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Executive Committee hears good news:

MWC in good health heading into Assembly 15

MWC's Executive Committee



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Executive Committee hears good news:

MWC in a healthy state heading into Assembly 15 in Paraguay

Asunción, Paraguay—“This is a good moment for MWC,” Larry Miller, general secretary, told the MWC Executive Committee in its annual meeting here August 1-7.

In his “State of the Communion” presentation, Miller cited several examples of why MWC is in good health:

- progress on the program and organizational plans adopted by MWC’s General Council meeting in Pasadena, California, USA, in 2006;
- initiatives to support member churches in difficult circumstances;
- a healthy financial situation.

MWC Executive Committee members responded with enthusiasm, giving approval to several new ideas and discussing at length plans for the next assembly, also scheduled for Paraguay in 2009.

Reorganization: The committee heard plans for developing commissions to do the work of MWC. In its 2006 meeting, the General Council had approved reorganizing into commissions in such areas as mission, service, peace, and faith and life.

These proposed commissions will generally be composed of up to 15 women and men and include both General Council members and “specialists” in a particular area appointed by

the Executive Committee. Discernment on the composition, tasks, and names of commissions was part of the discussion, with no decisions at this point.

The Executive Committee was encouraged when it heard that the Global Mission Fellowship (GMF) had decided to work towards becoming an MWC commission, according to Janet Plenert, chair of the GMF planning committee. The Executive Committee authorized MWC staff to work with GMF on responding to this request and developing a missions commission.

Support for member churches.

Executive Committee members heard details about four emerging initiatives being developed since the Pasadena meetings. Growing to some extent out of a service consultation preceding the 2006 General Council meetings, the four are:

- a remodeled Global Church Sharing Fund;
- a Koinonia Delegation to Zimbabwe;
- a deacons commission in the new MWC structure;
- Global Anabaptist Deacons to begin work immediately on pressing concerns.

The Global Church Sharing Fund was established 10 years ago in an effort to share the wealth of the global

Anabaptist church in a more equitable way. Specifically, funds donated by churches in North America and Europe were dispersed to member churches in the global South according to defined guidelines based on their membership and the capital income of the countries in which these churches were located.

The Executive Committee affirmed a proposed reconfiguration of the Global Church Sharing Fund that would create two accounts:

- a deacon account, to be used primarily by the Global Anabaptist Deacons in consultation with the deacons commission and MWC staff;
- a jubilee account from which grants to member churches would continue to be made but under new guidelines.

The Executive Committee directed staff to refine the approval policy, paying attention to balancing dispersal of funds equitably around the world.

The committee also heard about the first Koinonia Delegation. This one was

Cover: *Alvin Neufeld, Sissi Neufeld, and Nancy Heisey listen to a discussion of plans for Paraguay 2009 during the MWC Executive Committee meeting in Asunción, Paraguay, in early August. Alvin and Sissi are members of the National Coordinating Council for Paraguay 2009. Nancy serves as president of MWC.*

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scheduled for Zimbabwe immediately following the Asunción meeting. Its mandate was to learn, listen, encourage, and stand beside the Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe—a church which continues to experience much distress (see page 11).

Plans for the deacons commission and for a group of Global Anabaptist Deacons are in the initial stages with details to come to the next meeting of the Executive Committee in 2008.

Positive financial picture. MWC finances are “in pretty good shape,” Paul Quiring, treasurer, told the Executive Committee. This is mostly due to the positive response to a “Leadership Campaign” launched last year. The objective of this campaign was to raise unrestricted funds of \$200,000US per year for four years from major donors. Excellent response has resulted in a new goal: a total of \$1 million by 2010. During this period, MWC will continue to work at plans for long-term funding.

Also significant to MWC’s financial health in the lead-up to the 2009 assembly was a major contribution from Mennonite Central Committee to specified restricted funds.

At the end of 2006, the unrestricted fund showed a positive balance of nearly \$70,000. A deficit in the assembly fund, as budgeted, will continue to

The MWC Executive Committee gathering in Asunción generated considerable interest in the local community. Here Alfred Neufeld, Mennonite church leader and chair of the Assembly 15 National Coordinating Committee, is interviewed by a local Christian television station.

grow as assembly costs mount before registration fees come in, Paul told the committee.

Other business. The Executive Committee spent considerable time discussing various aspects of the planning and program for Assembly 15 (see page 4).

They also heard that the “Shared Convictions” brochure has been well received wherever it has been distributed worldwide. It is now available in English, French, Spanish and German. A study guide will be published in November 2007.

General secretary Larry Miller also reported on conversations between MWC and two other world communions: the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christianity Unity of the Catholic Church.

Larry also suggested that, in response to a recent statement from Pope Benedict XVI on the status of non-

Catholic churches, MWC take a statement on its view of the church to the Pontifical Council when an MWC delegation visits in late October 2007.

Meeting with the Executive Committee in Asunción, besides the GMF planning committee, were several other groups: AMIGOS, MWC’s youth and young adult committee; the Assembly 15 National Coordinating Council; and representatives of several travel companies which will be involved in bringing participants to the assembly.

The 10-year practice of planting a tree where the committee meets continued in Paraguay. Three trees were planted at different churches in Asunción and one in the Chaco (see page 9).

Following the Executive Committee meetings, most committee members and staff toured the Chaco, where Mennonite immigrants first arrived in Paraguay more than 75 years ago (see pages 6-9).



MWC's Assembly 15 will be shorter than previous gatherings; 7,000 expected to attend global event in Asunción, Paraguay

Asunción, Paraguay—In addition to its other business (see previous pages), MWC's Executive Committee devoted considerable time to discussing details of Assembly 15, scheduled for July 14-19, 2009, also in Asunción.

Its first decision was to shorten the assembly; it will now start on Tuesday rather than Monday as was true for previous assemblies. The change came in response to feedback that six days of meeting was too long and because the venue, the Centro Familiar de Adoración (CFA), will be used by the congregation for worship on Sundays.

Executive Committee members and staff visited CFA during their week together. Still under construction, this large church complex, scheduled for completion in 2008, will provide adequate space to accommodate the anticipated more than 7,000 assembly participants. This includes space for mass worship services, seminars, dining, and recreation.

The Executive Committee discussed a wide range of suggestions before settling on a theme for 2009. While still to be defined, the theme will relate to unity and service and

will be based on Philippians 2:1-11.

"Paraguay 2009 is estimated to cost approximately \$1.8 million," MWC's treasurer, Paul Quiring, told the Executive Committee. "That's more than double the cost of Assembly 2003," he said. "Almost everything will cost more in Paraguay than it did in Zimbabwe."

Registration fees are expected to cover approximately 60% of assembly costs. Paraguay member conferences have agreed to raise \$200,000 with additional donations likely to come from the Paraguay business community and the Mennonite cooperatives.

"There appears to be strong financial ownership [in Paraguay] in the success of this assembly," Paul said.

Ray Brubacher, Assembly 15 international coordinator, noted that of the 20 Anabaptist conferences in Paraguay—with a combined membership of 30,000—eight conferences belong to MWC. These eight conferences have a combined membership of 22,000 and include German, Spanish, and Indigenous congregations. They are working together on assembly planning, a first-time collaboration for the three groups.

Ray also reported the appointment of a Program Committee to plan each day's events at Assembly 15. The group includes three Executive Committee members: Markus Rediger (Switzerland), Elizabeth Vado Sandoval (Nicaragua), and Naomi Unger (Canada). Three Paraguayans are on the Program Committee: Dietrich Panna, Loma Plata (Toba-Enlhet); Juan Silverio Verón, Asunción (Spanish-speaking); and Ed Toews, Menno Colony (German-speaking).

The group spent a day working together immediately after the Executive Committee meetings. They will meet again in November.

Paul Dueck—who lived in Asunción until age 12 when his family migrated to Leamington, Ontario, Canada—also participated in program planning. Paul has been appointed the music coordinator for the assembly.

Registration information is expected to be mailed to member churches by April 2008, Ray noted.



Paraguay's First Lady visits MWC gathering

María Gloria Penayo de Duarte, wife of current Paraguay president Nicanor Duarte, paid a visit to the MWC Executive Committee meeting on Saturday, August 4.

A member of the Raices Mennonite Brethren Church in Asunción, the First Lady spoke briefly to the executive about her faith journey and her encouragement from the Mennonites. She also expressed gratitude that the next MWC assembly is scheduled to be held in her country. She noted that

the Paraguayans need to see that Mennonites are more than Germans who migrated to Paraguay, and she believes the assembly will help them to do that.

Following her remarks, MWC's general secretary, Larry Miller, presented the First Lady with a map showing the location of Anabaptists around the world (photo above). "We are delighted you are part of this family," he said. Looking on is Ernst Weichselberger, national coordinator for Assembly 15.



Indigenous people from three countries planning for first joint meeting as part of MWC Assembly 15

Asunción, Paraguay—Representatives of Native Mennonite congregations in Paraguay, Canada, and the United States are making plans to meet together when Assembly 15 is held here in 2009.

In a July letter, written to their indigenous brothers and sisters in Paraguay, North American Indigenous Mennonite congregations expressed their desire for a meeting.

“Our prayer is that some of us from the North American Native Mennonite congregations will be able to attend the global gathering. . . . We as indigenous Christians from Canada and the United States would also welcome the opportunity to visit your congregations and communities while we are in your country,” the letter said.

The North Americans also hope to bring with them several young people to attend the Global Youth Summit, adding that “it will be important for them to visit your communities with us.”

During their meeting, held in con-

junction with the MWC Executive Committee gathering in Asunción, the Assembly 15 National Coordinating Council responded enthusiastically to the proposal. Asiano Faust, Juan Ramos and Inocencio Galván—presidents of three Indigenous Mennonite conferences—reported they had already discussed the possible visit in their churches. Their people offered the North Americans a warm welcome into their homes and communities.

“We anticipate hearing about your walk with the Lord, your traditions, stories, and experiences within the Mennonite family of faith,” said their letter of response.

The conferences in Paraguay making plans for the visit are Convención Iglesias Evangélicas Unidas—Enlhet Paraguay, Convención Evangélica Hermanos Menonitas Enlhet, and Convención Iglesias Evangélicas Hermanos Menonitas Nivaclé, all MWC member churches.

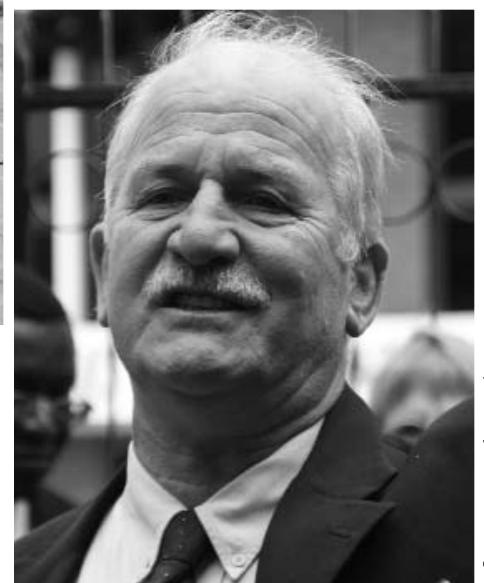


photo by Markus Rediger

Ernst Weichselberger (inset), national coordinator for MWC Assembly 15, leads a tour through the Centro Familiar de Adoración (CFA), projected site for Paraguay 2009 (photo above), during the Executive Committee’s August meeting in Asunción. Scheduled to be completed in 2008, CFA, with seating for 10,000 people, is being built by an Assembly of God congregation. The complex also includes a host of classrooms for seminars and workshops as well as a two-tiered, underground parking garage. Assembly planners are considering using one of these tiers as a large dining hall for the more than 7,000 projected to attend the assembly. Participants will be bused from hotels, churches, and homes in which they will be lodged.

Service to be theme of youth gathering

Asunción, Paraguay—AMIGOS, MWC's youth committee, agreed that "Service: Live the Difference" will be the main theme for the Global Youth Summit (GYS) in Paraguay in 2009.

The five committee members, each representing a different continental region, made that decision when they met here from July 30 to August 4, 2007, at the same time as the MWC Executive Committee.

AMIGOS is dedicated to global youth networking, encouraging inter-generational dialogue, and organizing GYS 2009, according to Elina Ciptadi, president.

Elina said, "GYS 2003 in Zimbabwe focused on trying to understand the issues and challenges faced by youth in their local communities and national society. We spent a lot of time looking inward.

"Building on the momentum generated in Africa, we believe it is now time for us to look outward: to start the action, showing the fruits of our faith through a lasting commitment to service."

The GYS theme will provide momentum towards a more comprehensive vision of service, according to Elina. It follows up a consultation sponsored by Mennonite Central

Committee and MWC in 2006 about service within the Anabaptist family of faith.

"We want young Mennonites and Anabaptists to understand that service is a lifestyle, a lifetime calling as followers of Christ, something to pursue beyond our comfort zone," Elina said. "We want to invite young people to a world of service that is so much more exciting than just donating spare change, isolated projects, service trips, or evangelism without addressing social issues.

"We hope to have biblical analysis, cross-cultural interaction, and sharing of each other's experience in ministry," she continued. "We want GYS 2009 to deepen our understanding of what it means to do service."

Amandus Reimer, AMIGOS vice-president and national planning coordinator for GYS 2009, said, "We hope 850 young people from Paraguay, Latin America, and throughout the world will gather here in 2009. We want them to come as delegates, participants, and volunteers. This will be at least triple the size of GYS 2003 in Zimbabwe. This will be a great way to introduce Paraguay to the world. It will also equip Paraguayan youth with international exposure."



by Ferne Burkhardt

Following a week of meetings (see pages 2-4), the MWC Executive Committee and several staff members traveled to Paraguay's Chaco for a visit to the Mennonite colonies there. The news editor of Courier / Correo / Courier, Ferne Burkhardt, Petersburg, Ontario, Canada, reflects on that visit as well as the history of the migration of the Mennonites to what the residents describe as "the green hell."—Editor

The road out of Asunción, Paraguay's capital city, is smooth and points northwest, straight as an arrow. There appear to be no intersections, no hills, no curves, no potholes, and little traffic. The road slices through dry grassland dotted with thorny bushes, clumps of trees, and occasional lagoons—scooped out of the dirt to catch rain water to quench the thirst of the ubiquitous cattle.

The road, the Trans-Chaco Highway, leads to the Mennonite colonies—Menno, Fernheim, and Neuland—in the Central Chaco in the heart of Paraguay, "an island surrounded by land."



The five AMIGOS planning the program for the Global Youth Summit in 2009 (from left): Barbara Kaercher, Germany; Khohlwani Moyo, Zimbabwe; Elina Ciptadi (president), Singapore; Amandus Reimer, Paraguay; and Sarah Thompson, USA.



The Chaco miracle:

On the road to faith, prosperity, and cooperation

There was no road when Mennonite immigrants arrived in the bush, first in 1927 from Canada to begin Menno Colony, or three years later when they came from Russia via Germany and established Fernheim Colony. Their arduous journey from Asunción was by river boat, train, ox-cart and on foot, a trip that often took two weeks. With the highway, begun in 1959 and finally paved 20 years later, the trip takes four hours.

The first colonists, who had fled hostilities of various kinds, were stunned by the harsh and hostile land at the end of the road—blazing hot in summer, dry and dusty, with fierce winds driving temperatures up or down sharply and quickly. Rains, when they came, turned pathways into an impassable mess.

But these people were strong and determined. They knew hard work, and they had an unshakable faith in the God they believed brought them to this place called “the green hell.” Within a year they had felled tough, hardwood trees, clawed out the roots, and created small fields, laid out villages, and harvested food from gardens planted with seeds carried from their homeland.

The third wave of immigrants, who

arrived from Europe in 1947, established Neuland Colony. Like the others, it soon had houses, villages, schools, a church, fields, and a government.

Each of the three colonies established a cooperative where products could be bought and sold. Cooperatives also served as a kind of bank, and profits allowed a cooperative to finance social institutions, including hospitals, homes for the elderly and the handicapped, libraries, and other infrastructure. Businesses and industries began to develop.

But the road to a new community was not completely straight, and there were potholes—discontent, depression, illness, too many deaths, insect pests, crop failures, and too much poverty.

And there was unexpected traffic. The Lengua, indigenous hunters and gatherers, wandered across land the Mennonites had been told was empty. To these gentle, soft-spoken people, fences were foreign, as was the concept of private property. The clash of cultures at first left both groups suspicious of the other.

Early intersections, however, benefit-

While the road to the Central Chaco from Asunción is now paved, going from Menno Colony to Fernheim the short way means traveling dirt roads (above).

ted both groups: the Enlhet, who were also known as Lengua, provided the labourers the Mennonites needed, and the Mennonites shared food, their skills, and the gospel with them. Later, the Nivaclé, another major ethnic group in the Chaco, and other smaller groups also connected with the Mennonites.

Today, German entrepreneurs readily concede they could not operate their large dairy and peanut factories and other businesses without indigenous employees. Successful business operations also attract workers to the Chaco from other parts of Paraguay and neighbouring countries like Brazil.

The road also has curves to negotiate. Just as curves make a road more interesting, so diversity makes a community more interesting. Diversity can be a strength, but it calls for sensitivity and respect.

There continue to be three distinct

(continued on page 8)

On the road to faith, prosperity, cooperation

(continued from page 7)

German Mennonite groups—General Conference, Mennonite Brethren, and the Evangelical Mennonite Brotherhood. The three are separate, but they cooperate. In Filadelfia, each has its own church building, but the three groups have a long tradition of worshipping together several times a month in whichever building can accommodate them. The 1,000-member General Conference congregation hosted a joint communion service last Easter.

At the same time, Spanish-speaking Paraguayans and Indigenous people, who are also Mennonites, have separate churches, schools, hospital wards, and medical assistance plans which respect their language, culture, and traditions. It takes several visits for an outsider to understand the difference between respect and discrimination and how the

MWC visitors at lunch prepared by the staff at the Instituto Bíblico Indígena in Yalve Sange in the Chaco (from left), Khohlwani Moyo, Zimbabwe; Karen Martin Schiedel, Canada; Ron Byler (hidden), USA; Eleanor Miller (background), France; Joshua Okello, Kenya; Margaret Brubacher, Canada; Danisa Ndlovu, Zimbabwe.

different groups mesh in the colonies and the cooperatives.

German Mennonites—about 9,000 in Menno, 3,000 in Fernheim, and 2,000 in Neuland—now are a minority in the Chaco; they make up about 32% of the population. Indigenous people make up 52%, Latin Paraguayans 11%, with the remaining 5% coming from Brazil, Argentina, and other countries. But the Germans still appear to be in control.

Change will come to the colonies, the various groups agree, as young people increasingly intermingle. It is happening among the German churches, to some degree between Latin Paraguayans and German Mennonites, less so between Indigenous Mennonites and the others. A new challenge will be how to sustain their various identities and cultures in the midst of that change.

German, Spanish, and Indigenous paths come together at the Instituto Bíblico Indígena at Yalve Sanga. The school's director is of German origin, teaching is in Spanish, and the students, all male, come from seven different Indigenous groups. What began with



four months of training in 1963 is now a three-year program, with classes at school and practical work in congregations.

Families live on site in small, brick houses with electricity, and they have easy access to water, amenities not always available in their villages. There is a school for the children and Bible and home economics classes for women.

Students, with only a few years of school or none, are sent by their churches. Ninety percent of the leaders of these churches as well as many community leaders have studied at the Bible institute. The Indigenous churches have more than 8,300 baptized members, more than any one of the Germanic or Spanish Mennonite conferences that are MWC members in the Chaco.

The school was the vision of pioneer missionaries, who also recognized the importance of stepping back into the role of advisors, then having the Indigenous move to partnership and eventually ownership. The goal is not yet realized, but they are on the way.

Development in the Mennonite colonies in the Chaco in just over 75 years is nothing short of miraculous. The immigrants have tamed the wilderness and built homes in towns and villages with supermarkets and shops,





book stores and libraries, numerous churches, good schools, state-of-the-art hospitals, pharmacies, homes for the elderly and handicapped, and flourishing businesses and industries with global markets.

The colonies were established on four pillars: churches, schools, social services, and economics. Says one leader: If the pillars stay level, there can be a solid foundation on which to build. But if one pillar rises higher than the rest, something will slide off.

Is that happening? asks a visitor.

The economy seems to be rising more quickly, was the reluctant response. "The first 30 years were about survival," he said. "They were tough. But to sustain biblical and ethical foundations will be harder than surviving."

The Mennonites in the Chaco—those for whom it is their ancestral home and those for whom it became home as they tamed the wilderness—have all conquered many challenges. Their profound Christian faith, courage, and spirit will continue to take them along the road into the future.

That road will have hills, curves, potholes, and more intersections. But with God in the driver's seat, they are unlikely to crash or lose their way.



MWC Executive plants four trees

For the past 10 years, Mennonite World Conference has planted a tree in the community in which its Executive Committee meets. This year they planted four. One was in the Chaco at the Instituto Bíblico Indígena in Yalve Sanga, where musicians sang and played prior to the planting (above).

Another was at Iglesia Hermanos Menonitas del Barrio Hospital de Clínicas (left), where Rainer Burkart (Germany) watered the tree while Oscar Peralta, president of the Convención Evangélica de Iglesias Paraguayas de los Hermanos Menonitas, and Flavio Florentín, academic director of the MB Bible Seminary, looked on.

The Executive Committee also planted trees at the Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Concordia and at Iglesia Evangélica Menonita Emaus, both in Asunción.

MWC's tree-planting tradition developed out of a practice by Tanzania Mennonite women to restore nature. "Tree-planting reminds me of MWC," said general secretary Larry Miller. "We don't do much, but we do it everywhere!"

At evening, we all eat from the same

by Jonathan Larson

In quiet conversation with a friend recently, I learned that her project to build a home in a suburb of Gaborone, Botswana, had suddenly come to an awkward halt. Her well-to-do neighbours had called the police because of squatters on her land. When she investigated, her worst fears were confirmed: as many as 20 strangers were camping on her property. She fled out of fear for her own safety

What was she to do now?

I wondered if any of them might be

Anabaptist sisters and brothers from Zimbabwe. Here in Botswana, it is estimated by some that nearly one in five persons currently in this country are in flight from what has befallen them at home in Zimbabwe. That once proud, educated, and productive society has been drubbed to its wobbly knees by HIV, drought, corruption, inflation, and political folly.

My mind went back to the hospitality we had received at MWC's Assembly 14 in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, amidst threadbare circumstances: the army of women who laboured to cook and serve

the multitude, the array of black cooking pots over the wood fires, and the humble nameless who washed and cleaned and swept with such zeal.

I went with my friend to the police station to see the squatters: men and women, even mothers with small infants on their backs. Some were in handcuffs, and all had the resigned, humiliated look of the wretched of the earth. They were Zimbabweans, border-jumpers, as they are called here. The children of Robert Mugabe. A tiny eddy of a much larger tide of *les misérables* who have fled their homes as a

Khohlwani Moyo of Zimbabwe:

'I can't leave when I think of the children'

by Ray Brubacher

'Khohlwani, have you lost weight?' I ask. 'People say I have,' he says with a rather pained smile.

Well, who wouldn't, particularly if you were 28 years old with six children—ages 22, 19, 18, 15, 15, and 12—in your care and expecting your first biological child in three months? All this in Zimbabwe, a country with 4,500% inflation (highest in the world) and a life expectancy of 36 years (lowest in the world)!

Yet, here Khohlwani Moyo sits with his hugely infectious smile, diving into endless conversations with fellow AMIGOS, a committee of five young adults gathered in Asunción, Paraguay, to plan for the second MWC Global Youth Summit in July 2009. At times Khohlwani becomes the life of the party, leading MWC Executive Committee members and staff in a lively rendition of "Hakuna Akaita," a song made popular at the MWC assembly held in his home town, Bulawayo, in 2003.

Khohlwani did not grow up in a Christian family. In fact, he did not meet his biological father until he was nine. He grew up with his mother's

brother. His father served in the liberation movement of Zimbabwe and continued as a soldier in the civil war which followed independence in 1980. His parents met while his father was involved in the "operations." His mother already had one child and his father had 13.

Khohlwani started relating to the Brethren in Christ Church at the age of 12 through the influence of a BIC teacher in a public high school. His mother died in 2000 and his father in 2003, soon after the MWC assembly. So Khohlwani assumed responsibility for his three youngest siblings, with the help of his mother's sister, a single mother with three young children. A few months later that aunt died, and Khohlwani took in her three children.

In 2006, he married Nomathemba whom he met in a BIC church in Bulawayo several years ago. They expect their first child in November.

For several years, Khohlwani worked with a computer company and then branched out on his own. Two years ago he needed to close that business because few people in Zimbabwe could afford computers. He then took up buying cattle in the countryside and selling them in an auction in Bulawayo. Initially this was good business. But as

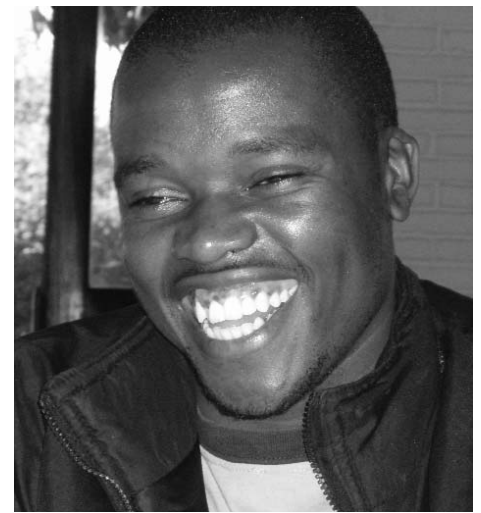


photo by Ray Brubacher

Khohlwani Moyo, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

inflation soars, even cattle dealing barely keeps food on the table.

"So, why don't you leave Zimbabwe like three million of your compatriots?"

"I have thought of leaving," Khohlwani says, "But I can't when I think of the children. Besides, I love my country. The system is bad, but the country is good."

And he flashes his million dollar smile. US dollars, that is.

Ray Brubacher, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, serves as the international coordinator for MWC Assembly 15.

black pot

matter of survival, and been cast adrift.

I know of a family outside Bulawayo whose able-bodied bread winners have been picked off one by one by AIDS. The surviving children have been left to the only surviving member of the family. Today she has 12 children under the age of five living under her shrinking roof and no means of support.

Little wonder that a ragged band of these unfortunates should have found its way through the back country fences and crept under the eaves of an unfinished house seeking some shelter. As we spoke with them at the police station, we assured them that we will not press charges against them. Who could bear to see them taken to prison, or, even worse, returned to their shattered country? We only asked that they return the house to its owner.

These people are Shona refugees from the eastern side of Zimbabwe—600 kilometers or more away. They, and many more like them, would have taken buses or trucks to the border areas, crossing by foot and then trekking to the Botswana highways where they might catch a passing vehicle into towns. I'm not sure how many enter each day, but it must certainly be in the hundreds.

The pressure of these growing numbers of arrivals has elicited an uncharacteristic resentment from Botswana society, which had always been known as a congenial haven for outsiders since apartheid and before. Yesterday, the Special Branch police swept through our side of town checking documents again. They accosted a young man whom we had hired at the church hall as a day worker. I feared they were going to haul him away, but in the end they were persuaded his papers were okay.

We returned with our squatters to the construction site. They began, with astonishing efficiency, to gather their belongings. They have done this many times. But the story of their troubles is far from over. They gathered the blackened cooking pots, the plastic jugs, the



We will not forget you!

An eight-member MWC Koinonia delegation visited Zimbabwe August 16-29, 2007, to learn, listen, encourage, and show MWC's support for the church in that country in the midst of difficult political and economic circumstances.

In his closing remarks to the 2003 global assembly in Bulawayo, MWC general secretary Larry Miller said to the thousands of Zimbabwean Brethren in Christ sisters and brothers who were present, "We will not forget you."

Members of the delegation, pictured above during an orientation session in Johannesburg, South Africa, just prior to their entry into Zimbabwe include (from left):

John Byers, a retired BIC pastor from North America.

Dan Nighswander and Yvonne Snider Nighswander, Canadians currently serving in South Africa with Mennonite Church Canada Witness.

Pascal Kulungu, Mennonite Brethren leader from Congo.

Beatriz Barrios, Mennonite pastor from Uruguay.

Mesach Krisetya, a professor at Satya Wacana Christian University in Salatiga, Indonesia, and president of MWC from 1997-2003.

Barbara Kaercher, a nurse from Germany, representing the youth organization AMIGOS on the delegation.

Pakisa Tshimika, MWC associate general secretary and leader of the delegation.

The idea for a Koinonia delegation to Zimbabwe developed at the MWC General Council meeting in California, USA, in 2006. Delegations to other MWC churches experiencing difficulty are also projected.

Reflections on their experiences by members of the Zimbabwe Koinonia delegation will be carried in the next issue of *Courier / Correo / Courier*.

frayed bags in which they have folded their blankets and clothes—belongings that we would cart away to a dumpster. Someone will come with a battered pickup to collect them and their things. Then they will go in search of some other unguarded corner where they will huddle for a few days.

There, by the evening fires, they will laugh the quiet laugh of those whose hearts are breaking, the dispossessed of the world.

Even now, the great and powerful of these countries and of the world gather

at seaside villas, where, turned out in their finery, they laud each other surrounded by body guards. If only they could sit by those evening fires to hear the truth, the gritty, pitiful truth.

For, in this part of the world, truth reads this way: at evening, we all eat from the same black pot.

Jonathan Larson, Gaborone, Botswana, was one of the speakers at MWC's Assembly 13. This article was distributed by Mennonite Church Canada.

German Mennonite Conference offers hope for the future

Karlsruhe, Germany—Hope and a future: These words of promise from Jeremiah 29:11 served as the center of the Mennonite gathering here, May 17-20, 2007.

More than 400 Mennonites from the 55 churches that make up the AMG, Associated Mennonite Churches in Germany, came together for the conference. It is held every three or four years.

Each morning speakers focused on biblical texts that both challenge resignation and encourage hopeful awareness of where God is at work in the world. Digging into texts from both the Old and New Testaments, the presenters spoke of hope and renewal, themes that also shaped the afternoon workshops.

Drawing parallels from the dry bones that received new life in Ezekial 37, Corinna Schmidt and Frieder Boller spoke of God breathing fresh hope into churches today. Schmidt is pastor of the Mennonite churches in Lübeck and Hamburg and



photo by Liesa Unger

Many young people were among the 400 participants in the German Mennonite Conference gathering in Karlsruhe. The four-day conference focused on how to bring hope to the future.

Boller is pastor of Ingolstadt Mennonite Church and newly appointed chairman of AMG.

Both challenged their listeners to look beyond the number of attendees or the amount of activity in a congregation and instead seek genuine life and renewal, measured by God's standards.

With examples from their work in European Mennonite circles outside of

Germany, Henk Leegte, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Amsterdam, and Madeleine Bähler, supervisor and coach active in the Swiss Mennonite Church, examined the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. They noted its relevance for churches in today's pluralistic society. They encouraged churches to look honestly at their present state and role in their communities, recognizing the paths where God is leading.

"Conflicts are often brought on by a fear of change," Bähler said, commenting that courage is fear transformed by prayer.

Mennonites from other European countries as well as Christian brothers and sisters from North and South America and the Middle East shared from experiences in their home settings, finding ways to remain hopeful despite challenges and frustrations.

On the first evening, Paraguayan Mennonite Ernst Weichselberger

extended an invitation to German Mennonites to attend MWC's Assembly 15 in Asunción, Paraguay, in July 2009. Weichselberger is the national coordinator for Assembly 15.

Also among the international guests was Daoud Nassar, a Palestinian Christian from Tent of Nations in Bethlehem. He visited Germany as the German Mennonite Peace Committee's 2007 Michael Sattler Peace Award recipient. During an afternoon workshop he shared his family's vision of a meeting place for people of varied nationalities and religions as a way of offering hope for the future.

During the final gathering Sunday morning, Doris Hege, pastor of the Mennonite church in Frankfurt, acknowledged in summary, "We've considered the promise that God wants to give us a future and hope. Trusting God, may we take this hope into our churches, our families, our society and our world."—*Megan Rutt*

New—and old—name: clearer purpose

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo—ICOMB is now the "International Community of Mennonite Brethren." At its annual meeting here June 17-20, 2007, delegates from around the world decided on a new identifier.

The "C" has stood for "Committee" since 1988, when ICOMB was created as a global fellowship of Mennonite Brethren. ICOMB members decided to change the "C" to "Community" to reflect the growing fellowship and ability to express that fellowship globally through specific events and programs. At the same time they wanted to keep the acronym "ICOMB" which is understood—even used as its own word—in conferences and languages around the world.

Break-in at Colombia Mennonite agency working for peace puts justice workers, abuse victims, and churches at risk

Bogota, Colombia – A pre-dawn break-in here on June 14, 2007, targeted two computers containing sensitive information at the office of Justapaz, the Christian Center for Justice, Peace and Nonviolent Action.

Justapaz is a program of the Mennonite Church of Colombia and a Mennonite Central Committee partner.

The thieves by-passed nine other computers, telephones, and a safe, taking only the computers. These contain information on people and churches that are active in work for peace and human dignity. They also have information on people from churches that are victims of and witnesses to human rights violations. The thieves also broke into the desk of the coordinator for a program for protection of persons at risk.

Witnesses in the neighborhood reported that soon after

the break-in, police officers stopped two men carrying a computer, but there is no information on whether the men are being held or whether the police retrieved the computer.

This attack occurred 12 days after a similar break-in at the Fellowship of Reconciliation's office and one in January 2007 at the office of the Permanent Assembly of Civil Society for Peace.

Precise knowledge.

Observers note that the attacks against Justapaz and the other organizations indicate that the perpetrators have precise knowledge of the offices and use sophisticated procedures to gain access to specific information.

This is the first time that a church was subjected to an attack in relation to its work for peace, human rights and dignity, and the safety of vic-

tims and potential witnesses to human rights violations. There is concern that the stolen information will lead to increased risk to persons and churches whose experiences are documented.

One of the stolen computers belonged to MCC worker Janna Hunter-Bowman. It held testimony about human rights abuses against members of Colombia's Protestant churches as well as profiles of the churches' peace ministries and names of grassroots church leaders and members who were documenting abuses.

The computer also held Hunter-Bowman's report on 29 assassinations of men, women, and children linked to several congregations, 84 cases of people forced to flee their homes, 21 civilian combat-related injuries, four arbitrary detentions, and other human rights violations.

Repeatedly, Hunter-Bowman has heard church leaders recount how many victims or families of victims in Colombia's armed conflict see the church as the only safe place. The victims were grateful for the chance to recount their stories through the documentation project.

Loss of safety. If the project is not a safe space, she said, they may feel that avenue too is closed. "This project tells their stories when they feel there are no other avenues," she said.

Thefts of information are not uncommon techniques of intimidation in Colombia, Hunter-Bowman said. Jenny Neme, director of Justapaz, worries that those behind the break-in are trying also to seek information on the international communications networks for peace, in this case connecting churches in Colombia with the international community.

The Colombia Mennonite Church and the Christian Center for Justice, Peace, and Nonviolent Action has invited Anabaptists to share this information with their congregations and others and to pray "not only for Justapaz but for all the individuals, churches, and organizations that continue in the task of announcing peace."

They also suggest people contact the appropriate Colombian government officials in their countries about the violation of human rights in Colombia.—*from a Justapaz release and MCC files by Marla Pierson Lester*

Palestinian family receives German peace prize

Rottenburg, Germany—The German Mennonite Peace Committee has awarded its 2007 Michael Sattler Peace Prize to "Tent of Nations" a peace project in Palestine.

"Tent of the Nations—People Building Bridges" was conceived and is operated by the Christian Palestinian Nassar family in their struggle against encroaching illegal colonization. The German peace committee gave the prize in recognition of the creativity and non-violent solutions this family is seeking to the problems in the Middle East conflict.

While the Nassars' right to their farmland on a hill south of Bethlehem is con-

firmed by British, Jordanian, Israeli, and Ottoman papers—some 100 years old—nevertheless, Israeli settlers have laid claim to their land.

The Nassar family operates the farm themselves, always keeping at least one family member present. In the last few years they have also operated a simple Christian retreat and meeting center, while continuing their 15-year struggle in Israeli courts for their possession rights.

Jewish settlements already occupy the surrounding hills, but, despite the difficult circumstances, the Nassar family continues to live a Christian witness. They com-

bine the rightful claim to their land with the active hope the conflict in the Middle East can be peacefully overcome and justice can become possible.

With the prize, the German Mennonite Peace Committee, together with its ecumenical partners, remembers the Anabaptist Michael Sattler, who was burned May 20, 1527, in Rottenburg for his Christian witness and non-violent stance.

The Michael Sattler Award is supported by the Evangelical and Catholic churches of Rottenburg, the Catholic Peace organization Pax Christi, and the City of Rottenburg.

Commission in discussion of condemnation of Anabaptists and implications for Mennonite-Lutheran relationships today

Strasbourg, France—The confession of faith in use today by the worldwide Lutheran Church contains doctrinal condemnations which contributed to the persecution, torture, and killing of Anabaptists during the Reformation.

What do these condemnations say to the relationship between Lutherans and Anabaptists today?

These are the questions before the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission. This commission—co-sponsored by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Mennonite World Conference (MWC)—held its third annual meeting

June 18-22, 2007, at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France.

The commission's mandate is to hold conversations that focus on the condemnations of Anabaptists in Lutheran confessional writings and their applicability to MWC member churches today.

During the 2007 gathering, the commission noted that the condemnations and supporting statements by the Lutheran reformers does not figure prominently among Lutherans today. The history of persecution has, however, been deeply imbedded in the memory of Anabaptist descendents.

The latter requires careful joint processing to remove obstacles toward better understanding and closer relations between Mennonite and Lutheran churches today.

The commission agrees that this processing requires both an accurate understanding of the condemnations in their historical context and the hermeneutics of the Lutheran confessions. It further requires joint theological reflection on the specific issues with which the condemnations are concerned, in particular baptism and the relationship between church and civil authorities.

At this year's meeting, the commission:

- Reviewed the recent "Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Condemnations of the Anabaptists" and the response of Mennonite Church USA.

- Discussed "Called Together to be Peacemakers," a report of the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and MWC.

- Reviewed the text of the Imperial Mandate of Speyer of 1529 and a variety of Anabaptist sources related to themes addressed in the Augsburg Confession.

- Heard papers on Christians and the public order and the socio-political implications of the Lutheran condemnations.

- Worked towards consensus on an historical account of the Lutheran reformers and the condemnations of the Anabaptists.

The commission hopes to present a final report to LWF and MWC by the end of 2008.

Mennonite members on the commission are Rainer Burkart, Germany; Claude Baecher, France; Hellen Biseko Bradburn, Tanzania; John Roth, USA, and MWC general secretary Larry Miller, France.

Lutheran members are Timothy J. Wengert, USA; Litsietsi M. Dube, Zimbabwe; Annie Noblesse-Rocher, France; and consultants Theo Dieter and Marc Lienhard, both consultants with the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg.



Sewing kits and baobab juice. Women from the West African village of Pirang, Gambia, gather pods from the baobab tree and pound it into powder for a drink. That powder became a gift to their Sister-Link friends at the Cedar Street Mennonite Church, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, USA, among them Edith Clugston (right).

Relationships between the USA and Gabian women began when Edith and her husband Dale became part of a missionary support team for work in Pirang. That relationship developed into a loan to the Pirang women from Sister-Link, a

partnership sponsored by Mennonite Women USA.

Eventually, Edith was able to visit her sisters in Pirang, bringing sewing kits made by the Pennsylvania women. In return, the Pirang women pounded the dried pods of the native baobab tree into powder and sent it to their sisters in the USA.

Sister-Link seeks to develop partnerships between women in North America and those in other countries in ways that both groups can be givers and receivers. —from a Mennonite USA report by Denise Williamson



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Youth live in two realities

by Vincent Gamache

This article is another 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?"

If one wants to see through the eyes of Christian young people in Québec, it is first necessary to understand Québec culture. In Québec society, there is still a sense of anger against the church because of its past interference in private affairs, especially in imposing many strict rules. As a result, there is a widespread negative reaction against any movement or structure that in any way resembles the Catholic Church.

As a result, youth live in two realities: that of a world that reacts against the church

and that believes it has the truth, and that of a community that tries to live out the gospel of Jesus. The young person who is looking for the right path to follow is confronted with an unavoidable tension between the values of the church and those of society. This occurs just at the time when young people are most in search of their identities.

Young people are looking for transparent and authentic relationships, where real concerns can be discussed in depth, and not only superficially. When the church avoids dealing with subjects such as homosexuality, while at the same time friends who are not Christians speak of it openly, this raises questions for young people. How can youth live authentically in the church? How can they raise other sensitive subjects from their life experiences?

For example, if an adult judges a young person of 16 or 17 who dates a non-Christian in a close-minded and categorical way, it is

quite possible that the young person will become frustrated and feel that the adult has neither listened nor understood.

Our main concern as young people is that we be understood and accepted rather than forced into a preconceived mold. Youth need relationships of equality. They do not want to feel dominated by an authority figure. They want to be understood and treated as persons capable of making judgments and making their own decisions. At the same time, they need counsel and opinions from adults in order to help them make their choices.

Young people dream of the day when the church will call upon their opinions to build tomorrow's church and help to prepare for the time when they will be engaged in and leading the church. Naturally there will be challenges. But difficulties are a normal part of any learning process.

Why is it that in many secular contexts youth are encouraged to move forward, while the church is so hesitant to do the same? There are many young people who would like to mature in their walk with God, and to be accompanied by authentic believers who know how to listen. How will the church respond to them?



Vincent Gamache, Montréal, Québec, Canada, works in discipleship formation for youth.

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Perspective:

Unity, service, and the mind of Christ

by Larry Miller

From 36 suggestions, to four proposals, to two subjects and one biblical text: so runs the still unfinished story of articulating a theme for Paraguay 2009, the 15th world assembly of the MWC community of churches.

In late 2006, MWC invited General Council members and staff to suggest a theme for the assembly. In January 2007, officers and executive staff transformed the mass of ideas into four proposals. In August, the Executive Committee and the Paraguayan National Coordinating Council met in Asunción to take action. Which subject would we choose: unity, care of creation, service, or the Sermon on the Mount? Valuing all four possibilities—and committed to include all four in the program of the assembly—our attention focused in the end on unity and service.

In the early rounds, most European and North American participants emphasized the importance of service. “Unity,” one said, “is hard to achieve when you focus on it. I’d like to elevate the theme of service.” “Unity is too easy to talk about but not put into action,” another said. “Service, on the other hand,” added a third, “can be active witness to the world in our many contexts.”

A majority of African, Asian, and Latin Americans participants, however, spoke for unity. “The worldwide Mennonite community needs to unite,” one said, “If we are not united, we can do nothing.” Another: “Unity is important in the political realities we face today in which governments are telling the church what to do. The church needs to affirm our unity in allegiance to another political system.” But most poignant for me were the words of a Paraguayan indigenous church representative whose communities have been the recipient of service and mission projects for decades: “Without unity, we are not included,” he said.

Are these different points of view rooted in sociological,

economic, or historical differences that can distance us from one another in the global church? Do they expose a divergence between those who speak from a position of historic strength and belonging and those who continue to feel weak and on the margins? Do they reveal a distinction between those who know not only that they have the duty but also the material means to serve others worldwide and those who have come to see themselves primarily as recipients?

In any case, I doubt that the underlying difference shaping our initial perspectives was theological, since it took only a couple of hours to bring us all to one mind. Whatever the final wording, we agreed, unity and service together shall be the theme of Paraguay 2009, and Philippians 2:1-11 shall be its foundational text.

“Be of the same mind,” the Apostle Paul wrote in this passage, “having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”

Whatever the relationship and the relative value of unity and service in our minds, in Paul’s mind both are fruit of the mind of Christ. Do we think we are strong? Our model for living in unity and service is, like Jesus, to disregard “equality as something to be exploited” and to take on the “form of a slave” (2:6-7). Do we think we are weak? The model remains the same. Indeed, if we think like Paul, living in unity and service according to the mind of Christ is the divine and human way in which we work out, in fear and trembling, our own salvation (2:12).

Larry Miller serves as the general secretary of MWC.

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