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A common literature of core

by Merle Good

A rich and diverse wisdom is present within our global family of faith. But how do our churches have access to the inspirational understandings, experiences, and practices within our fellowships around the world? How can our congregations and conferences be enriched by these sources of life scattered in many other places?

One Mennonite World Conference (MWC) project is making such an exchange and enrichment possible. Each year MWC selects a book for the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature on a subject of particular interest to member churches.

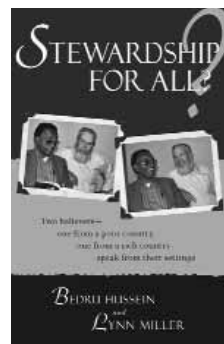
This book or booklet of the year may have been published first in any one of the languages spoken within the Anabaptist-related fellowships found in 75 countries around the world. Or sometimes MWC commissions a book to be written or adapted for the Global Shelf.

These annual titles also function as a kind of “glue,” contributing to common understandings and convictions held by Anabaptist-Mennonite groups worldwide.

In order for these books to be widely read and studied, MWC encourages fellowships around the world to translate

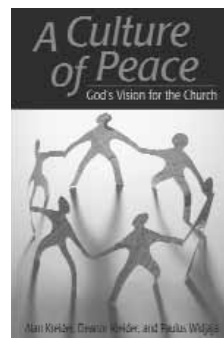
them into their own languages, and then distribute them to their own members. At this point, efforts are underway to have each title available in 16 languages. Funding and effective distribution are continuing hurdles in many places.

To date, five books have been published in the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf. The five and the years they were selected for the shelf are:



2006: *Stewardship for All? Two believers—one from a poor country and one from a rich—speak from their settings*, by Bedru Hussein and Lynn Miller

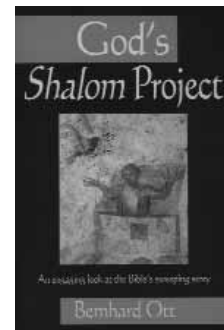
Does stewardship have a place in our world? Everywhere and in all circumstances? Two leaders—an Ethiopian and an American—look at the subject honestly, finding its origins and proposing possible practices. A group of stories concludes the book.



2005: *A Culture of Peace: God's Vision for the Church*, by Alan Kreider, Eleanor Kreider, and Paulus Widjaja

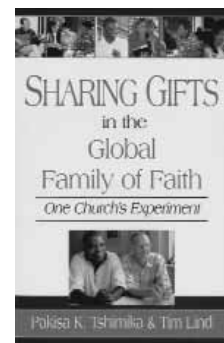
Why is peace such a divisive issue, even among Christians? Why is peace so hard to

practice right here right now? Why is peace often considered an extra, rather than an essential, to faithful Christian living? True stories from communities around the world support this hopeful but strenuous call.



2004: *God's Shalom Project: An engaging look at the Bible's sweeping story*, by Bernhard Ott

This book looks at the biblical story, especially focusing on God as a gracious parent, intent on a restored relationship with humans. “God wants a Shalom people,” a community of the faithful who together love God and each other, and then live in the world within that strength.



2003: *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith: One Church's Experiment*, by Pakisa K. Tshimika and Tim Lind

As the “center” of Christianity has moved south to Africa, Asia, and Latin America, what gifts can churches in different parts of the world share with each other? How do we overcome the real obstacles that obstruct this essential part of being the church?

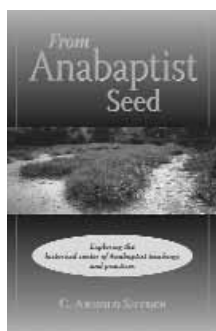
Cover: Courier / Correo / Courier focuses this issue on *stewardship and taking care of the resources God has given us. That includes more than money, but it also includes money! Money, generous amounts of it, is what made possible MWC's Assembly 14 at Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in 2003, from which comes the cover photo for this issue.*

photo by Wilhelm Unger

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beliefs



2002: *From Anabaptist Seed: Exploring the historical center of Anabaptist teachings and practices*, by C. Arnold Snyder

This book addresses what it means to believe and act as Anabaptists

today, not only in thousands of different local settings but also as a global family of faith. It looks at what distinguishes Anabaptists' beliefs and practices.

English editions are available of all five books published to date in the Global Mennonite / Anabaptist Literature Shelf.

United States: Good Books, PO Box 419, Intercourse, PA 17534; (1) 800-762-7171; www.GoodBooks.com.

Canada: Pandora Book Shop, 33 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R2; (1) 866-696-1678; www.pandorapress.com.

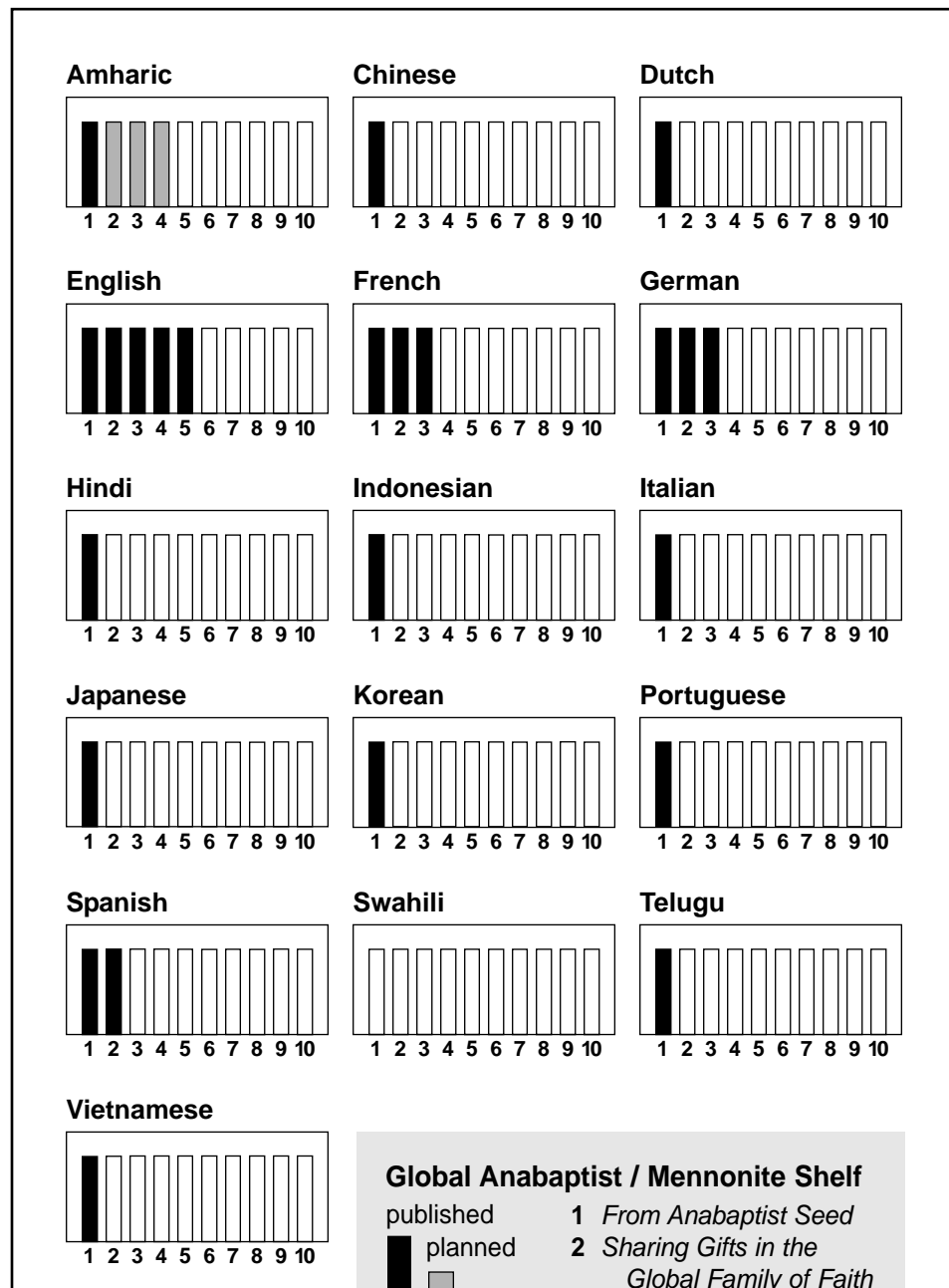
Other language editions:

1. *From Anabaptist Seed*

French: Graines d'anabaptisme, Editions Mennonites, 3 Route de Grand-Charmont, 25000 Montbéliard, France (33) 381 94 59 14; editions.mennonites@wanadoo.fr

German: Täuferische Saat – Weltweites Wachstum, Neufeld Verlag, VdK-Str. 21, 92521 Schwarzenfeld, Germany; (49) 94 35 50 24 49; info@neufeld-verlag.de

Spanish: De Semilla Anabautista, Pandora Book Shop, 33 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3R2; (01) 866-696-1678; www.pandorapress.com.



Global Anabaptist / Mennonite Shelf

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| published | 1 <i>From Anabaptist Seed</i> |
| planned | 2 <i>Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith</i> |
| | 3 <i>God's Shalom Project</i> |
| | 4 <i>A Culture of Peace</i> |
| | 5 <i>Stewardship for All?</i> |

2. *Sharing Gifts ...*

French: Dons de chacun au service de tous

Editions Mennonites, 3 Route de Grand-Charmont, 25000 Montbéliard, France (33) 381 94 59 14; editions.mennonites@wanadoo.fr

German: Teilen, was wir sind und haben, Neufeld Verlag, VdK-Str. 21, 92521 Schwarzenfeld, Germany; (49) 94 35/50 24 49; info@neufeld-verlag.de

Spanish: Compartiendo Dones en la Familia Global de la Fe, Ediciones Clara-Semilla, Apartado Aéreo 57 527, Bogotá D.C., Colombia; clara_semilla@etb.net.co

3. *God's Shalom Project*

German: Schalom – das Projekt Gottes, Neufeld Verlag, VdK-Str. 21, 92521 Schwarzenfeld, Germany; (49) 94 35 50 24 49; info@neufeld-verlag.de

French: Shalom, le projet de Dieu, Editions Mennonites, 3 Route de Grand-Charmont, 25000 Montbéliard, France (33) 381 94 59 14; editions.mennonites@wanadoo.fr

Why stewardship?

by Phyllis Pellman Good

Our settings and our circumstances affect what we hear Jesus and the Bible say. The 2006 selection for the Global Anabaptist / Mennonite Shelf of Literature, *Stewardship for All?* brings together two voices from two vastly different parts of the world to talk about the subject of stewardship—opening the subject to more light for us and our churches, no matter where we are in the world.

Take Ethiopia (Bedru Hussein's home) and the prosperous parts of North America (Lynn Miller's home). We may be sisters and brothers in our Christian faith, but our exposure to the matter of stewardship—and then our experiences with practicing it—couldn't be at greater extremes. Look at our different standards of living, our vastly different income levels, our cultural frameworks, our histories.

The Bible has many references to stewardship. But we hear different emphases, depending upon who we are and where we are.

Two voices come together in this book. The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia realized that they had under-taught and under-experienced stewardship when political circumstances within their country changed during the early 1990s. In addition, North American Mennonite churches, who had supplied personnel

and funding to the MKC, were phasing out both. The Ethiopian church was faced with wobbly finances in a destitute economy.

And so, MKC leadership asked one of their own, Bedru Hussein, to prepare a teaching, study guide for their congregations. It was a basic booklet, laying out the biblical case for stewardship, and then suggesting highly practical and specific ways for helping the ideas to work. An adaptation of that booklet, first published in 1998 in Ethiopia, makes up Part 1 of this book.

Lynn Miller has developed a reputation for speaking about this subject throughout Mennonite churches. It's his conviction that many faithful Christians have forgotten or lost sight of the pure gift that lies behind this whole subject. In Part 2 of this book, he goes straight to the biblical text to unearth the fresh energy that has kept this ideal alive for centuries, despite the way it's been treated. Lynn, like Bedru, hopes that this book will be helpful to churches in all parts of the world, no matter their circumstances or settings.

Consider the voices of these two brothers from different parts of the family of faith. They offer to the whole church around the world what they've discovered anew in the texts written first to the youthful churches—some impoverished, some prosperous—scattered around the Mediterranean and Aegean seas.

A group of stories in Part 3 shows how some churches, and individual members, practice stewardship throughout our global family of faith.

The book concludes with a series of discussion questions, making it a resource for small groups, Sunday school classes, and weekend retreats.

Phyllis Pellman Good and her husband Merle are publishers of Good Books, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, USA. They also serve as MWC communication consultants.



Making

by Bedru Hussein

1. Create a foundation. As people become Christians and begin to participate in Christian activities, they need to be taught stewardship principles as part of living faithfully. These principles will then become part of what Christians expect to do.

Stewardship classes need to be held regularly and ongoing for all ages in the church. Unless tended constantly, the practice of stewardship is likely to decline. Members need to be taught the discipline of routinely asking themselves:

- Who am I?
- To whom am I responsible?
- Why should I give to the church?
- How much should I give?
- Does it matter how I spend the money that I don't give to the church?

The three articles on these two pages are excerpted from the 2006 selection for the Global Anabaptist / Mennonite Shelf of Literature, Stewardship for All?

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photo by Merle Good

Responding to God's generosity

by Lynn Miller

We can show our thankfulness by being generous with what we have been given. Now that may not make a lot of common sense. A person who receives a gift, and then goes about giving it away to others, isn't always thought of as a wise person.

For example, I pastored a church that had a fund which was used to assist people who were having financial diffi-

Bedru Hussein, Ethiopia (left), and Lynn Miller, United States, authors of the 2006 selection for the Global Anabaptist-Mennonite Shelf of Literature, Stewardship for All?

culty. One day a woman came to the church office to ask for help because she had run out of money and had no food in her house to feed her family. We immediately put together a box of food staples from our own food pantry at the church, and then I took her shopping for the perishable items that she needed. We went to her home where I helped her unload the groceries that she had received.

About a week later I received an angry telephone call from a neighbor of that woman, a man who informed me that we were being foolish for giving food to her. When I asked why he thought so, he replied that the woman to whom we had given food was giving it away. "How needy can she be," he thundered, "if she is giving away what we gave to her?" What kind of thanks is that, he wondered, when a person takes a gift she herself needed and gives some of it away to someone else?

The next time I was in town I visited the woman we had given food to and asked her how things were going. She told me that she was doing better now, but that her neighbor needed some help. Her neighbor was a widow who was living on a very small income, and, to make matters worse, she was too embarrassed to ask for assistance. So the woman we had given food to had shared her food with her neighbor.

I thought about my conversation with the fellow on the phone, and his observation that we were being foolish to give food to someone who was passing it on to someone else. I could only conclude that not only were we doing the right thing by giving this woman food, we should have been giving her even more because she was sharing it with those who could not ask on their own. Our generosity created the possibility of her generosity.

it practical

A church which regularly works at these issues together develops a shared sense of responsibility and mission within its congregations. Members will be informed practitioners of stewardship, and they will understand by experience how vital it is to their lives.

Remember—such faithful commitment and practice can happen only if a systematic and consistent stewardship education program is established within congregations.

2. Leaders must give. Because humans learn by example, church leaders need to be in the forefront of Christian giving. Their giving needs to be regular and faithful. In Ethiopia there is a saying, "If the king goes bending, the people also bend and go like-wise."

Church leaders are respected and watched. They need to set the precedent. Members will be only as faithful

as their leaders are. In the MKC, only those persons who practice tithing and stewardship (according to church records) are eligible for church leadership positions.

3. Financial accountability is essential. Regular written reports need to be distributed to the members, giving an accounting of the money their congregation has both collected and spent. Regular opportunities need to be established for the members to interact with the leadership regarding the money which has been collected and spent. Then members will know whether their church is on schedule regarding its budget plans.

This kind of reporting establishes transparency and credibility, and it gives the entire church a sense of working together in achieving its agreed-upon goals.

Stewardship is increasing joy, not reducing wealth

Three reflections from different parts of the globe about what it means to take care of the resources that God has given to each one of his disciples.

What my wife Daisy and I understand by stewardship is the Christian way of managing our money. This means deciding how much of our money we spend for our own needs and how much we spare for serving the Lord and giving to others in need.

We practice stewardship by tithing and supporting various ministries, such as church-building projects, evangelism, and charities, either through our local church or other agencies. We also sometimes support friends or others who really need financial support for such things as medical bills (health insurance is not common in Indonesia), children's education, or simply to enable them to survive or to start a small business.

Usually we learn about these necessities through the church bulletins and announcements, personal talks, sharing, or emails. Our financial support is, of course, based on our capacity and also on our heart—that is, whether we feel sure God wants us to give or not, considering there are so many projects and people to support.

We also know there are many other brothers and sisters who are also able and willing to support others financially. Giving money as an act of ministry or charity is not tax-deductible in our country.

For us, tithing from our regular income is not yet giving. Contributions after tithing is what we call giving.

Whenever God blesses us with more than our regular income, we spare at

least 10% for various other ministries, and we put the money in a special "Ministry Account." We had experienced some amazing moments when God let us use the money for unexpected purposes, such as paying for paintings of a friend who needed money so badly for his heart surgery, or supporting a university teacher who has been lying in the hospital for months.

Our local church (GKMI "Anugerah" in Jakarta) has practiced stewardship with close to 25% of its income by supporting evangelism (at home and abroad), opening new church branches, giving scholarships, and various charity projects in both the congregation and the community.

Even while our church is currently in a project to expand our building, the congregation has committed to give 10% of the project fund-raising income to other GKMI church-building projects in various parts of Indonesia.

God has been blessing our church abundantly. Giving more never reduces our wealth; it increases our joy!

—*Eddy Sutjipto, Jakarta, Indonesia.*
Eddy represents Asia and the Pacific on the MWC Executive Committee.

In the Bible, Jesus used the subject of stewardship to illustrate various aspects of the Christian life. A steward was understood to be a person who was given responsibility for possessions which belonged to the master (Luke 12:41-48; Luke 16:1-12). Jesus taught that every true disciple is expected to be a good steward.

But if there is to be a steward, there must be a master or owner.

The master and owner of all things is the Creator, God. He is Lord of heaven and earth and everything that is found therein (Roman 11:36). The

world, the land, all cattle and wild life, gold and silver, and even our bodies—all belong to him (Psalms 21:1, Leviticus 25:23, Psalms 50:10-12, Haggai 2:8, 1 Corinthians 6:14-20).

Every true disciple of Christ accepts the Lordship of Christ over everything that he is and has and agrees to care for it as a good steward in a manner which pleases the master.

While stewardship refers to many different areas of our lives, in Zimbabwe it affects how we use our possessions, especially in relation to our giving to the church. It is our understanding that one of the master's wishes is that we should give at least a tithe to the work and ministry of the church.

Many church members have learned to give a tithe of what they have, as was done in the Old Testament. This is true in spite of spiraling costs of living due to an inflation rate of approximately 1300%. Their tithe includes livestock, maize, millet, sorghum, fruit, handcrafts, and money.

At one general conference, the offering included eight head of cattle, two donkeys, three goats, eighteen chickens, sixteen bags of maize, a knitted sweater, other handcraft items, and cash gifts.

At one of our district leaders' meetings, Pastor Naka Gininda Ndlovu, gave the following testimony: "Every year the Lord blesses me greatly. I always give him a tithe of my crops. Even if I get less than 10 bags of maize, I give him a full bag. Many of my neighbours have asked what kind of manure I use in my fields, which produces bountifully nearly every year. I tell them that 'God is my manure.' I give to him as his Word says, and he always blesses me."

This same spirit of giving is frequently seen in the way people respond when hearing about a member of the community or church who has experi-

enced loss. Even those who do not have much give freely and joyfully to assist those in need.

The church in Zimbabwe has learned the meaning of true Christian stewardship and the blessings which come from being good stewards of the master's possessions and obediently bringing what the master wishes into his storehouse (Malachi 3:7-10).

—*Jacob R. Shenk, former bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church of Zimbabwe, is now regional administrator for BIC World Missions for Southern Africa.*

Christian stewardship begins with an understanding that everything belongs to God. Our finances, health, skills and abilities, spiritual gifts, the earth, the church, and our relationships are all gifts from God.

Christian stewardship means being faithful managers of all that we've been given from God, caring for these resources, thanking God for them, and using them for good ends—to serve others, to glorify God, and to build God's kingdom.

Jesus Christ saves us from bondage to possessions and helps us not to hoard or hide our God-given resources, not to become arrogant, nor to use resources for our own selfish ends or in harmful ways.

When I was younger, stewardship sermons focused entirely on money. We were encouraged to give generously to the church and to help the less fortunate. This teaching, plus my commitment to follow the example of Jesus' compassion, are the reason that my husband and I are very deliberate in giving our material resources to God.

Over time, my understanding of stewardship has expanded. I realize that the sacred and the secular are interconnected. As a result, I do such things as caring for the earth by reduc-



photo by Laurie Oswald Robinson

ing pollution and by recycling. I steward my time by not filling it with so much busyness that I lose sight of God's presence in my life. I share my skills and life experiences with the church and the community through committee work, preaching, and other involvements with people.

Congregations in Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA are fortunate to have various teaching and worship materials that focus on

Sharing the gift of food at MWC's Assembly 14 in Zimbabwe. Sharing skills with the church and community is practicing faithful stewardship.

stewardship. We also have financial associations that nurture the church in Christ-centered giving and living.

—*Naomi Unger, Rabbit Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada. Naomi is a representative from North America on the MWC Executive Committee.*



Plans move ahead for finances and facilities for M

Asunción, Paraguay—Paraguayan Mennonites are eager to host Assembly 15, MWC's next global gathering July 13-19, 2009. Interest is expanding beyond the leadership of the eight Mennonite host conferences, and the people want to contribute substantially to the cost of the event.

These were the impressions of MWC officers and staff following a visit to that country. They were MWC treasurer Paul Quiring; Ray Brubacher, International Coordinator for the event; and Karen Martin Schiedel, MWC's financial manager.

During their visit, the three focused on financial projections and checked facilities and overall planning with the National Coordinating Council (NCC).

Schiedel notes that MWC expects to set a registration fee for internationals, to be adjusted according to each country's per capita Gross Domestic Product. They also hope to set a single registration fee for Paraguayans, but deciding where to peg that fee is a chal-

lenge since the level of wealth among Mennonites in that country ranges widely.

Paraguayans want to help with the cost of the assembly, Schiedel reports. At a meeting in Asunción with 12 Germanic business leaders, the MWC visitors were told: Give us—businesses, cooperatives, and conferences—a challenge. Ask us for a significant sum of money, and we will decide how to meet that challenge.

Later, representatives from several indigenous groups said they would set specific goals for their congregations and encourage individuals to begin now to save for the registration costs.

Different challenges: Planning for the next assembly has different challenges from those of 2003, Brubacher notes. Paraguay's economy is stable. Its currency, compared to the U.S. dollar, is strong, so exchange rates will offer little if any advantage to international guests. In 2003, the American dollar could buy ever increasing amounts of

Zimbabwean currency, but inflation constantly spiralled upwards and the country's instability kept offering new surprises to MWC planning.

A constant is the fact that to attend the global gathering will require sacrifices. "But will the financial sacrifices of wealthier participants be equal to the sacrifice of those with lower incomes?" asks Brubacher.

"The ideal for 2009, as it was in 2003, is to make it possible for all participants in Anabaptist-Mennonite-related churches in the host country who want to attend to be able to come," he says.

Brubacher expects the number of Canadian and German registrants to double from 2003 because of strong family connections. During the 20th century there were several surges of migration by Germanic Mennonites from Europe to Canada and Paraguay and subsequently between Canada and Paraguay.

According to the most recent data,



WC Assembly 15

there are 29,461 Mennonites in Paraguay. Of these, 22,940 or about 79% of the total, are baptized members of the eight conferences hosting Assembly 15: three Germanic, with 9,611; three indigenous, with 8,379 members; and two Latino, with 4,950 members.

Three groups working together: Each hosting conference has an equal voice on the NCC with three representatives. It is the first time the divergent conferences have worked together in this way. Twelve sub-committees will soon begin work and report to the NCC, which also includes a representative from the Global Youth Summit (AMIGOS) and MWC staff.

The MWC guests also visited the Paraguayan Chaco. "It was helpful to get the geographic and historical background of the different Mennonite communities and to see the faces of the people with whom we communicate in their own context," said Schiedel.

"Every group is excited and asking,

Centro Familiar de Adoración (CFA), currently under construction, will be the site of MWC's Assembly 15 in Asunción, Paraguay, in 2009. Above (left), a view of the new building from the outside. Right: MWC staff and members of the National Coordinating Council tour the 10,000-seat auditorium, where most of the Assembly events will be held.

"How do we participate?" she reported. They are all eager to do their part."

Brubacher has met with the NCC four times and will continue to attend their meetings twice a year until 2009.

Plans call for the MWC Executive Committee to meet in Asunción the first week of August 2007 to review plans and visit the projected site. The NCC will join this meeting for two days.

MWC's Assembly 15 will also include meetings of various other groups. These include the General Council, Peace Commission, Faith and Life Commission, Global Mission Fellowship, and AMIGOS.

Site chosen for global assembly

Asunción, Paraguay—The National Coordinating Council for MWC's next global assembly, scheduled to be held here in July 2009, has chosen a site for the large event.

Most activities will be held at the large Centro Familiar de Adoración (CFA), a 10,000-seat auditorium and school megachurch complex currently under construction.

In early 2004, Larry Miller, MWC General Secretary, and Ray Brubacher, International Coordinator for Assembly 15, had joined local hosts in assessing potential sites. The most viable venue seemed to be four contiguous football clubs in downtown Asunción. One club had the city's largest indoor arena, but there were no kitchen and dining facilities available to feed the participants.

At the suggestion of local Mennonites, the assessment team went to CFA and met with the energetic and charismatic lead pastor, Emilio Abreu, a member of the Paraguayan swim team to the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. Abreu assured the team that CFA would be happy to rent their facilities to the Mennonites.

Brubacher notes, "While holding the assembly in the Mennonite colonies in the Chaco was discussed, it never became a strong alternative to Asunción. There were no facilities large enough for the anticipated number of participants.

"The additional travel would complicate logistics and increase costs for international visitors," says Brubacher. "Given that the colonies are predominantly Germanic, the Paraguayans agreed that Asunción would be a more 'neutral' venue for the diverse ethnic groupings within the Mennonite church family in this country."

MWC staff and the National Coordinating Committee expect more than 6,000 to attend the assembly. Approximately that many attended Assembly 14 in Bulawayo in 2003.

MENNONITES IN PARAGUAY



photo by Burton Buller

Paraguay's First Lady:

Assembly will change ideas about Mennonites

Tampa, Florida, USA—Paraguay's First Lady has high hopes for the 2009 Mennonite World Conference assembly in her country.

For one thing, she expects it will put to rest any preconceptions that all Mennonites are blonde-haired and blue-eyed.

"People will be looking at us, and they'll see that being Mennonite is a faith issue," María Gloria Penayo de Duarte told an audience of 450 at the annual convention of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) held here November 2.

"When I introduce myself as a Mennonite, people ask me if I speak German, if I was born in the Chaco," Duarte said in her keynote address at MEDA. "People are often confused about this. The true evidence of being

a Mennonite is the faith. I'll be so happy in 2009 because then people in Paraguay will understand. When all Mennonites gather, from different cultures, they'll understand the true concept of what it means to embrace the Mennonite faith."

She said she was also excited by how the preparations are bringing Mennonites together as a team. "We have eight different Mennonite conventions [conferences] in Paraguay, but we're working together. It's beautiful to see the unity in the way we're working."

The teamwork will have a lasting effect, she added. "The deepening communion will be very enriching. It will help the church in Paraguay mature."

Duarte traced her own spiritual pil-

'Leaving a footprint'

Mennonites first came to Paraguay from Canada in the 1920s, wanting a place to live quietly without interference. For many years they succeeded, carving out a life of their own in the rugged Chaco where they originally settled. Over time their national presence has become more visible. Now, numbering some 30,000 baptized members, they are a vital part of the country's economic fabric, dominating industries such as dairy production.

They are also more visible in government, the country's First Lady said in an interview at the annual MEDA convention in Tampa, Florida, USA. Mennonites are playing a key role in her husband's efforts to elevate Paraguay economically and morally, said María Gloria Penayo de Duarte, wife of President Nicanor Duarte, and herself a

Paraguay's First Lady, María Gloria Penayo de Duarte (right), talks with Phyllis Pellman Good following a seminar on why Mennonites should come to her country for MWC's Assembly 15.

grimage, describing herself as a "daughter of God" and an "adopted Mennonite."

Her husband, current Paraguay president Nicanor Duarte, had just become the country's minister of education 12 years ago when she sensed a new spiritual longing. While she had been brought up with moral values, "there was a hole in my life. ... I didn't know the concept of a loving God," she said. "I gave my life to Jesus, and he became my rock."

In 1997 she was baptized and joined the Raices Mennonite Brethren Church in Asunción, where she attends regularly with her six children. Her husband also attends when his schedule allows.

—Wally Kroeker, *Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, editor of MEDA's Marketplace magazine.*

MENNONITES IN PARAGUAY

on Paraguayan culture, government

baptized member of a Mennonite congregation.

When her husband became president in 2003, “he really wanted to be an agent of change. Corruption had become a way of life. We had a culture of not paying taxes, of tax evasion,” she said.

“Part of this was probably also due to people’s lack of confidence in the government’s wise use of the money. Our country has the reputation of being an informal country. We started to help people understand the tax system, to understand what it means to pay taxes and have a formal economy.”

To help bring reform, Duarte appointed several Mennonite businessmen to key economic posts, such as Ernst Bergen as minister of finance, Carlos Walde as economic adviser, and Andreas Neufeld as vice-minister of taxation.

These and other Mennonites who serve in the government are “leaving a footprint,” said Mrs. Duarte. “They are showing it is possible to be in public office without contaminating themselves.

“My husband says it would have

been difficult without the support of the Mennonites. People respect the Mennonites highly. They think of Mennonites as honest, hardworking, and having a strong ethic.”

This doesn’t mean everything has gone smoothly, however. There has been stiff opposition from some who do not want to pay taxes, as well as from some media outlets owned by powerful business interests.

“People ridiculed us for our faith,” said Duarte. “The press gave me a nickname—‘Mrs. Bible.’ They publish lies about us and about the Mennonites. We feel bad about this because we know the Mennonites have always guarded their reputation very well. They and their families are not prepared for this type of thing.”

Duarte noted some officials have received telephone threats (“Be careful or we’ll kidnap your children”).

“But through all of this the Lord has given us his hand,” she said. “We really have to rest in the Lord, or else we’d always live in fear. We hand it over to him and trust in his care.”

— *Wally Kroeker*

Assembly 15: ‘It’s in God’s hands; why worry?’

MEDA convention in Tampa, Florida, USA, last November also included a workshop, “Why Should the Global Church Come to Paraguay in July 2009?” Paraguay’s First Lady was joined by Larry Miller, MWC general secretary; Alfred Neufeld, chair of the National Coordinating Council for Paraguay 2009; and Merle and Phyllis Good, MWC communication consultants.

“We need your blessing; come and bless us,” Neufeld told the North Americans. “We need your correction; come and correct us. We need your counsel; come and counsel us. We need your encouragement; come and encourage us.”

Did the Paraguayan leaders have any worries about hosting such a large gathering?

“Nothing worries me because we have placed everything in the Lord’s hands,” said Mrs. Duarte.

Added Neufeld, “It is God’s will that you come.”

To which Miller responded, “If Mrs. Duarte says it’s in God’s hands and Alfred says it’s God’s will, then all I can say is, ‘Why worry?’”

Photo by Ray Brubacher



Members of the Assembly 15 National Coordinating Council surround Ernst Weichselberger, national coordinator, and his wife Anni with prayer during a commissioning service for Ernst’s work.

Seniors fund raiser sends five to Paraguay assembly

Several people will go to Assembly 15 in Paraguay in 2009, thanks to the vision of seniors in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. Last September, the Seniors’ Fellowship of Emmanuel Mennonite Church decided to change their monthly potluck meal to a fund raiser for the MWC travel fund. About 300 people came to eat, buy crafts and services at an auction. The crowd contributed enough money to subsidize travel to Assembly 15 for five or six people.

The group invited Pakisa Tshimika, MWC associate general secretary from Fresno, California, USA, to speak at the event. Pakisa “inspired the audience to feel a part of the wider Mennonite world and their struggles,” said one guest.

Music groups from Africa and Paraguay reminded those attending of Assembly 14 in Zimbabwe in 2003 and gave a glimpse of the culture and music of the host country for 2009.

— *Canadian Mennonite*

Vice-president: 'Zimbabwe needs your support'

Strasbourg, France—"The challenges facing our nation do not seem to want to go away," Danisa Ndlovu, MWC vice-president and bishop of the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe, told MWC officers and executive staff at a meeting in January. "Each day seems to bring more hardships."

Ndlovu is asking the MWC global family to continue to pray for his country and his church and to make solidarity visits to Zimbabwe. He also requested financial assistance for the BICC Peace Committee and MWC's help in creating a Peace, Social Justice and Ethics desk to serve Zimbabwe and other African countries.

Koinonia delegation. MWC officers at the California meeting agreed to send a koinonia delegation to Zimbabwe in 2007 to build community through presence, prayer, and encouragement. Volunteers will be considered along with selected participants.

Ndlovu described increasingly devastating political, economic, and social conditions. These fuel corruption, he noted; unemployment is at 80%; inflation continues at 1,200%, the highest in the world; and life expectancy is now about 38 years.

To address the situation, three major Christian church groups in Zimbabwe, including the BIC church, have banded together and presented a document, "The Zimbabwe We Want," to President Robert Mugabe.

"We are praying that this cup of suffering will go away," said Ndlovu.



Expanding on World Fellowship Sunday: GKMI Anugerah in Jakarta, Indonesia, celebrated WFS 2007 with ground breaking for an extension to their four-story building that already accommodates more than 500 worshippers on the second floor. The new structure will be used for Sunday school classes and meetings of various small groups.

GKMI Anugerah broke ground for its main church building in 1997 and has been growing ever since. "Having experi-

enced God's abundant blessings and grace, we want to continue to be a blessing, not only locally, but nationally and even internationally," Eddy Sutjipto (fifth from right in the second row), a member of the MWC Executive Committee, said to his fellow church members prior to the ground breaking.

GKMI Anugerah's senior pastor is Yesaya Abdi (front, fourth from left). Founding pastor Andreas Setiawan stands behind Abdi on his right.—Daisy Sutjipto

Meetings continue after conflict with Vietnamese authorities

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

—The Mennonite house church in Ho Chi Minh's District 2 continues to meet in the home of Pastor Nguyen Hong Quang after the recent third dismantling of part of the building in the last 18 months. Thirty to 40 people meet each Sunday.

On Tuesday morning, January 9, when a group of believers were gathered for prayer, precinct officials sent a large force to tear out most of the improvements done in the house renovation this past summer. Though Quang argued that their actions were illegal, the authorities arrested and held 17 persons for several hours until completing their work. The church members were

then all released and no charges were filed.

This confrontation is the latest incident in a long tug-of-war between the congregation and the local precinct.

In July 2004, shortly after Pastor Quang and five others were arrested, authorities tore down a few meters at one end, claiming the building extended beyond the property line.

Conditional permit.

After Quang received the offer of an international gift to make repairs, he received a permit to upgrade the building with a stipulation that no additional alterations be made.

When it became evident that Quang was raising the roof and making a new

upstairs loft, local authorities forcibly tore down some of this construction.

Some observers note that the local authorities did not move against the church last summer while Vietnam was seeking membership in the World Trade Organization. With that achieved, it appears authorities have fewer inhibitions in restricting religious groups.

Others, citing growing freedom of house churches to register, observe that Quang might be specifically targeted due to his outspoken criticism of the government's policies.

MWC asks the worldwide church to pray for churches and authorities in Vietnam.

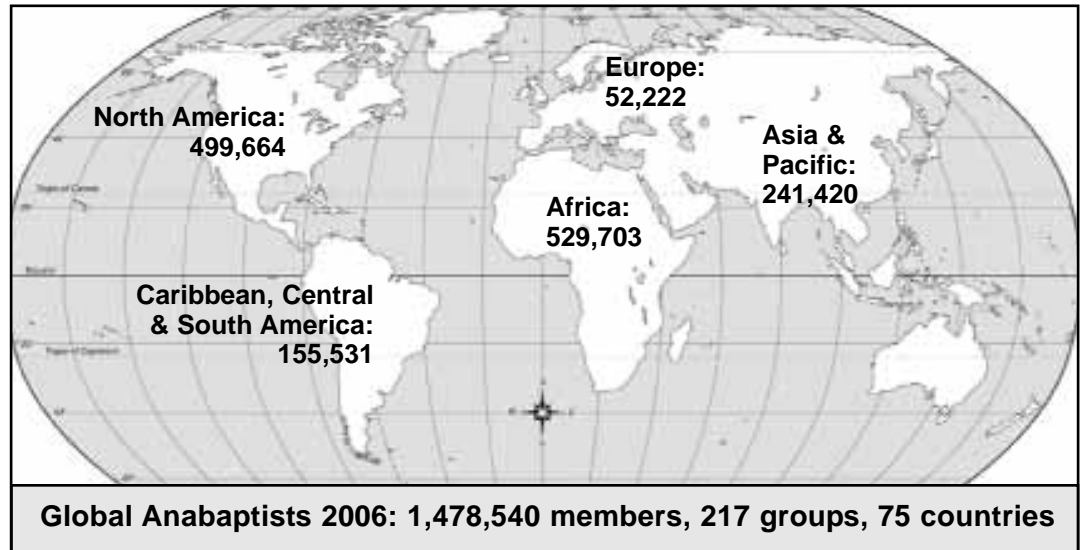
—*Vietnamese Ministries*

First Ugandan Mennonite church seeks registration

Rukungiri, Uganda—Ugandans celebrated the birth of a new circle of four Mennonite churches here in December 2006. The churches are the result of outreach efforts, begun in June 2004, by leaders and members of the Kenya Mennonite Church.

Ugandan church leaders have written a constitution for the new national church and begun the process of registration with the Ugandan government as the first Mennonite Church of Uganda.

The new churches grew out of a dream of Bishop Moses Otieno, now moderator of Kenya Mennonite Church. He led members of the Kenyan church in outreach into Uganda after being challenged by a friend, "Why don't you plant a Mennonite Church in Uganda?"—*Jewel Showalter*



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Global Anabaptists number nearly 1.5 million

Strasbourg, France—There are now almost 1.5 million Mennonites, Brethren in Christ, and related Anabaptists in the world. They worship in 217 churches located in 75 countries.

Those statistics come from the recently released MWC World Directory.

Of the 1,478,540 global Anabaptists, a third now live in Africa with 529,703

members. This continent continues to have the largest and fastest growing membership among the five continental regions.

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) in Ethiopia is the largest national conference globally, with 130,727 members. All continental regions except Europe have shown increased membership.

According to 2006 numbers, Africa has stretched its membership lead over North America by some 30,000, a 17.2 percent increase since 2003.

Membership in North America in 2006 has grown to just under half a million (499,664), an increase of 10.7 percent. Until 2005, Mennonite Church USA was the largest national conference. It now numbers 110,696 members, more than 20,000 fewer members than the MKC.

Other national churches with 100,000 members or more include the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in India (103,488) and the Communauté Mennonite au Congo (100,000).

Second to Africa in the

rate of growth among the continents is the Caribbean, Central, and South America region with 16.8% growth and a total of 155,531 members in 2006 compared to 133,150 in 2003.

Close behind is Asia & Pacific with 241,420 members, a 15.9% growth over 2003 figures.

Europe was the only continental region to show a reduction in numbers in 2006: 52,222 members, a 1.9% decline since 2003.

New listings in the 2006 directory include churches in eight countries: Botswana, Congo (Brazzaville), Gambia, Thailand, Bahamas, Romania, Ukraine, and Haiti.

Inclusion in the World Directory does not mean membership in Mennonite World Conference but rather that churches identify with the Anabaptist-Mennonite stream of church history.

Copies of the new directory are being mailed to all member conference offices and General Council delegates. Others may request copies from any MWC office; a donation of \$5 US is suggested to cover costs.

photo by Richard Showalter



Kenyan Bishop Moses Otieno baptizes one of 23 new believers, the first baptisms of the new Ugandan Mennonite Church. The entire Kiberama Mennonite congregation walked the six mile round trip to celebrate the baptisms.



MKC leaders during the assembly resulting in historic votes. Mulugeta Zewdie, general secretary, is at the microphone.

Landmark votes set new policies at 2006 MKC General Assembly

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia—Historic votes at Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) General Assembly October 6-7, 2006, have set new policy on two boundary issues for the church: women in leadership and baptism of polygamous converts.

Delegates approved a recommendation in favor of women holding congregational office on the basis of gifts and election. This includes salaried offices such as evangelist, teacher, and pastor as well as unsalaried offices such as deacon and elder.

Discussion of the issue included recognition that women played important roles as leaders of the underground church during the 1980s, when the Communist government shut down the MKC and seized its properties.

Previous to this vote, there was no official policy, but tradition and custom discouraged the election of women to recognized roles in congregational leadership.

No leadership positions. In a separate vote, delegates approved a task force recommendation in favor of baptizing polygamous converts but restricting them from leadership positions.

Polygamy or marrying more than one wife is common throughout Africa and in many other countries. Previous MKC policy denied baptism to polygamous converts.

A priority for evangelism played a role in the church's decision to baptize polygamous converts. Delegates heard testimony from regional church leaders stating that the church's witness would be handicapped by denying baptism to polygamous converts.

Community concern. "This decision shows concern for the community, and especially for the wives and the children who are affected," said General Secretary Mulugeta Zewdie. Experience has shown that church teaching requiring polygamists to divorce multiple wives has often caused extensive suffering for the women and children affected.

Monogamous marriage continues to be the teaching position of the church. Policy regarding church members who take a second wife will remain the same as in the past. "Their membership will be cancelled," Zewdie clarified.

—*Holly Blosser Yoder*

European Mennonite leaders detail challenges for 2007

Karlsruhe, Germany—Hope for the future, keen public interest in Anabaptism, surprising church growth, new enthusiasm, and numerous challenges highlighted reports from seven countries when 20 Mennonite church leaders from conferences in Europe gathered here in December.

While the leaders acknowledged that membership numbers suggest stagnation or even regression (see story on page 13), they brought reports of positive developments in their respective countries:

In Switzerland, where the first Anabaptists were persecuted for their faith, recent films, theatre productions, and reconciliation services have raised intense public interest and questions of today's Mennonites. 2007 has been designated the year of the Anabaptists, and resources available to respond are so stretched the church is looking for help.

In the Netherlands, Dutch Mennonites turned a new page by identifying Switzerland as the country of origin of the Anabaptist movement. Some churches in the Netherlands are growing, but the conference is looking for ways to support churches that continue to decline.

In Germany, building up the church has also been on the agenda of the Association of Mennonite Churches (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden). Its 6,000 members in 54 churches in

three regions undertake larger tasks collectively: publication of *Die Bruecke* (The Bridge), a yearbook, and two youth projects.

In Spain, until recently, the six churches in various regions, founded by American Mennonite missionaries, had limited contact with each other. In 2006, all met together for the first time. Spanish Mennonites also reported increased contact with both Protestant and Catholic churches.

In France, discussion in the Mennonite Conference (AEEFMF) is on membership of two churches, one African and the other Vietnamese, as well as a request for membership from the French Protestant Federation. Many churches are discussing questions of leadership. France is also heavily involved in the Francophone Network, facilitated by MWC.

In England, the London Mennonite Centre is widely known for its peace work and its connection with "Roots and Branches," a network of organizations with Anabaptist values numbering approximately 20,000 people. New challenges in London are work with African immigrants who are building rapidly growing churches. The Mennonite Centre has also recently begun a new project, "Work among Muslims."

—*Barbara Hege Galle and Markus Rediger*

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Corrections: *The sidebar, 'GMF and MWC' on page three of the 2006 / Quarter 4 issue of C/C/C contained several errors. GMF is not only a forum for mission workers but primarily a fellowship connecting Anabaptist-related churches and mission groups worldwide. MWC is not a member but rather facilitates GMF and its work. GMF funding is based on a percentage of the annual 'mission budget' of each member. C/C/C regrets the errors.*

Vision and dreams of youth for the church

Talk with us, not about us

by Christian Schneeberger

Before asking about the vision and dreams of youth for the church, perhaps the church needs to ask about its vision for youth. That's the opinion of Wagner Hadlich, member of a Lutheran youth group in Brazil.

"No one is ever opposed to our activities, but we constantly have to remind the congregational council, 'Don't forget about us! We are here and we need your support,'" he says.

Earlier generations have gone back and forth in relating to youth between being strict, even legalistic, and permissive. But is not indifference the dominant attitude toward youth today? Is the church different from society in how it relates to youth?

Having worked among youth between ages 18 and 25 in different countries for nearly 20 years, I know that cultural elements change from generation to generation and from country to country. But the basic aspirations of youth for the church remain the same.

Unfulfilled expectations. "Many studies show that one out of two [committed] young Christians abandons his or her faith between 15 and 25 years of age!" notes Olivier Bangerter, a former moderator of the Bible Study Groups of French-Speaking Schools and Universities of Switzerland (GBEU).

Bangerter mentions four different reasons for this rejection: unfulfilled expectations, a boyfriend or girlfriend who is not Christian, vulgar thoughts, and the absence of contact with other Christians.

Unfulfilled expectations represent the

This article is the first in a series developed by the Francophone Mennonite Network on youth in the church. Youth in Switzerland, France, Quebec, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burkino Faso were invited to respond to these questions: "What is your vision for the church? What do you expect of the church? What are your dreams for the church?"

opposite side of what youth hope and dream for the church. The church is not responsible for all unmet expectations, but some of its failures are problems for the hopes of youth.

Some youth say, "Our non-Christian friends think that Christians don't live out what they say they believe." Youth, whether Christian or not, are looking for more consistency between the church's words and deeds.

Authentic relationships. Youth are hungry for authentic and honest relationships. They want the church to be a place where they can say what they think. One young woman said, "I would like to know what the pastor really believes."

"As members of the church, it is our task to assist youth to live out a dynamic faith and to show our interest in them," said Bangerter.

He believes churches need to progress in two areas to better respond to the expectations of youth: relationships and teaching. One young woman he interviewed said, "It is important that the church develop more small group settings where faith can be shared in a more personal way, where people can encourage each other."

Difficult relationships within the church can be the source of disillusionment for young people, but the absence of authentic relationships alienate youth. But it is a positive thing to know that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the church can be the answer to our common hunger for relationships.

Sound teaching. The church also needs to provide youth with more solid teaching. One young Christian told Bangerter, "It is easy to say 'it says so in the Bible,' but that doesn't really speak to me." Critiques of the Bible and of Christianity from teachers or fellow students often confront young students. For Bangerter, it is thus essential to have "good Christian literature, and elders in the faith."

As the body of Christ, we need to decide to communicate with youth, not to communicate about youth.

Christian Schneeberger serves as facilitator of the Swiss Mennonite Youth Commission



Perspective:

It's all about stewardship

by Larry Miller

Earth and its creatures are threatened. The signs are everywhere, in both North and South: climate change, ozone-layer depletion, toxic and nuclear wastes, urban pollution, groundwater contamination, loss of agricultural land, diminishing fish stocks, unsustainable forestry practices.

Add to that social and economic injustice, with the growing disparity between rich and poor, and one has a depressing picture of the health of natural, human, and—too often—church communities worldwide.

What can change this anguish-producing picture of the world into an image more like God's?

It's all about stewardship. Stewardship of creation and stewardship of money, the primary subject of this issue of *Courier / Correo / Courrier*, are parts of the same picture. "As Christians," writes Bedru Hussein (Ethiopia), "we are stewards of all of life—our bodies, minds, time personalities, possessions, and the earth."¹

Stewardship, whether of financial resources or of earth resources, is a spiritual matter. "We believe that if persons don't give regularly, they have a spiritual problem," says Bedru's colleague, Tewodros Beyenne, secretary of the Executive Committee of the Meserete Kristos Church. "They need to examine their relationship to Christ. Leaders visit with those people who do not give."²

Meditating on the stewardship of creation, David Hallman (Canada) makes a similar assertion. "My hope for the future rests to a significant degree in my belief that there are spiritual values embedded in Christianity ... that can help us live justly and sustainably if we can understand, rejoice in, and live our individual and collective lives according to those values."³

photo by Alex Miller



Values can be positive or negative, life-enhancing or destructive, conscious or unconscious. More basic than beliefs and attitudes, values are those deep-seated influences within us that shape how we think and act. Our behavior, more accurately than our words, reveals our values.

Which values lead to good stewardship of financial and earth resources? Hussein lifts up five "qualities of a good steward": humility, knowledge (of God) and wisdom, understanding, faithfulness, and selflessness.⁴ Hallman points to eight spiritual values for justice and sustainability: gratitude, humility, sufficiency, justice, love, peace, faith and hope.⁵

Of course, individuals living rightly won't be enough to fix the broken structures of our global economic and ecological interdependence. Still, these spiritual values are the foundation for good stewardship of creation and all that is in it.

Today, a deep longing for the spirit of life is blowing across the face of an earth fractured by economic disparity and threatened by ecological catastrophe. May we be good stewards of the values that this movement of the Spirit implants in our hearts, renewing life-styles, both personally and as a global community.

Larry Miller, Strasbourg, France, serves as general secretary for Mennonite World Conference.

Notes

¹*Stewardship for All?* by Bedru Hussein and Lynn Miller (Good Books, 2006), p. 11

²*Stewardship for All?* p. 82

³*Spiritual Values for Earth Community* by David G. Hallman (WCC Publications, 2000), p. 7

⁴*Stewardship for All?* p. 13

⁵*Spiritual Values for Earth Community*, p. 5

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