of defense.”

“We Mennonites have agreed with the Lutherans about how we will tell our joint history,” reflects Larry. “Our differences have included the way we have characterized each other and interpreted each other’s behavior and theology. Now we have agreed to our story together—after frank and extended and pointed conversation.

“This is not the celebration of doctrinal unity on all points,” Larry emphasizes. “It is, rather, a fresh, and, we believe, an honest understanding of what happened in the 16th century and its consequences since then. The Lutherans are committed to teaching their confession of faith in light of this dialogue. When they reprint the Augsburg Confession with commentary, they intend to include these new perspectives, commitments, and interpretations of Anabaptists that are inaccurately stated in the Augsburg Confession.

“We must be no less respectful of Lutherans and their gifts to us in our future telling of our common story.”

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

As a symbol of “a new heart and a new spirit,” MWC president Danisa Ndlovu anoints Ishmael Noko, outgoing LWF general secretary with oil from the Holy Land during the reconciliation and healing service in Stuttgart. Both men are from Zimbabwe, and both were born to Brethren in Christ mothers in that country.

photo by Liesa Unger



Executive Committee hears good news:

Mennonite World Conference 'in good shape' as it faces changes in structure and personnel

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—“Mennonite World Conference is in good shape. There are no crisis areas. What we agreed to do we have been able to do.”

With those words, Larry Miller, general secretary, summarized the work of MWC to the Executive Committee when it gathered here July 28-August 4, 2010, for its annual meeting.

Most of the members of this Executive Committee were new, having been elected by the MWC General Council in 2009 in Asunción, Paraguay. Charged with overseeing the work of MWC between the triennial sessions of the MWC General Council, the new Executive Committee first spent time becoming acquainted with the structure and work of the organization they oversee.

But they soon became involved in discussion of significant areas for MWC's ongoing work.

One was the frequency of MWC assemblies and the site for the next assembly. After serious consideration of alternatives, the Executive Committee acted to reconfirm the six-year cycle for these gatherings. They also agreed to hold the next assembly in 2015 either in the United States or in Indonesia (see story at right).

“But MWC is much more than assemblies,” Miller told the group. Executive Committee members soon learned that as they reviewed the work of four commissions, new to the MWC structure.

Finalized in 2009, the four

commissions—Faith and Life, Peace, Deacons, and Mission—each reported to the Executive Committee they have begun their work electronically and in person. All have plans for future work:

- Faith and Life Commission is anticipating surveying member churches on practices related to baptism and the Lord's Supper;

- Peace Commission has plans for a study of peace practices in Anabaptist-related churches globally;

- Deacons Commission has identified two or more Global Anabaptist Deacons in each continent to be available especially in times of crisis;

- Mission Commission announced plans to hold a Global Mission Fellowship in 2013 somewhere in Asia.

Commission mandates.

“What is the role of these commissions?” several Executive Committee members asked. “Are they the MWC programming groups?”

“The commissions are not intended to be programming entities,” Larry said. “Their primary task is to prepare issues and resources for the General Council and member churches. But there already seems to be some expectation for them to act like program units. So the executive needs to continue to give attention to this point.”

While affirming the plans, Executive Committee members cautioned against duplication, urging the commissions to work together and holistically. Toward that end,

the chairs and secretaries of the commissions held their first annual joint all-day meeting immediately following the Executive Committee gathering.

New staff, new structure.

Commissions are not the only changes for MWC. The executive heard a report from a search committee charged with finding a new general secretary, who will replace Larry Miller when he leaves the position in 2012 after 22 years of service in that role. The committee will have the name of a replacement to consider

when it meets next in May 2011.

A previous Executive Committee, working from 2003-2009, set in motion plans to move towards MWC representation and offices located in each continental region.

“In the future, we will need to decide what kind of representation there will be in each region, what kind of offices each will have, in which countries they will be, and how much they will cost,” Ernst Bergen, Paraguay, MWC treasurer, said. “These are good questions that come with growth.

Executive Committee preference:

MWC's Executive Committee, while meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, July 28-August 4, 2010, unanimously stated a preference for holding the next MWC assembly in the United States in 2015.

The committee also unanimously decided to consider Indonesia as the alternative choice for 2015, if plans for the USA do not work out. Indonesia is also their first choice for the site of the 2021 global assembly.

“We need two items in order to move forward with the USA as the location for our next global gathering,” said Larry Miller, MWC General Secretary. “We need to discuss with the MWC member churches in the USA whether they desire to host the next assembly. And, if they do, we need to do a feasibility study of the site they propose.”

An extensive study was prepared in 2004 along with an invitation from the USA member churches to hold the 2009 assembly in eastern Pennsylvania. But after careful consideration, MWC accepted instead an invitation and study received at the same time from the Paraguayan member churches.

Now the Executive Committee is making good on its promise to its USA members in 2004 to consider “with utmost seriousness” holding the 2015 assembly in that country.

“But we don’t want officers and staff alone to answer them,” Ernst continued. He reported that consultants from the global North and the global South will look at MWC’s transition and future structure, and help answer the questions.

Budgets and opportunities. While MWC is currently in good financial shape, it is not yet in a position to simultaneously establish representation and offices on each continent, Ernst said. So this plan is being listed in MWC’s financial projections as an “opportunity,” along with several other things that MWC will do as funds become available.

Income for current operations is meeting expenses, Karen Martin-Schiedel,

Canada, director of finance and administration, said. But because of additional costs due to changes facing MWC, an Unrestricted Fund budget of \$897,000^{USD} for 2011, passed by the Executive Committee, calls for \$150,000 to come from reserves designated for the transition period.

MWC has built modest reserves over the past several years primarily because of individual contributions to a Leadership Campaign designed to facilitate the leadership transition financially over the next several years and because of a surplus from Assembly 15 in 2009.

“I would like to see MWC use the same strategies in other continents as in North America,” said Pakisa Tshimika, Congo / USA,



photo by Markus Rediger

MWC continued a tradition of planting a tree at some location in the country hosting an MWC event; but on Sunday, August 1, it planted 38 trees at the Misrak Meserete Kristos Church, the largest MKC congregation in Ethiopia. Above, MKC chair Tewodros Beyene (center) and MWC president Danisa Ndlovu prepare for the planting. At left is Sisca Ibanda, African representative on the Executive Committee.

to hold next global assembly in the United States in 2015

The executive, in stating a preference for this location, recognized that the last three assemblies were held in the global South (Calcutta, India, in 1997; Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in 2003; and Asunción, Paraguay, in 2009).

“Despite the fact that the majority of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ live in the Southern Hemisphere, Executive Committee members believe it is essential that churches in the North have the opportunity to welcome the global family into their homes and fellowships,” commented Larry. “While it is financially possible for many persons from the North to travel South, the Executive Committee stated clearly its desire not to deprive our member churches in the North of welcoming the global church, of offering hospitality, and of experiencing firsthand the wonder of fellowshiping and worshipping with sisters and brothers from around the world,” Larry elaborated.

The Executive Committee acknowledged that serious visa problems may exist for persons wanting to enter the USA from some countries. They made a commitment for MWC to pursue legal efforts vigorously and to pray ceaselessly for admission of all who wish to attend the assembly.

“We are also in communication with three other world communions who recently held their global assemblies in the USA,” explained Larry. “They had varying degrees of

success on this issue, and we will counsel with each of them. This is a problematic situation, but we believe we have possibilities of succeeding.”

In its recent meeting, after careful study and serious consideration of alternatives, the Executive Committee also acted to reconfirm the six-year cycle of MWC global assemblies.

They also presented likely locations for the two assemblies following the one in 2015. In 2021 the assembly will likely be held in Indonesia, and in 2027 in Europe.

The Indonesian churches had invited the 2015 assembly to their country. The executive asked the Indonesian churches to take two steps: to maintain their invitation for 2015, pending an invitation from the North American churches and a satisfactory feasibility study, and to consider extending their invitation to 2021 if the 2015 assembly is held in the USA.

Several significant anniversaries related to Anabaptist history will take place in 2025 and 2027. For that reason, the European member churches will likely invite MWC to hold the assembly on their continent in 2027. At the same time, MWC will consider how best to celebrate globally in 2025 the 500th anniversary of the first Anabaptist baptism (January 1525) and the 100th anniversary of the first Mennonite world conference (June 1925).—Phyllis Pellman Good

MWC Global Church Advocate. "We need to push Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans also to do their part."

Janet Plenert, Canada, MWC vice-president, agreed by citing the example of the Paraguayans and their support of Assembly 15, which was a major factor making possible a surplus of \$325,000 from that event.

Engaging youth. Elina Ciptadi-Perkins, Singapore, staff liaison for youth, and Ayub Omondi Awich, Kenya, African representative on the Youth Task Force, met with the Executive to outline plans for a new Young Anabaptists Network (YABs)

to work with young people in five areas: (a) networking; (b) fellowship; (c) capacity building; (d) decision-making; and (e) Anabaptist identity.

Elina said the initiative comes out of enthusiasm generated by two Global Youth Fellowships held in conjunction with Assembly 14 in Zimbabwe and Assembly 15 in Paraguay. "Young people are interested in MWC and want to be involved," she said.

Executive Committee members warmly welcomed the plans for the network, which will be incorporated into MWC's structure and budgeting. The group comes

with an \$85,000 surplus from the Global Youth Summit held in Paraguay in connection with Assembly 15.

Interchurch dialogues.

After hearing positive and emotional reports from the MWC representatives who had just come from the Lutheran World Federation event in Stuttgart, Germany, at which Lutherans apologized for the legacy of the persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century, the Executive Committee approved participation in two interchurch dialogues:

- bilateral conversations with the World Conference

of Seventh Day Adventists on "lifestyles as Christians," particularly the biblical understandings and practices of peace;

- tri-lateral conversations on baptism between the Lutheran World Federation, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Catholic Church, and MWC.

Both dialogues will begin in 2011.

Representatives from Latin America, while approving, urged caution. "Given the reservations that some of our churches have, because of persecution from the Catholics in the past and statements which continue

The Executive Committee

This group of 14 is responsible for the work of MWC between the triennial sessions of the General Council. During its first annual week-long meeting in Addis Ababa, Phyllis Pellman Good, MWC communications consultant, interviewed each member for these brief snapshots of the spirit they bring to the MWC executive.

Two members were not at the Addis Ababa meetings:

Thuma Hamukang'andu, Zambia, Brethren in Christ Church, absent because of visa complications;

Felix Rafael Curbelo Valle, Cuba, died on December 13, 2009. MWC's Executive Committee will name his replacement.

General secretary, **Larry Miller**, France, also sits on the Executive Committee.

Photos by Merle Good / MWC



Danisa Ndlovu
president

Zimbabwe

Brethren in Christ Church

Church role: Bishop of BIC in Zimbabwe, a position combining administrative and pastoral concerns for 320 BIC congregations and preaching points
Family: (spouse) Treziah; (daughters) Thinkgrace, 21; Trustworthy, 19; (son) Devotion, 17

For rest and relaxation:

"Going out to the village where my mom lives to walk in the bush away from the busyness."

Reason for hope: "Hope is about accepting reality—and within that reality you accept that God has called you for such a time as this. You live that out fully. This is what I believe it means to be true to your call."



Janet Plenert
vice-president

Canada

Mennonite Church Canada

Church role: Active lay member, sometimes preaching
Occupation: Executive Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada Witness

Family: (spouse) Steve; (daughters) Gabrielle, 23; Natasha, 20; Katrina, 17

For rest and relaxation:

"Riding my bicycle in the sunshine, knitting."

Reason for hope: "I have hope when I see signs of God's transformation: caring rather than greed, sharing instead of selfishness. I believe the kingdom is coming when I see people coming together, whether locally or around the world."



Ernst Bergen
treasurer

Paraguay

Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden

Church role: Leader of congregation's ministry in Asunción prison; leader of board overseeing Fahce, denomination's university
Occupation: Entrepreneur and partner in many businesses
Family: (spouse) Lucy; (daughter) Daniela, 20; (sons) Samuel, 17; David, 7

For rest and relaxation:

"Walking in nature, both in the Chaco and in the hills outside Asunción."

Reason for hope: "When I see how God changes people in a constructive and upbuilding way, I am hopeful. People do grow in faith. In our prison ministry I see big miracles all the time."

to this day, it's very important that the objectives for dialogue be very clear," said Edgardo Sanchez, Argentina.

Healing of memories.

Larry noted that one reason for some interchurch conversations, such as those with both Catholics and Lutherans, is to talk about the past and memories of the past.

"Because of our history, we Anabaptists have often seen ourselves as heirs of martyrs, and we need to come to terms with how that affects our view of the world," he said. "We also need to see ourselves as members of the wider body of Christ, called to give an

account of our convictions and practices, and to receive others as they do likewise."

The Executive Committee also heard about MWC's involvement in accompanying conflict among member churches.

Out of these and other concerns, there was agreement to work further on what is being labeled as a "healing of memories" project, dealing with such themes as the legacy of slavery and colonialism, leadership and power transitions in the context of violence, the use of money and power in relationships among Anabaptists within and between cultures.



photo by Merle Good / MWC

Sisca Ibanda of Congo (right) leads a song during an Executive Committee worship session. To her right are Ron Penner of Canada and Edgardo Sanchez of Argentina.

Other business. MWC's Executive Committee also:

- received copies of *Mission and Migration* by

Jaime Prieto, the third in a series of Global Mennonite History books written from the perspective of a particu-



Sisca Mawangu Ibanda

DR Congo

Communauté des Églises de Frères Mennonites au Congo

Church role: Director of women's services for local church; Kinshasa area overseer for denomination
Occupation: Sociology and psychology teacher for a Congolese rural development agency
Family: (spouse) Ibula Muana Katamanga Jules Cesar; (son) Jacques Ibula, 35; (daughters) Laura Ibula, 32; Debbie Ibula, 31; (son) Godwin Ibanda, 28; (daughter) Jennifer Mawangu, 24
For rest and relaxation: "I love to garden—flowers and vegetables."
Reason for hope: "I believe that when each of us is being obedient to Christ, we do make a true difference in the world."



Prem Prakash Bagh

India

Bhartiya General Conference Mennonite

Church role: Pastor; member of denomination's executive committee
Occupation: "My pastoral work is completely volunteer. My wife is a medical doctor and is able to provide our family income because I have no salary."
Family: (spouse) Alka R Bagh; (daughter) Palak Prakash Bagh, 17; (son) Anubhav Prakash Bagh, 14; 76-year-old mother
For rest and relaxation: "Music—composing, singing, playing the harmonium and the dabra."
Reason for hope: "Our Christian villages may look the same as the Hindu villages, but in our attitudes and witness, we Christians are different."



Adi Walujo

Indonesia

Gereja Injili di Tanah Jawa

Church role: Vice-general secretary of the denomination
Occupation: Full-time pastor, "responsible for my own support. My wife brings in our income as the nursing director for a hospital, overseeing 350 nurses."
Family: (spouse) Sri Edy Hernani; (daughters) Angela, deceased at age 8 in 2008; Efifania Ariella Diani, 6; (son) Timothy Efifanio Hernadi, 1 month
For rest and relaxation: "Family is first."
Reason for hope: "When my daughter was sick, some Christians suggested this was punishment. But I said, No, God has something to say to me. When we have difficult times, God is especially close."



Rainer Burkart

Germany

Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland

Church role: Lead pastor of the Evangelical Mennonite congregation in Neuwied
Family: (spouse) Angelika; (son) Jan, 23
For rest and relaxation: "I read detective novels. I go to the sauna. I help my wife with her three horses."
Reason for hope: "I hope for the strength to live with open questions, without needing to have all the answers. This is especially important for me because I know that life can be very unfair. But even when experiencing this, we each need to trust God, which is also hope."

lar continent. This volume is about Anabaptist history in Latin America; volumes on Africa and Europe were released previously, and works on Asia and North America are scheduled for publication in 2011;

- heard about plans for a redesigned MWC website, which will provide for easier access for resources and space for commissions and continental caucuses to detail their work. Blogs are also being planned at www.mwc-cmm.org;

- learned that as of June 2010, MWC member churches totaled nearly 1.2 million baptized members, an increase of 30,000 over

the previous year. These members worship in congregations in 99 conferences in 56 countries. Baptized membership in all Anabaptist-related churches, both MWC members and those not members, totaled 1,672,072.

MKC hosting. The largest of these national churches is the Meserete Kristos Church of Ethiopia, hosts for the eight-day Executive Committee sessions.

“We now have 189,296 baptized members in 518 local congregations,” MKC chair Tewodros Beyene reported in welcoming the international guests to Addis

Ababa, capital of the country and center for the church. MKC also has 867 church-planting projects.

MKC executive secretary, Kenna Dula, described how the church began 60 years ago out of missionary work by Lancaster Mennonite Conference of the United States. In 1982, when the church went underground because of persecution by the then-communist government, it had 5,000 members. MKC emerged in 1991 “from the dark time of persecution” with a membership of 50,000—and it has been growing ever since.

“God has been very good to us,” said Tewodros. “In

spite of the challenges, MKC is now completely self-sustaining with no assistance from outside sources.”

On Sunday, August 1, groups of MWC Executive Committee and staff participated in worship services in five MKC churches throughout Addis Ababa.

The next meeting of the MWC Executive will be in early May 2011 in Hong Kong. A final decision is expected there on the site of the 2015 assembly and on the person to be recommended to the General Council for appointment by mail vote as MWC’s next general secretary.

—J. Lorne Peachey



Markus Rediger

Switzerland

Konferenz der Mennoniten der Schweiz

Church role: One of pastoral team of three; member of denomination’s executive; chair of planning committee for the Mennonite European Regional Conference (MERK)

Occupation: Managing director of Agricultural Information Center of Switzerland

Family: (spouse) Marianne; (sons) Matthias, 23; David, 22; (daughter) Caroline, 19

For rest and relaxation: “I love to hike in the mountains, do photography, ski, and meet with friends.”

Reason for hope: “It is so helpful to spend time with my brothers and sisters on the Executive Committee because I get to see that God is working all around the world in their lives.”



Edgardo Sanchez

Argentina

Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Argentina

Church role: Lead pastor with a team of four; supervisor of 12 mission churches

Occupation: Civil engineer directing building projects

Family: (spouse) Erica; (daughters) Débora, 18; Anita, 16; (son) Pablo, 8

For rest and relaxation: “I love to go out and share God’s message with people. It just comes out naturally.”

Reason for hope: “In Patagonia, and throughout all of Argentina, I hope that in every town there will be one family who loves God and lives according to kingdom principles. We ask families either to move or to be alert to being God’s presence in specific places.”



Iris de León-Hartshorn

United States

Mennonite Church USA

Church role: Conference minister for regional conference, Pacific Northwest

Family: (spouse) Leo; (daughters) Isabel, 30; Toni, 28; (son) Andres, 30; (grandson) Gavin, 6

For rest and relaxation: “I like to read—theology to fiction!”

Reason for hope: “I see people in the church who continue to give to the church and who have hope. The church might wear me out sometimes, but, at the same time, I see that the church can work. And that keeps me going.”



Ron Penner

Canada

Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Church role: Interim congregational co-pastor (with his wife)

Occupation: Co-owner (with his wife) of a chicken-growing farm

Family: (spouse) Ruth; (son) Duane, 44; (daughters) Robin, 42; Kristen, 30; deceased son, Trevor

For rest and relaxation: “I like to play golf—and travel. And I like to read.”

Reason for hope: “A week of meetings with MWC’s Executive Committee gives me hope! I see clearly demonstrated that wherever you go in the world, the church is there.”

Global Anabaptist service entities consider how best to work together

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—In an historic event, representatives of Anabaptist churches and organizations from around the world involved in service in some way gathered here August 6-9, 2010, to consider how they might work together more effectively.

The consultation, the first ever of its kind for Anabaptist service groups worldwide, drew 53 participants from 27 agencies, departments, or committees of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) member churches.

From 18 countries and all continents, more than 80% of the total global Anabaptist membership was represented in some way, according to Reg Toews, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, one of three consultation facilitators.

As outlined by Pakisa Tshimika, MWC Global Church Advocate and another of the facilitators, this consultation grew out of previous conversations on diakonia or service held in connection with the MWC

General Council in Pasadena, California, USA, in 2006. At that time, the General Council had approved a gathering of service entity representatives to explore how they could work together on common questions, concerns, and programs.

Participants soon agreed that they wanted to work together in the future. They called for “a space or entity under MWC auspices in which every member relates in an interdependent way in order to serve the church and the world more effectively.”

Local and global. They also agreed they would support this new endeavor with finances, personnel, gifts, and skills. With equal access to service entities and churches in both the North and the South, the new initiative is to focus on both local and global connections while maintaining each participating agency’s identity and autonomy.

Exactly how all this should be carried out took most of the two-day discus-

sions, both in small groups and in plenary sessions.

Conversations centered around four models presented by the facilitators, another of whom was Phyllis Toews of Canada. The models:

- *process*: continue to improve what we are already doing together, gradually growing into something better;

- *ad hoc*: appoint a committee to call the group together as need arises;

- *new*: create a new structure, such as a council or network, to provide information, accountability, and ways of working together;

- *transformation*: redesign a current organization to become a global, coordinating body.

Discussion of the latter centered on Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the largest agency participating in the consultation. While some favored asking MCC to assume responsibility for global coordination of service activities, the majority wanted MCC to remain a North American organiza-

tion coming to a new global entity as an equal partner, even with its larger size and operations.

In the end, consultation participants focused on a new network or entity and asked MWC to facilitate its creation. They agreed to appoint “a provisional task force,” charged with gathering and disseminating information about current Anabaptist service activities and planning for future consultations or even activities. The task force will be under the direction of MWC during its initial mandate, until May 2012.

Subject to approval.

Representatives noted, however, that these plans are subject to approval by their sending bodies. Approval or rejection, feedback, and comments are due by the end of 2010.

During the consultation, participants were reminded of the possible risks of being involved in service when they learned of the death of MCCer Glen Lapp in Afghanistan, which happened as they gathered in Ethiopia.

Lapp’s death was announced and prayers for the family and MCC took place at the Misrak Addis Ababa Meserete Kristos Church, which consultation participants attended on Sunday, August 8.

—J. Lorne Peachey

Consultation participants worshiped with the Misrak congregation, the largest MKC church with an attendance of several thousand.



The glory that comes with unity

by Antonio González

In his priestly prayer in John 17, when Jesus prays to the Father for his present and future disciples he uses an apparently strange term. Jesus prays that the glory the Father has given him may also be bestowed on his disciples, “so they may be one as we are one” (John 17:22).

This strange term begs us to ask a question: What is the nature of the glory that the Father has given Jesus

and that Jesus requests for us, so that it may become the foundation of Christian unity?

The term used for glory in the Greek language has the connotation of a dazzling appearance. It is often taken to refer to a superficial opinion that does not grasp the true reality of something.

But in a Semitic context, glory has other nuances. From a Hebrew viewpoint, glory suggests the “weight” someone has or receives from others. In Spanish, one can also speak of the

“weight” of an opinion or “a person who has weight” in reference to that person’s importance or “gravity.”

From this perspective, glory is not something apparent or superficial. Rather, glory refers to the true dimension of a person and to opinions that have “weight.”

This glory is not a purely individual concept; instead, glory is bestowed on us by others, who give us “weight” (importance or value), or “enrich” us when they praise or accord recognition to our words.

So, a person truly receives “weight” or “gravity,” which shapes that person’s social importance in relation to other people. Glory comes from others. It would be rather absurd if one bestowed glory on oneself, because that glory would amount to nothing (John 8:50-54).

Therefore, from a Semitic point of view, what is important is not to make a distinction between superficial appearance and profound reality as the Greeks do. Rather, it is to reflect on where glory comes from and who bestows it.

The gospel of John is precisely where we find the difference between two fundamental types of glory: (a) The glory that comes from God, and (b) the glory that comes from human beings.

This difference causes tension, since fear of social rejection and the desire to receive recognition from others prevents people—especially those who have a higher social position—from believing in Jesus. The glory of humankind leads people to despise the glory that comes from God (John 5:44; 12:42-43).

This highlights a decisive aspect of

Antonio González leads a Bible study focused on John 17 at the Thursday morning worship service at Assembly 15.

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Christian faith. Christian faith is not just a purely individual or inner phenomenon. It also covers all human dimensions, including social relationships. Whoever believes in Jesus no longer belongs to the world.

Of course, this does not mean no longer living on earth or not loving the world that God so loved (John 3:16). Rather, it means not being part of the social system of mutual recognition and approval, as was exemplified by Jesus, who did not receive the glory of humankind (John 5:41).

Christians are in the world, but they are not of the world (John 17:14-15). For this precise reason, Christians will receive not the glory of humankind but the glory of God.

What does the glory of God involve? In its fullest sense, this glory involves being united to God, being totally independent from the world, just as Jesus was before the world was created (John 17:5).

But this glory can also be experienced in the world, just as Jesus experienced it. The glory of Jesus involves a life lived in grace and truth. The miracles of Jesus may be seen as the signs of his glory. But it is important to realize that these miracles do not refer to the glory that Jesus receives from humankind, as if miracles were extraordinary actions intended to gain recognition from the world. The miracles of Jesus specifically express the glory of God, that is, the recognition that God gives Jesus, reason for which his disciples believe in him (John 2:11; 11:4).

The glory of God is not about recognition from the world; it is about transferring something that begins in God and that Jesus gives on God's behalf to others. This is the foundation of the glory of Jesus (John 16:14-15).

Perhaps this is why the glory of God entails emptying out oneself. In the gospel of John, the glorification of Jesus is related to his "hour," a clear reference to what was going to happen during Passover (John 7:39; 17:1).

Contrary to what one may think, this glory does not refer, first of all, to resurrection. Rather, this glory is something that is expressly told to us in the gospel of John: the glorification of Jesus consists precisely in the fact that a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies.

Once again, this means a break with the world (John 12:23-26). Obviously, the world does not praise or follow those who have been crucified or who have failed. Jesus, having been crucified, received not the glory of humankind but its rejection.

Nevertheless, it is precisely because of this rejection that Jesus receives the glory of God. It is hardly surprising that in the gospel of John, death, resurrection, and the giving of the Spirit are so intimately related.

We can now go back to the beginning question about the nature of the glory that Jesus requests for us.

John tells us (John 17:22) that the glory Jesus received has already been bestowed on us. It is not something we have to conquer by our own power; it is a gift from God. We have already received the glory of God: eternal unity with the Father, life in grace and truth, the possibility of giving others what we have received, death, and resurrection with Jesus. It involves a gift that is already ours. Our task consists of experiencing that gift and allowing it to bear fruit.

Now we can see that the gift of glory is directly related to unity, for at least two reasons.

(1) The glory of God removes us from the system of recognition and approval that is part of the world, making us members of the community of Jesus.

(2) The glory of God allows us to die to ourselves, for only those who die to themselves may reach full unity with others.

It is quite clear that this unity does not imply a lack of interest in the world. Rather it implies service to the world. Christian unity, precisely because it is not something that emerges from a system of this world, witnesses to the world the radical newness of what God has done: that he loves us as much as he loved Jesus himself (John 17:23).

From this perspective, we can understand what Jesus means when he talks about us being with him and seeing his glory. It is not about something that refers simply to the other world. In the Gospel of John, the words are spoken by an earthly Jesus.

This is about being with Jesus and seeing his glory already in this world. It is about being with Jesus and seeing his glory in terms of being where Jesus is. And it is not enough to say that the glorified Jesus is everywhere. We need to discern, in the present world, in our society, in our context, where Jesus is calling us to be with him, and to see and share his glory in that place. This is a glory that is not of this world, but rather a glory that is found on the way that leads to the cross.

Antonio González is director of research and publications at Fundación Xavier Zubiri in Madrid, Spain. Born and raised in a Roman Catholic home and school in El Salvador, he entered a Jesuit order, intending to become a priest. In 1999 in Guatemala, he discovered and was influenced by Mennonites from the Latin American Anabaptist Seminary and two years later made the difficult decision to leave the Jesuits. He found a home in the Brethren in Christ Church. His graduate studies have been in Spain and Germany. He is married and with his wife has felt God's call to evangelism in Spain.

In this issue, Courier-Correo-Courrier continues a series of articles adapted from the sermons and Bible studies at Assembly 15, meeting under the theme, "Come together in the way of Jesus Christ." The Bible study by Antonio González (these pages) and the sermon by Ditrich Pana (pages 16-17) were both on the Thursday, July 16, sub-theme, "Uniting in Christ."

What it means to be one in Christ

by Ditrich Pana

Acts, the fifth book of the New Testament, is a record of the growth of the early church. It follows right after Dr. Luke's Gospel, a record of the work of Jesus. Together, these two books contain 25 per cent of the material of the New Testament. That's a more extensive piece of work than all of the epistles of Paul combined.

Both books are full of many insights into the theme of unity. When I recently studied the book of Luke verse by verse, it took me three and a half months. In my study, I found the word "unity" 37 times in different forms: "unanimous, unity, meeting, congregated, assembly, council, convene."

The book of Acts is a continuation of the story of the work of Jesus through his new body, the church. In this new work, Jesus is no longer limited by time and space.

Luke emphasizes four general principles in the book of Acts:

- *The Holy Spirit.* In Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled the believers, who became the instruments through which the Good News of Jesus would be proclaimed to every last person on earth (Acts 1:8).

- *The despised and the sinners.* The Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-40), Cornelius (Acts 10), and the jailer (Acts 16:22-34) were rejected by Judaism but accepted and redeemed by Christ.

- *Women.* Women were omitted from the center of Jewish worship; they were forced to remain standing at the back of the synagogues only to listen to discussions and the Holy Scriptures read by men. Luke emphasized the roles of Lydia (Acts 16:13-15) and Priscilla (Acts 18:18). He mentioned the fellowship of various unnamed women in Paul's missionary travels (Acts 17:4).

- *Devotion to Jesus.* The first chapters

of Acts describe the apostles and other followers of Jesus praying in the temple. Prayer was also a practice that characterized the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

These four principles resulted in an atmosphere of unity among the believers. "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46-47).

This is unity. This is what it means to be uniting in Christ.

Believers in the early church experienced unity through the power of the Holy Spirit. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Was the unity among the believers of the early church visible? Yes! The communion and unity among the apostles and the early church was visible.

One of the ways was through the healing that was taking place. In Acts 3:16, Peter said: "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."

This sick man was healed because of unity in Christ. It could happen because the apostles were united in Christ.

The same thing can happen today. I have experienced it in my life.

On Thursday, June 17, 2004, my wife and two of my daughters were involved in a serious accident. That day I had a meeting with the women leaders of our church in Pozo Amarillo, some 70 kilometers from Loma Plata, and didn't know about the accident until I learned about it from a nephew that night. My wife was fine, he said, but one of my daughters had a

serious bone fracture.

My daughter was hospitalized for four and a half months, completely immobilized. The doctors wanted to operate but couldn't because the fracture was so serious. Finally, they told me they would send my daughter to Asunción so that she could be operated on by specialists.

But when the specialists saw her, they said she seemed to be healing without an operation. I was happy, but I also thought that when she was healed, she would need to use a wheel chair. But when she became well, she walked just like she did before.

I, as the father of this child, had no worries before the Lord. I had been praying tirelessly night and day. The Lord heard my request, and my daughter got well without surgery.

Who healed my daughter? Only Jesus healed her. She was healed by the unity in Jesus. Blessed be Jesus, the true son of the Almighty God, who healed her.

Another of the visible characteristics of unity in Christ is worship. The early believers worshiped together in the temple and in their homes. In their worship services, they shared their bread and ate together. The unity that these believers experienced with their brothers and sisters was visible to those around them who were not part of the church. "They praised God and enjoyed the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

Today, worship must be firmly linked to a person's daily life. This worship can take many forms, ranging from spontaneous personal bursts of thanksgiving for some redeeming act by God to formal psalms and hymns adapted for collective worship in the church. Worship must come from the heart and not be merely an external demonstration.

Another characteristic of uniting in Christ that becomes visible to others is

Uniting in Christ

the fruit unity produces: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humbleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). The Bible says that there is no law condemning such things.

Are we practicing unity in our lives today? We can find a description of what that means in Acts 4:32: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they all shared everything they had.” Note that the verse begins with “all” and ends with “all.” Unity and harmony among believers was experienced by all in the early church. May that also be true today.

One of the ways that can happen is through Mennonite World Conference. I believe MWC is firmly maintaining this unity and harmony through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to experience joyful and heartfelt unity in settings such as Assembly 15. As we meet together, in the power of the Holy Spirit, we get to know many brothers and sisters and learn more deeply about the church of Christ worldwide.

My first experience of this global fellowship was at the 12th assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1990. Here I learned the word, *Shalom*. Now 19 years later, I remember this word very well: *Shalom*. *Shalom* is what allows us to be united, despite the fact that we come from many continents and from many races and languages.

Through worship services and other means, MWC makes it possible for us to experience unity as friends. Uniting in Christ goes beyond race and language.

Latin Americans, Europeans, North Americans, Africans, and Asians, let us enjoy being united in Christ. The global church is present in our lives today. Every day the Lord adds to his children through unity with him. Every day we should look to our brothers and sisters next to us and say, “Christ unites us.”

I had a good experience during



photo by Lowell Brown

Ditrich Pana preaches at the Thursday evening worship service at Assembly 15.

Assembly 15 in Asunción. At the entrance to the venue there were three security men in uniform; one of them gestured to me to approach them. When I did, they asked me many questions. One of them was, “Are you a Mennonite too?”

And do you know what I replied? “I am a Mennonite! Amen!”

Ditrich Pana served for three years as president of Convención Iglesias

Evangélicas Unidas—Enlhet Paraguay. Ditrich, who speaks two languages and three dialects, has also preached in his mother tongue, Northern Lengua, on La hora evangélica (Evangelical Hour), a 15-minute weekly radio program. For Paraguay 2009, Ditrich served both as a member of the National Coordinating Council and of the Program Planning Committee. Ditrich and his wife Mariacita are parents of five and the grandparents of four.



A game of "Dutch Blitz" eventually involves both North and South at Assembly 15.

Unity begins with relationships

by Melanie Schellenberg

How can we live out our unity in Christ through diverse cultures, languages, and societal realities? Where can we even begin?

My experiences at Assembly 15 in Asunción, Paraguay, in 2009 helped me start to answer these questions.

My friend and travel partner, Natalie, and I enjoy playing "Dutch Blitz," a fast-paced card game popular in many North American Mennonite circles. One morning before the worship session, we sat on the floor in the hallway with our new friend, Alison, from the United States to play a few rounds. Now and then, when people walked by, some stopped and watched us curiously.

An Indigenous Paraguayan couple and their young son were among these. They watched our game intently for some time. Then, a North American couple walking by commented, "Isn't this typical? North Americans playing the game while South Americans watch." That comment got us thinking.

So we asked, in our limited Spanish, if the Paraguayans would like to play.

The man, whose name was Leonardo, agreed to try. He caught on quickly. We had time to play a couple of rounds before we went into the sanctuary to worship together.

We ran into Leonardo and his family a few days later and exchanged warm smiles and greetings with our new friends.

For me, this simple encounter over a card game taught me that unity begins with relationships. I never learned Leonardo's life story or his faith testimony. (I did learn he is good at "Dutch Blitz"!)

To work towards true unity, Mennonites and all believers in Christ from around the world must come together to "play the game" and to make new "games" with everyone's input. Nobody should need to watch from the sidelines.

In addition to attending Assembly 15, Melanie Schellenberg from Canada and her roommate, Natalie Wiebe, spent time traveling to Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, and Peru. Adapted from a Mennonite Church Canada release.

Unity begins with

by Jon Spicher

As my friend Lars and I pedaled our bicycles down the desert coast of Peru, it seemed like we heard about the town of Chimbote before we even noted it on our maps. We were told it was a port town, and quite a dangerous one at that. Anyone who mentioned Chimbote always gave us advice: do not stop there even to eat lunch, much less for the night. We were told not only that the people of Chimbote would not receive us, but that we would surely be robbed if we went anywhere near the town.

Despite the plentiful advice, we found ourselves riding into Chimbote at sunset one evening; it was the only city around after a long day's ride. Well, we told ourselves, we'll have to see about all that advice. Upon arrival, we inquired at the Catholic cathedral on the downtown square about a place to stay. After being shuffled around to a couple of different offices, we were finally directed to a parish on the outskirts of town.

There we waited for the evening mass to finish and then met our hosts. Two nuns in white habits with blue striped borders greeted us. They didn't ask questions about us or our trip; they simply said, "Good evening. Let's get you inside."

We soon learned these nuns were part of the Sisters of Charity, Mother Teresa's order. The nuns spend their days caring for marginalized and handicapped Peruvians in all senses of the word.

As they showed us our room, they asked if we wanted anything to eat or drink. We had just eaten, and had an extra bag of bread with us, so we really weren't hungry. But when asked again if we would like something hot to drink, we accepted gratefully.

As we began to unpack our things, one of the sisters brought in a tea tray,

hospitality

laden with a thermos of hot water, teacups, instant coffee, sugar, and a container of strawberry jelly. They had noticed our bag of bread and gave us jelly for it without asking.

So instead of confirming the prejudices of fear so prominent about Chimbote, we were wonderfully received in that town. We left the following day amazed at how natural and comfortable it was for the sisters to host two complete strangers. We marveled at this authentic hospitality, coming from lives organized by the spiritual disciplines of daily prayer and service, habits of giving oneself to God and to others.

Jon Spicher and Lars Akerson traveled more than 12,400 kilometers (7,700 miles) by bicycle from Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA, to Asunción, Paraguay, to attend Assembly 15.

Lars Akerson (left) and Jon Spicher on arrival in Asunción, Paraguay, in July 2009 after bicycling for six months from their homes in the United States.

photo by Ray Dirks



An 'outsider' looks at our shared convictions

by Louis Schweitzer

The following view of MWC's Shared Convictions statement comes from a Baptist pastor and a professor of ethics and spirituality at Faculté de théologie évangélique de Vaux-sur-Seine, France, who is well aware of the diversity of the evangelical, Protestant, and wider Christian worlds. The article is reprinted by permission from Christ Seul, a publication of the Église Évangélique Mennonite de France. Translation by Tim Lind.—Editor

This text of *Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists* is at once clear, concise and well written. It is carefully ecumenical (in the sense that it expresses aspects of faith common to all churches, such as belief in a triune God), Protestant, and Mennonite. From the introduction, we are reminded that those Christians who identify with this statement of faith are a part of the historical and universal church. There is no aspect of exclusivity, but rather an affirmation of beliefs that attempts to express a faith shared by all Christians, yet with some specific emphases.

Many convictions that historically would have been seen as very "Mennonite" are today less distinctive. Most Christians could certainly agree to the key parts of this text; those who see themselves as evangelical would accept even more, and some would be in agreement with nearly everything. At the same time, each point retains a Mennonite flavor, an emphasis—sometimes subtle—that recalls or details an angle of approach, a belief, that may well be shared by others, but that together make up the specific profile of this family of churches and believers.

Mennonite flavors...

- In the first conviction regarding the trinity, it is stated that this people is called by God to be faithful "in fellowship." This highlights the community aspect.

- The second, referring to the nature of Christ, goes beyond the cross and the resurrection to speak of Jesus' teachings and of becoming disciples.

- The third conviction on the Holy Spirit and the church could be accepted by any believer, but it nevertheless underlines the dimension of "following" Christ.

- The very "protestant" fourth conviction speaks of the Bible, and while it would be acceptable in principle to most evangelical Christians, its focus on the dimension of interpretation by the community under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in the light of Jesus Christ gives it a particularly Mennonite ring.

- The fifth is without doubt the most distinctively Mennonite article in that it highlights the area of peace, nonviolence, and love of the enemy.

- What follows next regarding worship seems a classical Christian statement, but the Anabaptist flavor is found in the point of mutual accountability, which seems a more modern version of ancient practice.

- The last conviction affirms a stance of non-conformity to the world and its values that is well illustrated by the story of the 16th century Anabaptists.

Here then is a confession of faith that many evangelical Christians will be happy to identify with. Perhaps this is because, while these Christians are not Mennonites, they are in some sense part Anabaptist.

Serving God together as

Each year since 1999, Anabaptist-related churches around the world have been encouraged to worship around a common theme on a Sunday close to January 21, usually the fourth Sunday in January. On that date in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland.

World Fellowship Sunday (WFS) provides an opportunity for Anabaptists to remember our common roots and celebrate our worldwide koinonia. Churches are encouraged to plan a WFS worship service that will help them enter more fully into fellowship, intercession, and thanksgiving with the global faith family.

Each year Mennonite World Conference designates different people to prepare worship material for WFS. For 2011, the assignment went to young people, more specifically the MWC Youth Task Force (YTF), under the direction of Elina Ciptadi-Perkins and Melani Susanti.

Early on the YTF decided its work needed to be intergenerational. “We quickly realized that we don’t solely need creative ideas from young people,” said Melani. “We also needed the knowledge and wisdom of the elder members of the church. That’s how the idea of creating intergenerational WFS material came about.”

The ages of those involved in creating WFS 2011 range from 19 to 67 years old. They come from ten countries on five continents—Colombia, Honduras, Indonesia, Singapore, United States, Canada, Kenya, Nigeria, Spain, and Switzerland. Each part was developed by two people, one younger and one older, working in tandem.

The planners’ goals for WFS 2011 are to provide a day:

- to recognize what both young and old bring to the body of Christ;
- for young people to recognize they need to work together with leadership and senior members in the church;
- when young people support senior members and seniors encourage the young;
- when different generations make extra effort to work together.

This year’s materials do not have a specific order of service. Rather, churches are encouraged to develop their own outline using materials appropriate to their situation from those provided by the planners:

- a confession and affirmation (page 21);
- a wishing tree (page 22);
- a testimony: “Young people at the heart of the church” (below and also available for download from the MWC web-

Young people at the heart of the church

by Ray Brubacher

If you look at a picture of the participants in the first Mennonite World Conference, held in Switzerland in 1920, you will see mostly older white European men with a few women, but no young people.

In pictures of the assembly in India in 1997, you see many Indian men and women, a good number of Europeans and North Americans, a smaller number from many countries, and just a few young people.

But in pictures of the 15th world assembly in Paraguay in 2009, you see the multi-cultural face of Mennonites—and many more young people. The second Global Youth Summit attracted close to 800 young adults.

Not only was Paraguay host to the largest GYS, but the MWC office in Asunción was dominated by young people. The average age of the 11 staff members was 25!

In the three years leading up to the assembly, this group of young people exceeded my expectations in

every way. They were extremely hospitable and committed. One often left home at 6:30 a.m. and did not return until 9:00 p.m. or later. These young people never complained about the amount of work they had to do and all the challenges they faced. They continued to be gracious about being given more and more tasks to do closer to the actual event.

During the assembly itself, this group of young people basically ran the show, and my job was essentially complete. Credit for the fact that the assembly was a blessing to more than 6,000 people from around the world goes to these young people. I will forever count it an incredible blessing to have been related to a group such as this.

Ray Brubacher, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, served as MWC international coordinator for Assembly 15. For WFS Sunday 2011, a PowerPoint presentation with this testimony and photographs is available at www.mwc-cmm.org.

one family of faith

site as a PowerPoint presentation with illustrations);

- sermon suggestions, “The fruit of good mentoring” (page 22);
- testimonies by young people of their involvement in the church with their mentors. These are available only via www.mwc-cmm.org and the link to the WFS 2011 Facebook page after November 1, 2010;

- prayer requests, available only at www.mwc-cmm.org and the link to the WFS 2011 Facebook page after November 1, 2010.

Planners encourage young and old to work in tandem in leading the service. For example, there can be two worship leaders, two preachers, and a mixed choir or music band.

More extensive materials than those appearing in this issue of *Courier-Correo-Courrier* are being mailed to the headquarters of all Anabaptist-related churches around the world.

These resources will be available for download from the MWC website. As noted above, additional testimonies and prayer requests are only available from www.mwc-cmm.org.

Confession and affirmation

by Doug Hostetter and Karen Flores

Elders: We have often viewed the work of the church
As an “elders only” endeavor.
While we have valued the experience, maturity,
and wisdom of age,
We have neglected the insights, curiosity,
and energy of youth.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Youth: We have often viewed the work with youth
As a “young people only” effort.
We have prized the socialization
and vigor of youth
While minimizing the knowledge
and understanding of age.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Elders: We have often viewed church leadership
As too difficult and demanding for youth.
We have assumed that because of our judgment
Only we could make wise decisions for the church.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Youth: We have believed that because of *our* age
There was no role for us in the church.
We have believed that because of *your* age
There was no role for you in our lives.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Elders: We have treasured our sense of authority
And believed youth were too inexperienced to help.
We were sure that we could do God’s work
Without help from the youth.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Youth: We have cherished our sense of independence
And thought that elders were too old
for advice.
We were sure that we could do God’s work
Without help from the seniors.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Leader: Before the God of all ages we acknowledge
our failures in word and deed.
We commit ourselves to be a church
that reflects the full body of Christ,
A church that welcomes the passion of youth
and the wisdom of age.
Youth who welcome the advice of seniors.
Elders who mentor and support
the involvement of the young.
Youth eager to serve with the guidance of elders.
Elders willing to empower
and teach the youth.
Lord, give us wisdom, patience,
and the willingness to work together,
Together as one church, the body of Christ.
Help us to become a church that embraces
and supports all of our members.
That welcomes the gifts and talents
you have given to each of us.
So that we can fulfill your mandate
To love justice, to do mercy,
and to walk humbly with our God.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Serving God together as one family of faith

Sermon suggestions:

The fruit of good mentoring

by César García and Peter Edem Akpan

Mentoring of the young by the older is important in the life of the church. When it doesn't happen, serious problems can result.

We have an example in 2 Samuel 13-18, which tells the story of Absalom's rebellion against his father David. While rarely used to describe an intergenerational relationship, this story shows what can happen when there is a lack of good mentoring.

Absalom grew up without much of a relationship with his father because David had to divide his attention among many wives, children, and state affairs. As a result, Absalom had:

- *no guidelines or discipline.* Absalom was not taught to respect authority, so he took matters into his own hands, such as when he killed Amnon who raped his sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13:28-29). In 2 Samuel 15:1-6, Absalom stands beside the city gate giving counsel that should have been given by King David. Yet knowing this, David did nothing to discipline Absalom.

- *no empowerment.* In spite of the fact that Absalom had the qualities of a great leader—an excellent communicator (2 Samuel 15:3), a sympathizer (2 Samuel 15:4), a persuader (2 Samuel 13:20), and a very focused person (2 Samuel 13:22)—David did not give him the chance to exercise his skills and ideas. As a result, Absalom took the kingship and power from his father by force.

- *little or no love.* There is evidence from 2 Samuel 13:20-21 that David had little love for Absalom. He favored Amnon over Absalom. David didn't do anything when he learned that Absalom's sister had been raped by Amnon. 2 Samuel 14:22-23 also mentions that David did not show his love for Absalom even though he longed for his son to return from exile.

By contrast, the story of Paul and Timothy in 1 and 2 Timothy shows many examples of unity between generations. This relationship is the story of mentoring and intergenerational work that made Timothy a respected leader and strong follower of Christ. For example:

- 2 Timothy 3:10-11 shows how Paul mentored Timothy and equipped him with the right knowledge and tools before releasing him into ministry and leadership.

- 1 Timothy 1:18 and 6:20 and 2 Timothy 1:6-7 show Paul, the mentor, giving clear instructions and guidelines so Timothy, the student, knew exactly what to do.

- 1 Timothy 5:1-4 gives a clear indication that Paul advised Timothy to relate to the different groups and generations in the church, instead of running a one-man show or working only with the youth.

- 1 Timothy 6:20-21, 2 Timothy 3:14-16, and 2 Timothy 4:1-5: Paul could not stress more the importance that Timothy stay true to the teachings of Jesus Christ. He sees the importance of appointing young leaders who are sound in the knowledge of the Bible, who live with integrity, and who are passionate about teaching the gospel. Paul does not want older persons choosing their successors based only on relationship, popular choice, or charisma.

In both 1 and 2 Timothy, we see how Paul mentored Timothy for leadership by imitation. That is, Paul offered himself as an example to young Timothy. Paul could do this because he had no disjunction between his beliefs and his practice.

Mentoring is possible only where there is congruence between the way we talk and the way we walk. Young people are ready to respect and follow leaders of integrity.

The wishing tree

Ask the youth or a young adult group in the church to create a "wishing tree" (see photos). The tree is made up of the wishes young people have for the ideal church, written on paper shaped like fruit or leaves. These get glued on a tree trunk, which can be displayed in the main auditorium during WFS 2011.

Worshippers would be encouraged to "adopt a wish," that is, pray for a specific wish on the tree. The tree should also include blank leaves or fruits on which senior members of the church could put words of encouragement as well as their wishes for the church.

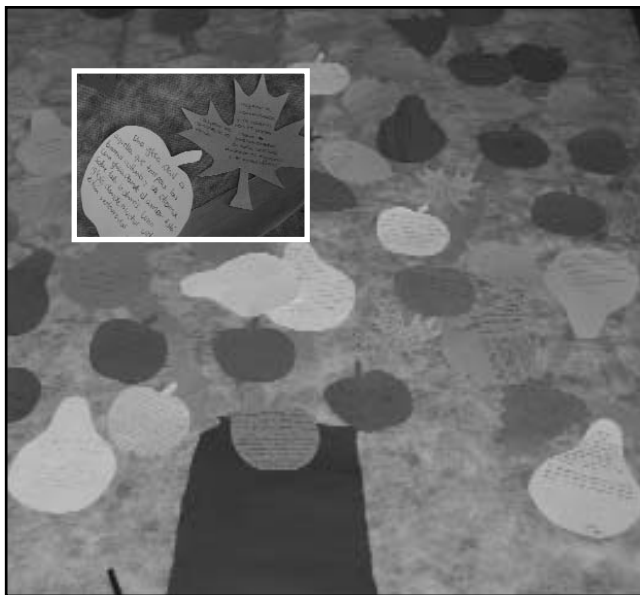




photo by Titus Guenther

Roberto Saez (left) pastor of the Lota Mennonite Church near Concepción, Chile, joins Boris Fuentealba (right) in surveying where Boris' house stood before the February 27 earthquake.

Mennonites in Sange hit hard by Congo fuel truck disaster

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo—A major explosion from an overturned fuel truck on July 2, 2010, has directly affected a Mennonite Brethren congregation in Sange, South Kivu Province.

Some 250 people were killed and over 300 hospitalized with serious injuries as a result of the explosion. According to Mennonite pastor Charles Mbuyi of the provincial capital city of Bukavu, 51 of the dead and another 50 injured were from the Mennonite Brethren congregation in Sange.

Congo's Protestant church umbrella, the Église du Christ au Congo (ECC, translated Church of Christ of Congo), reported that UN agencies, the Congo Red Cross, and the International Committee of the Red Cross all responded quickly with the evacuation of the injured. It also noted that 20 homes were destroyed in the fire, numerous children have lost both parents, and many survivors are suffering from

psychological trauma.

The ECC includes the three Mennonite denominations in the Congo, all members of MWC.

Sisca Mawangu Ibanda, a member of MWC's Executive Committee and the Congo Mennonite Brethren Church (CEPMC), visited Sange 19 days after the disaster. In addition to the physical desolation of the scene, she reported the "trauma that one can see on the faces of the inhabitants. They have clearly been overcome by the dimensions of the tragedy."

Sisca notes that "the church district has been sensitive and responsive to the tragedy; it has taken the initiative of mobilizing members to contribute to a fund to help the sisters and brothers of Sange who have been affected by the catastrophe."

She urges the worldwide Anabaptists church to be in prayer for the people of Sange.—*From reports and an interview by Tim Lind, MWC Church-to-Church Relations staff*

Six months after earthquake:

Chilean Mennonites rebuilding houses, lives in hard-hit area

Strasbourg, France—Six months after the February 27, 2010, earthquake that devastated their country, Mennonite churches in Chile have been involved in mutual aid among members and in witness to their communities.

One of the worst-hit congregations was the Lota Mennonite church, about 500 kilometers (300 miles) south of the capital Santiago, and in the region near the city of Concepción in central Chile, where the earthquake struck the hardest. More than 400 people died in the 8.8 magnitude quake, although no Mennonite members were among them.

According to Lota pastor Roberto Saez, the congregation is rebuilding the homes of four families of the congregation who lived on a hillside full of wooden houses.

The congregation is also repairing their meeting house, which suffered some damage. Some church buildings in the town, Saez reported, had been "totally destroyed."

On vacation. In Concepción itself, many members of the Puerta del Rebaño church were away on vacation at the time of the quake. Some returned and helped with local emergency medical care, while others facilitated aid efforts from where they were, unable to travel.

Reconstruction work for the Puerta del Rebaño church went beyond houses and church buildings. One member, Felipe Elgueta, reported that the church's "Spontaneous Theatre"

troupe performed in four communities devastated by the quake. "The theatre became a place of encounter," Elgueta said, "not in order to escape from what happened, but to share experiences in a place of trust." Besides drama, the troupe offered healing activities of drawing, story telling and lament."

New aid forms. In the weeks that followed the quake, Elgueta also noted that "new forms of aid developed." One Puerta del Rebaño member worked with a local child advocacy organization to put young offenders to work, providing recreational activities for children affected by the quake.

"The one thing we ask from the global Anabaptist church is to pray for Chile," wrote Pastor Samuel Tripainao, general secretary of the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita de Chile (IEMCH), to MWC staff. "We believe that after all the shaking and rocking of the earth, God will visit our nation in new ways."

The Lota church is one of a dozen congregations that belong to the IEMCH, which has applied for MWC membership. The Puerta del Rebaño church is an independent Mennonite congregation that has a separate history but is developing ties with other Mennonites.

The IEMCH and Puerta del Rebaño both sent delegations to the MWC assembly in Paraguay last year and are involved in the Southern Cone Congress, a regional association of Mennonite churches.



Sithabile Ndlovu

Death of young African shocks global community

Strasbourg, France—Sithabile Ndlovu, a 2008-2009 YAMEN! participant from Zimbabwe, died suddenly on Sunday, May 9, in Johannesburg, South Africa after a brief illness. She had been hospitalized the previous night.

Last August, Sithabile completed her year-long term with YAMEN!, a joint MWC-MCC program for young adults. She worked in Bolivia with Centro Menno programs in Santa Cruz, which provides services to Low German-speaking Mennonites in rural areas.

Sithabile attended MWC's Assembly 15 in Paraguay last July. Young adults, shocked at the news of her sudden death, recalled her keen engagement in the Global Youth Summit which preceded the assembly.

Barbara Kärcher, a GYS leader from Germany, reports of her delight to attend and graduate from college with the help of a former teacher.

She also shared with Barbara the joy of her experience in Bolivia, her fear of returning to the poverty and unsettled situation in her country and also of her loneliness, since both parents had died. She had been staying with her brother in South Africa for the past months.

'A good gesture'

MWC gives \$50,000 gift to Assembly 15 hosts

Strasbourg, France—Presidents of the eight Mennonite conferences who together hosted Paraguay 2009 have decided to share equally a \$50,000 gift from Mennonite World Conference.

MWC officers decided last October to use part of a positive fund balance following the global assembly to express gratitude to the Paraguayans for their generous hospitality. Danisa Ndlovu, MWC president, and Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, sent a letter to the presidents of each conference to inform them of the \$50,000 gift, giving the conferences the freedom to decide how to use it.

The people who had worked together to plan the assembly had finished their work, so it became the responsibility of the conference leaders to decide how to use the money.

Ernst Bergen, MWC treasurer from Asunción, asked Theodor Unruh to initiate contact with the other leaders.

"It was not very easy to

come to a common accord, but we tried to do it in the best way possible," said Theodor. "Each conference leader talked about the gift and its use in his respective conference board."

The eight leaders, from very diverse conferences, had different ideas. In the end, they agreed to split the money equally, with each conference receiving \$6,250.

Five of the conferences decided to use half of their share for their own projects and pool the other half to support Rancho Alegre, a camp about 50 kilometers east of Asunción. It is the one institution that the five conferences own jointly.

They use the camp for retreats for schools, youth, other church groups and Christian institutions.

Each of the three participating Indigenous conferences, which were particularly moved by the gift, will use their \$6,250 for their own projects, yet to be announced.

"We want to say thank

you for the good gesture of MWC for sending this gift to the Paraguayan conferences. It is a recognition for the work and effort that the churches and conferences put into planning and preparing for the [global] assembly," said Theodor.

The eight hosting conferences and their leaders are: Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet (Walter Ortiz); Convención Iglesias Evangélicas Hermanos Menonitas Nivacle (Inocencio Galván); Convención de las Iglesias Evangélicas Unidas - Enlhet Paraguay (Nenito Vins); Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden von Paraguay (Ferdinand Friesen); Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas Hermanos Menonitas (Juan Silverio Verón); Convención Evangélica Menonita del Paraguay (Alfred Klassen); Iglesia Hermandad Evangélica Mennonite - Fidelfia (Arnold Boschmann); and Vereinigung der Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinden Paraguays (Theodor Unruh).

MWC treasurer Ernst Bergen (far right) meets with leaders of the Indigenous conferences that helped host Paraguay 2009 to talk about use of a \$50,000 gift from MWC.





photo by Gerry Keener

The 26 newly credentialed pastors and their wives sing a song of consecration after the ordination. At right is Pastor Trung.

Vietnam Mennonite Church ordains 26, launches pastoral training institute

Ho Chi Minh City—After what felt like a long, cold winter of hard work and preparation, the Vietnam Mennonite Church (VMC) is enjoying a lush springtime of growth and development that parallels the rapid economic and social development of the country.

Pastor Nguyen Quang Trung, chairman of the VMC, officiated at a joyful March 20 ceremony, graduating 30 students from an in-service pastoral training class and ordaining 26 Mennonite pastors who had come from provinces and cities all over Vietnam. The 30 graduates had been meeting one week per quarter for the past four years.

Trung had led a small group of faithful Mennonites during three decades when the church was not officially recognized by the government. This public celebration, in which government officials sent congratulations and colorful bouquets to the newly-credentialed leaders, moved him deeply.

More than 100 Mennonite leaders and lay believers joined the festivities, held in a large banquet hall near the church's headquarters. Pastor Nguyen

Minh Sang, general secretary of the denomination, led in an opening prayer of thanks to God for blessing the church. Vice-chair Nguyen Hong An led a period of worship.

In the ordination service, Trung charged the 26 pastors, all of whom had completed the certificate program and were serving in pastoral positions in Mennonite churches, to commit themselves fully to the work of the Lord. He urged them to share the gospel with godly passion.

One by one the pastors knelt to receive the blessing and charge. Commissioning them with the laying on of hands was Pastor Trung; Pastor Tuyen Nguyen; Pastor Jae Sun Lim; Pastor Lee; Gerry Keener, a non-resident missionary with Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM); and visiting Mennonite theologian Palmer Becker from Canada.

In his comments to the local press following the service, Trung said, "This event is very meaningful for the Mennonite church; it is really a springboard for the church to push forward and develop the Lord's work in all parts of Vietnam."

A third celebration came a

week later with the official opening of the Vietnam Mennonite Institute in Theology and Renewal. The new school, which offers a bachelor's degree program in theology, had just enrolled 14 students and finished its first week of classes. Becker, under special assignment by Mennonite Church Canada, and Keener collaborated to teach "The Biblical Story" as the first course in the new bachelor's level program.

Pastor Sang reported that the VMC now has 90 local churches and about 8,500 members with 140 pastors and evangelists across the country. He said, "We are relying on God to lead in new and stronger steps to develop his work in the days ahead. My prayer is that the Mennonite Church will develop even faster than the country of Vietnam!"—*adapted from an EMM release by Jewel Showalter*

The Vietnam Mennonite Church

Mennonite Central Committee from North America first entered Vietnam in 1954, followed by workers with Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) in 1957. A Mennonite church in that country grew to around 150 baptized members before being closed in 1978. The missionaries all left in 1975.

For the next 15 years, without contact with North America, Nguyen Quang Trung kept the vision of a Mennonite church alive, and he repeatedly attempted to register the church with the government.

In 1997, EMM workers Gerry and Donna Keener went to Vietnam and began to connect with Mennonite leaders and churches for fellowship and leadership training while they worked in administration and teaching at the Saigon South International School.

Then in 2007, when the Vietnamese government officially recognized the Vietnam Mennonite Church, the doors opened for the church legally to organize its own leadership training schools.

Ministries come of age in Ecuador

Quito, Ecuador—A celebration here in March 2010 marked the 10th anniversary of the Ecuador Partnership, a collaboration that brings together the Central Plains Mennonite Conference of Mennonite Church USA, *Iglesia Cristiana Menonita de Colombia* (Mennonite Church of Colombia)—both MWC member churches—and Mennonite Mission Network (MMN), an agency of Mennonite Church USA.

During the week of celebrations, members of the Mennonite churches in Riobamba and Quito hosted a fellowship-and-work team to Ecuador. The visitors from Colombia and the United States attended partnership business meetings, worshiped with an indigenous church in San Antonio, met with refugee families who have fled violence in neighboring Colombia, visited the seminary, and heard stories of peacemaking.

In 2000, the Colombian Mennonite Church sent Urueña and César Moyo to serve through the Ecuador Partnership. During the celebrations, Urueña cited a series of milestones as she reflected on the past 10 years of partnership activities:

- establishing a relationship of trust with Indigenous people, resulting in an invitation to train church leaders;
- building a vibrant congregation in the capital city;
- planting a congregation in the Riobamba mountains;
- multiplying Anabaptist believers through teaching in seminaries and workshops;
- assisting refugees.

"Sometimes we think we should stop with the dreaming, but God is always giving us visions and ideas," said César.

In addition to supporting Indigenous church leaders with theological training and planting churches, César and Urueña have provided vision and leadership to various other ministries, including loans for small businesses and *Edu-Paz*, a collaborative project with neighborhood and school officials to help children learn positive values and conflict-resolution skills.

Since 2008, César and Urueña also have taught courses on peacemaking themes at *Seminario Sudamericano*, a Pentecostal seminary that draws students from many Latin American countries.—*from an MMN report by Holly Blosser Yoder with Lynda Hollinger Janzen*



MWC has named Byron Rempel-Burkholder (left) as replacement for retiring news service editor, Ferne Burkhardt (right).

Burkhardt retires as news service editor; Rempel-Burkholder named replacement

Strasbourg, France—After nine years of collecting information and writing news releases for MWC, Ferne Burkhardt, Petersburg, Ontario, Canada, retired as MWC news service editor in mid-June.

Replacing her is another Canadian—Byron Rempel-Burkholder, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

During her tenure as news editor, the volume of news stories about MWC circulated to media outlets and interested persons worldwide grew from about 40 to more than 70 in some years, Ferne reports, in reflecting on her nine years of service.

"The volume depended on what was happening," she says. "During assembly years, there was a tremendous amount of material; other years not so much."

Ferne served on the MWC staff as a volunteer. "I never kept track of time," she said, "but did what needed to be done whenever I had the time to do it. If that meant staying up until 3:00 a.m., that was okay."

What did she like best about those nine years? "The wonderful people from around the world. Meeting

them has been an amazing experience, beyond anything I could ever have imagined."

"MWC is extremely indebted to Ferne for her diligence and the skills she has brought to the task," says Larry Miller, MWC's general secretary. "At a time when the scope and activities of MWC were continually expanding, she was able to keep abreast of developments and report them in a way that Anabaptists around the world could understand and appreciate."

MWC's new editor, Byron Rempel-Burkholder, comes to his task with a wealth of international, communication, and church experience.

Born in 1957 in Ethiopia, his family moved to Canada when he was 13. He acquired degrees in English and New Testament and also served two congregations as pastor.

As a young adult, Byron spent time in Congo with the Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions and Services.

Returning to Canada, Byron edited curriculum and worship resources for several Mennonite groups in North America. He was the founding editor of *Leader* maga-

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zine for Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. Recently he was named book editor of Herald Press, and he continues as editor of *Rejoice!*, an inter-Mennonite devotional magazine. All assignments, as well as his work with MWC, are part time.

"I think I always imagined that some day I would work for MWC," Byron says. "That's because this work is a convergence of many things in my life: third culture kid, journalism, publishing, church, and my cross-cultural interest."

As part of his work as MWC editor, Rempel-Burkholder will also take over responsibilities for MWC's quarterly publication, *Courier-Correo-Courier*, when the current editor, J. Lorne Peachey, retires later this year.



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'I choose to be grateful'

by Ferne Burkhardt

Mennonite World Conference first carved out a spot in my memory when the 7th MWC assembly was held in Kitchener, Ontario, near my home, in August 1962. This first gathering in Canada was billed as the most representative in the 437-year history of Anabaptists.

Planners projected 8,000 registrants, but the final count reached 12,207!

Daily attendance was in the 7,000 range, with more than 10,000 at Sunday services. They came from 23 of the 30 countries which then had 400,000 Anabaptists.

As a member of a hosting conference in 1962, I had little time to attend worship services or other events. My most vivid memory is of crowds of mostly white people milling about asking questions, but the singing that filtered down to the information desk where I worked sounded wonderful.

In 1978, our family drove in a car with no air-conditioning to Wichita, Kansas, USA, where temperatures reached 109° F (42.5° C) during our second MWC assembly experience. This time, with no responsibilities, I revelled in the feast of activities. I never imagined then I would eventually be MWC's volunteer news editor decades later.

Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, offered me that position in 2001. He knew I had recently retired from work with a Canadian Mennonite newspaper. Larry requested a quick answer, since the news editor needed to be at the MWC Executive Committee meeting in a few weeks. When I spoke to my pastor, he chuckled, "So you begin with a trip to Germany? That's a tough decision."

It wasn't. I said yes. It has been my privilege to be part of MWC's communication team for nine years. Meeting and now calling "friends" some of the most dedicated and gifted women and men who are leaders in the global Anabaptist Church has been a delight and a blessing. I have also been inspired by ordinary folk like the man eking out a living

in Zimbabwe who said to me, "I choose to be grateful."

As part of the MWC team, I have had rich rewards. Participating as a staff person in two more global assemblies, in Zimbabwe in 2003 and Paraguay in 2009, has been a special bonus. Global gatherings are important in building community and must continue, but discerning and facilitating God's mission around the world between those spectacular events are at least as important.

It is still common to be asked, "Where will the next Mennonite World Conference be held?" Ten years ago, with limited understanding of the scope of MWC's work, I might have asked such a question. To observe how MWC operates in numerous places in dozens of astounding ways between assemblies has been a joy, and reporting its work has been a challenge. News service may have helped raise awareness of that work both within and beyond the global Anabaptist communion, and I trust it will continue to do so.

In the last decade, MWC has experienced an explosion of new initiatives: the "Shared Convictions" statement; a Global Anabaptist Shelf of Literature; a five-volume Global History Project; new commissions; Koinonia delegations to support member churches under duress; Global Gifts Sharing; dialogues with other world communions; a multilingual web page—the list goes on. It has been a privilege to be a part of the team as these changes have developed.

MWC has changed profoundly since 1962, mostly in the past few years. From the 400,000 Anabaptists in 30 countries then, numbers in 2009 have soared to more than 1.6 million baptized members in 80 countries around the world. Change will continue, possibly in unimagined ways, as MWC perseveres in responding to its call "to be [a] communion (koinonia) of Anabaptist-related churches linked to one another in a worldwide community of faith for fellowship, worship, service, and witness."

Soli Deo gloria.

What happened in heaven on July 22?

by Larry Miller, MWC general secretary

*Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.
And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*
—Matthew 16:19, 18:18

Mennonite World Conference called the Lutheran and Anabaptist-Mennonite events in Stuttgart, Germany, on July 22, 2010, a fulfillment of the “rule of Christ.” It was, we said, an essential experience of being “church”: binding and loosing, seeking and granting forgiveness, renewing relationships in the body of Christ.

But what really happened in Stuttgart on that day? What did we bind? What did we loose?

In Jesus’ time, binding and loosing referred to the rabbinic practice of determining how to apply scriptural commandments in contemporary situations. To bind an old commandment meant to declare it applicable in a new context and to show how it was so. To loose an established prescription meant to declare it inapplicable in current circumstances and to explain why it was so.

The Gospels show Jesus binding and loosing numerous times. For example, he binds the commandment to “love your neighbor,” applying it not only to friends but also to “enemies,” appealing to the example of God, who does good both to the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:43-48). He looses the prohibition against work on the Sabbath in the name of “mercy” (Matthew 12:1-9).

The element of mercy adds new meaning to the entire process. When a “sin” is identified (bound), it is so that the “sinner” can be freed (loosed) through repentance and forgiveness (Matthew 18:15-19). With Jesus, loosing seems to mean not only declaring a law or tradition inapplicable but predominantly also with granting forgiveness.

So what happened in Stuttgart?

Painfully aware of our own need for forgiveness, MWC representatives loosed (forgave) the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) communion of churches from that which they so voluntarily, vulnerably, and movingly confessed:

- the harm their forebears in the 16th century committed against Anabaptists;
- forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries;
- all inappropriate, misleading, and hurtful portraits of

Anabaptists and Mennonites by Lutheran authors.

Gratefully aware of the power of God to renew relationships when those involved agree to ask for it, LWF and MWC representatives together bound (affirmed) specific commitments from each communion about the future of our common life in the body of Christ and our service in the world (see pp. 4-6).

Undergirding the Stuttgart experience was an historic and foundational process of Lutherans binding and loosing the content of their own most authoritative confession of faith, the Augsburg Confession. While they did this in the context of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission—and thus in dialogue with the MWC delegation—the hardest, most self-critical, and most crucial work was Lutheran work.

In *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ, Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission*, Lutherans state that even though Martin Luther and other reformers “emphasized so strongly the distinction between Scripture and human traditions, they shared some convictions with their contemporaries that Lutherans today would consider to contradict the gospel.” In the light of Scripture (which is binding), these convictions must be rejected (loosed). For example, the reformers’ conviction that Christians should call for or accept “the intervention of state authorities in matters of faith must be rejected for all time.”

Similarly, in the light of historical research, the Lutheran delegation concluded that most of the condemnations of Anabaptist doctrine in the Augsburg Confession are not valid (loosed). They are based on “erroneous judgments about what 16th century Anabaptists believed and practiced.” Only those dealing with Anabaptist positions on baptism and church / state relations raise issues that require further fraternal conversation.

Did what happened in Stuttgart on July 22 happen also in heaven?

In a letter I received later from LWF general secretary Ishamel Noko, he wrote: “From the time I spoke to your MWC Assembly in Paraguay in 2009, it was evident to us that this movement of repentance and healing had a capacity for transformation in our churches which was greater than we had anticipated when the study commission began its work — and in Stuttgart it was clear that we were witnessing God’s work toward unity and reconciliation.”

I can only join my voice to Ishmael’s, and say “Thanks be to God.”